AMBULANCE AND MEDICAL TRANSPORT SERVICES

EVIDENCE REVIEW | REFERENCES | HISTORY

Introduction

The plan covers ambulance transport for a medical emergency. An emergency is when a person’s health is in serious danger and an ambulance is the only safe way to get to the closest medical facility. There are also cases where medical vehicles may be needed for nonemergency medical transport. This policy describes the situations in which ground, air, and sea ambulances, as well as nonemergency medical transport, are covered.

Note: The Introduction section is for your general knowledge and is not to be taken as policy coverage criteria. The rest of the policy uses specific words and concepts familiar to medical professionals. It is intended for providers. A provider can be a person, such as a doctor, nurse, psychologist, or dentist. A provider also can be a place where medical care is given, like a hospital, clinic, or lab. This policy informs them about when a service may be covered.

Policy Coverage Criteria

This policy provides medical guidelines that are appropriate for the majority of individuals who need ambulance and medical transport services in both emergency and nonemergency situations. Unique clinical circumstances may justify individual consideration for coverage, based on a review of applicable medical records.
### Applicable to ALL Ambulance and Medical Transport Services

- The medical transport services must comply with all local, state, and federal laws and must have all the appropriate, valid licenses and permits
- The ambulance or other medical transport services must have the necessary personnel, patient care equipment and supplies

### Emergency Medical Transport

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Situation</th>
<th>Medical Necessity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ground emergency medical transport</strong></td>
<td><strong>Ground emergency medical transport (ambulance) services may be considered medically necessary when ALL of the following criteria are met:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>- Any other form of transportation would be medically contraindicated due to the severity of the patient’s condition</td>
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<tr>
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<td>- The patient must be transported to the nearest hospital with the appropriate level of services for the treatment of the patient’s illness or injury, or in the case of organ transplantation, to the approved transplant facility</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Examples of medical conditions or injuries that may require emergency ambulance or medical transport include:**

- Conditions requiring treatment in a hyperbaric oxygen unit
- Intracranial bleeding requiring neurosurgical intervention
- Life-threatening shock, sepsis, or organ failure requiring immediate intervention at an appropriately equipped facility
- Life-threatening multi-system trauma or trauma requiring immediate surgical intervention at an appropriately equipped facility
- Neonatal emergencies
- Severe burns requiring treatment in a burn center

**Examples of specialized medical services that may not be available at all hospitals or acute care facilities include:**

- Cardiac care
- Critical care
- Intensive burn care
- Neurosurgical care
- Trauma care
## Emergency Medical Transport

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| Air/sea emergency medical transport | **Air or sea emergency medical transport services may be considered medically necessary in exceptional circumstances when the following criteria are met:**  
  - The patient’s medical condition or injury requires immediate and rapid ambulance transport to the nearest appropriate medical facility equipped to treat the patient, but the time required to transport the patient by land or sea poses a threat to the patient’s survival or endangers their health, and therefore, cannot safely be provided by ground ambulance due to one of the following:  
    - Great distances, limited time frames, or other obstacles (eg, it would take a ground ambulance 60 minutes or more to transport a member, crossing a large body of water, or crossing a mountain pass in inclement weather) are involved in getting the patient to the nearest hospital with appropriate specialized services for treatment (eg, transport of a critically ill patient to an approved transplant facility with a waiting organ)  
  - OR  
    - The point of pick-up is inaccessible by a land vehicle  
  
**Examples of specialized medical services that may not be available at all hospitals or acute care facilities include:**  
  - Cardiac care  
  - Critical care  
  - Intensive burn care  
  - Neurosurgical care  
  - Trauma care  

**Examples of medical conditions or injuries that may require emergency ambulance or medical transport include:**  
  - Conditions requiring treatment in a hyperbaric oxygen unit  
  - Intracranial bleeding requiring neurosurgical intervention  
  - Life-threatening shock, sepsis, or organ failure requiring immediate intervention at an appropriately equipped facility
## Emergency Medical Transport

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|           | • Life-threatening multi-system trauma or trauma requiring immediate surgical intervention at an appropriately equipped facility  
|           | • Neonatal emergencies  
|           | • Severe burns requiring treatment in a burn center |

## Non-Emergency Medical Transport

<table>
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</table>
| Non-emergent hospital-to-hospital medical transport | **Non-emergency ground ambulance** transport may be considered medically necessary for transfer of a patient from one hospital to another hospital under the following conditions:  
|           | • The transferring hospital is not equipped to provide the appropriate medical services needed by the patient  
|           | • The receiving hospital is the **nearest** acute care facility equipped to provide the appropriate specialized medical services needed by the patient  
|           | **Examples of specialized medical services that may not be available at all hospitals or acute care facilities include:**  
|           | • Cardiac care  
|           | • Critical care  
|           | • Intensive burn care  
|           | • Neurosurgical care  
|           | • Trauma care  
|           | **Non-emergency air-ambulance** transport may be considered medically necessary to transfer a patient from one hospital to another hospital under the following conditions:  
|           | • The transferring hospital is not equipped to provide the appropriate medical services needed by the patient  
|           | **AND** |
Non-Emergency Medical Transport

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</table>
| • The receiving hospital is the *nearest* acute care facility equipped to provide the appropriate specialized medical services needed by the patient  
AND  
• Due to the severity of the patient’s medical condition, the time required for ground medical transport poses a threat to the patient’s survival or endangers their health |  
Examples of specialized medical services that may not be available at all hospitals or acute care facilities include:  
• Cardiac care  
• Critical care  
• Intensive burn care  
• Neurosurgical care  
• Trauma care |

Transport from a hospital capable of treating the patient because the patient and/or the patient’s family prefer a specific hospital or physician is considered **NOT medically necessary**.

| Other non-emergency ground medical ambulance transport services | Other non-emergency ground medical transport services may be considered medically necessary when ALL of the following criteria are met:  
• The patient is a registered patient in an acute care hospital or other medical facility and appropriate diagnostic or therapeutic services are not available in that facility  
AND  
• The patient's condition would be jeopardized in the absence of medically-trained personnel or other means of transportation are contraindicated (eg, patient is bed-confined; patient has full body cast)  
AND one of the following:  
○ Transportation is from one hospital or medical facility to another hospital or medical facility, skilled nursing facility or free-standing dialysis center in order to obtain medically |
Non-Emergency Medical Transport

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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>necessary diagnostic or therapeutic services (such as MRI, CT, acute interventional radiology/cardiology procedure, or dialysis) provided such services are not available where the individual initially resides</td>
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<td></td>
<td>o Transfer from an acute care facility to an individual’s home or skilled nursing facility is required and the individual is unable to be transferred by any other method. Examples include being bed confined and unable to sit in a wheelchair or the presence of a condition that only allows transport by stretcher</td>
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</table>

**Ambulance services for deceased member**

Ambulance services are considered medically necessary if the patient is legally pronounced dead after the ambulance was called, but before pickup, or death occurs en route to the hospital.

Ambulance services are considered not medically necessary if the patient is legally pronounced dead before the ambulance was called.

In all cases, the appropriate documentation must be kept on file and upon request, presented to the plan. The presence or absence of a physician’s order for ambulance transport does not necessarily prove or disprove whether the service was medically necessary.

**Coding**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>HCPCS</td>
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<tr>
<td>A0140</td>
<td>Non-emergency transportation and air travel (private or commercial) intrastate or interstate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A0426</td>
<td>Ambulance service, advanced life support, nonemergency transport, level 1 (ALS 1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Code</td>
<td>Description</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>A0428</td>
<td>Ambulance service, basic life support, nonemergency transport, (BLS)</td>
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<tr>
<td>A0430</td>
<td>Ambulance service, conventional air services, transport, one way (fixed wing)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A0434</td>
<td>Specialty care transport (SCT)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A0435</td>
<td>Fixed wing air mileage, per statute mile</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A0436</td>
<td>Rotary wing air mileage, per statute mile</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A0999</td>
<td>Unlisted ambulance service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S9960</td>
<td>Ambulance service, conventional air services, nonemergency transport, one way (fixed wing)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S9961</td>
<td>Ambulance service, conventional air service, nonemergency transport, one way (rotary wing)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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**Related Information**

**Description**

Ambulance and medical transport services involve the use of specially designed and equipped vehicles to provide transportation for patients who are injured or have acute medical conditions. These services may involve ground, air, or sea transport in both emergency and nonemergency situations.

**Benefit Application**

All devices and supplies are considered an integral part of the ambulance and medical transport services and no additional benefits are provided for reusable or disposable devices or supplies.

Consult the member benefit booklet to determine coverage for ambulance transport services. Some Plans offer riders for air or sea ambulance services. If a member or group does not accept this rider, the Plan may consider reimbursement in these situations up to the limits of the ground ambulance benefits. If a life-support ambulance is used, the life-sustaining equipment must also be used for it to be covered.
Cabulance Van: Ambulatory/Non-ambulatory/Wheelchair Transport Services

Wheelchair vans do not contain the required equipment to qualify as an ambulance.

Evidence Review

N/A

References

N/A

History

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Comments</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>07/12/11</td>
<td>New Policy - Add to Administrative section. Held for provider 90-day notification; policy effective date December 1, 2011.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>07/20/12</td>
<td>Replace Policy. Reviewed without literature review. Minimal rewriting for clarity. Added HCPCS codes A0140 Nonemergency transportation and air travel (private or commercial) intrastate or interstate and A0434 Specialty care transport, Policy statements unchanged.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>09/11/12</td>
<td>Replace policy. Policy Guidelines section updated with statement to allow use of clinical judgment in special circumstances. Added: &quot;Note: This policy provides medical guidelines that are appropriate for the majority of individuals who need ambulance and medical transport services in both emergency and nonemergency situations. Unique clinical circumstances may justify individual consideration for coverage, based on review of applicable medical records.&quot; Policy statement unchanged.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Comments</td>
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<tr>
<td>01/30/14</td>
<td>Minor update. HCPCS codes A0426 and 0428 added to the coding section; these already appear on the RMN list and should be listed. Scope section updated with language indicating this policy is not applicable to Medical Advantage.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>06/19/14</td>
<td>Annual Review. Policy reviewed without literature review. Minor reformatting for readability. Policy statement unchanged. All HCPCS removed with the exception of A0140, A0426, A0428, A0430-A0431 and A0999 – they do not suspend for review.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>04/24/15</td>
<td>Annual Review. Minor formatting changes made for reading clarity. HCPCS codes A0434-A0436 added to the policy; these had been inadvertently removed and should be listed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11/10/15</td>
<td>Interim Update. Policy section updated to address coverage of “other non-emergent medical transportation” considered medically necessary when criteria are met.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>05/01/16</td>
<td>Annual Review, approved April 12, 2016. Policy reviewed. Policy statement unchanged.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>09/01/19</td>
<td>Interim Review, approved August 22, 2019. Clarified intent of great distances, limited time frames, or other obstacles (eg, it would take a ground ambulance 60 minutes or more to transport a member, crossing a large body of water, or crossing a mountain pass in inclement weather) for air/sea emergency medical transport policy statement.</td>
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</table>

Disclaimer: This medical policy is a guide in evaluating the medical necessity of a particular service or treatment. The Company adopts policies after careful review of published peer-reviewed scientific literature, national guidelines and local standards of practice. Since medical technology is constantly changing, the Company reserves the right to review and update policies as appropriate. Member contracts differ in their benefits. Always consult the member benefit booklet or contact a member service representative to determine coverage for a specific medical service or supply. CPT codes, descriptions and materials are copyrighted by the American Medical Association (AMA). ©2020 Premera All Rights Reserved.

Scope: Medical policies are systematically developed guidelines that serve as a resource for Company staff when determining coverage for specific medical procedures, drugs or devices. Coverage for medical services is subject to
the limits and conditions of the member benefit plan. Members and their providers should consult the member benefit booklet or contact a customer service representative to determine whether there are any benefit limitations applicable to this service or supply. This medical policy does not apply to Medicare Advantage.
This Notice has Important Information. This notice may have important dates in it. You may need to take action by certain deadlines to keep your health coverage or help with costs. You can file a grievance in person or by mail, fax, or email. If you need help filing a grievance, the Civil Rights Coordinator is available to help you.

You can also file a civil rights complaint with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office for Civil Rights, electronically through the Office for Civil Rights Complaint Portal, available at https://ocrportal.hhs.gov/ocr/portal/lobby.jsf, or by mail or phone at:

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
200 Independence Avenue SW, Room 509F, HHH Building
Washington, DC 20201, 1-800-368-1019, 800-537-7397 (TTY)
Email AppealsDepartmentInquiries@Premera.com

If you believe that Premera Blue Cross has failed to provide these services or discriminate in another way on the basis of race, color, national origin, age, disability or sex, contact the Civil Rights Coordinator.

You have the right to file a complaint with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services about Premera Blue Cross. There may be key dates in this notice. You may need to take action before or after these dates to keep your health coverage or help with costs. You have the right to free language services to people whose primary language is not English. You can file a grievance in person or by mail, fax, or email. If you need help filing a grievance, the Civil Rights Coordinator is available to help you.

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