

POLICY FOR PAIN MANAGEMENT PROCEDURES

Ventura County Health Care Plan (VCHCP) has adopted the Milliman Care Guidelines for the initial Pain Management procedures of epidural steroid injections (Milliman A-0225), diagnostic facet blocks/medial branch blocks (Milliman A-0695) and therapeutic rhizotomy (Milliman S-1040). Requests for follow-up procedures will require specific criteria to be met prior to authorization. This policy was written in collaboration with pain management and PM&R specialists.

Criteria

- A. For repeat epidural injection (taken from the American Society of Interventional Pain Physicians [ASIPP]), all the following:
1. Six to eight weeks of significant pain relief (>50% improvement in symptoms) based on the Numeric Rating Scale (NRS-11) or the equivalent
 2. Documented improvement in functional response based on the Oswestry Disability Index (ODI)* or equivalent; or documented improvement in ADLs; or subjective improvement in quality of life, including improved sleep and mood
 3. Maximum of 4-6 injections per year
*[See: <https://orthotoolkit.com/oswestry/>]
- B. For medial branch blocks (facet blocks):
- Follow Milliman Care Guidelines (MCG) for criteria for facet block plus documentation of facet involvement on physical exam (e.g. pain with extension, facet tenderness) and facet abnormalities on MRI.
 - Follow MCG requiring 2 diagnostic blocks prior to consideration of rhizotomy.
Note: MCG does not allow for repeated therapeutic blocks.
- C. For rhizotomy/facet neurotomy:
- Follow Milliman Care Guidelines for initial procedure including 80% pain relief from baseline pain scores with each of 2 medial branch blocks and imaging studies having ruled out other causes of spinal pain. Pain relief must be consistent with the anesthetic agent used for the diagnostic blocks. For example, for a pure bupivacaine block, expect 2-3 hours of pain relief; bupivacaine plus minimal dose steroid block, expect up to 3-4 days of pain relief for medial branch blocks vs a month to several months of pain relief for facet joint block.

**Medical Policy: VCHCP Policy
For Pain Management Procedures**

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- Follow up rhizotomy/facet neurotomy requires six months or more of significant pain relief (>50% improvement in symptoms)

Review History

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2/20/25	Yes	Howard Taekman, MD; Robert Sterling, MD	Added links for MCG criteria