Medical Coverage Policy | Carcinoembryonic Antigen (CEA) Testing

EFFECTIVE DATE: 05|01|2026
POLICY LAST REVIEWED: 01|21|2026

OVERVIEW
Carcinoembryonic Antigen (CEA) is a protein polysaccharide found in some carcinomas. It is effective as a biochemical marker for monitoring the response of certain malignancies to therapy.

MEDICAL CRITERIA
Not applicable

PRIOR AUTHORIZATION
Not applicable

POLICY STATEMENT
Medicare Advantage Plans and Commercial Products
Carcinoembryonic Antigen testing is covered when filed with a covered diagnosis (see Coding section).

All other indications are not covered for Medicare Advantage and not medically necessary for Commercial Products as there is no indication that technology results in an improvement in the net health outcome.

Laboratories are not allowed to obtain clinical authorization or participate in the authorization process on behalf of the ordering physician. Only the ordering physician shall be involved in the authorization, appeal or other administrative processes related to prior authorization/medical necessity.

In no circumstance shall a laboratory or a physician/provider use a representative of a laboratory or anyone with a relationship to a laboratory and/or a third party to obtain authorization on behalf of the ordering physician, to facilitate any portion of the authorization process or any subsequent appeal of a claim where the authorization process was not followed and/or a denial for clinical appropriateness was issued, including any element of the preparation of necessary documentation of clinical appropriateness. If a laboratory or a third party is found to be supporting any portion of the authorization process, BCBSRI will deem the action a violation of this policy and severe action will be taken up to and including termination from the BCBSRI provider network. If a laboratory provides a laboratory service that has not been authorized, the service will be denied as the financial liability of the participating laboratory and may not be billed to the member."

Commercial Products
Some genetic testing services are not covered and a contract exclusion for any self-funded group that has excluded the expanded coverage of biomarker testing related to the state mandate, R.I.G.L. §27-19-81 described in the Biomarker Testing Mandate policy. For these groups, a list of which genetic testing services are covered with prior authorization, are not medically necessary or are not covered because they are a contract exclusion can be found in the Coding section of the Genetic Testing Services or Proprietary Laboratory Analyses policies. Please refer to the appropriate Benefit Booklet to determine whether the member's plan has customized benefit coverage. Please refer to the list of Related Policies for more information.

COVERAGE
Benefits may vary between groups and contracts. Please refer to the appropriate Benefit Booklet, Evidence of Coverage or Subscriber Agreement for applicable laboratory testing or not medically necessary/not covered benefits/coverage.

BACKGROUND

CEA may be medically necessary for follow-up of patients with colorectal carcinoma. It would however only be medically necessary at treatment decision-making points. In some clinical situations (e.g. adenocarcinoma of the lung, small cell carcinoma of the lung, and some gastrointestinal carcinomas) when a more specific marker is not expressed by the tumor, CEA may be a medically necessary alternative marker for monitoring. Preoperative CEA may also be helpful in determining the post-operative adequacy of surgical resection and subsequent medical management. In general, a single tumor marker will suffice in following patients with colorectal carcinoma or other malignancies that express such tumor markers.

In following patients who have had treatment for colorectal carcinoma, ASCO guideline suggests that if resection of liver metastasis would be indicated, it is recommended that post-operative CEA testing be performed every two to three months in patients with initial stage II or stage III disease for at least two years after diagnosis.

For patients with metastatic solid tumors which express CEA, CEA may be measured at the start of the treatment and with subsequent treatment cycles to assess the tumor's response to therapy.

CODING

Medicare Advantage Plans and Commercial Products

The following code is considered medically necessary when filed with one of the diagnosis codes in the attachment below:

82378 Carcinoembryonic antigen (CEA)

ICD-10 Diagnosis List for 82378

RELATED POLICIES

Biomarker Testing Mandate
Genetic Testing Services
Medicare Advantage Plans National and Local Coverage Determinations

PUBLISHED

Provider Update, March 2026
Provider Update, May 2025

REFERENCES

1. Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services. National Coverage Determination (NCD) Carcinoembryonic Antigen 190.26

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