

## Payment Policy | Wet Age-Related Macular Degeneration Treatment



**EFFECTIVE DATE:** 04/15/2008  
**POLICY LAST UPDATED:** 12/04/2012

### OVERVIEW

This payment policy documents the coverage determination for Wet Age-Related Macular Degeneration Treatment. Age-related macular degeneration (AMD) is a retinal disease causing severe and irreversible vision loss. AMD affects the macula, the area of the eye responsible for central vision, is essential for most visual activities such as reading, driving, and facial recognition. It is the major cause of blindness in individuals 60 years of age or older. There are two types of age-related macular degeneration: wet and dry.

### PRIOR AUTHORIZATION

Prior authorization is not required.

### POLICY STATEMENT

#### BlueCHiP for Medicare and Commercial

Ocular photodynamic therapy (OPT) with verteporfin, pegaptanib sodium, ranibizumab, bevacizumab, and aflibercept are covered for the treatment of neovascular (wet) age-related degeneration.

Pegaptanib sodium, ranibizumab, bevacizumab, and aflibercept are not available for member purchase at local pharmacies; physicians may order through the network specialty pharmacy.

### MEDICAL CRITERIA

Not Applicable

### BACKGROUND

Age-related macular degeneration (AMD) is a retinal disease causing severe and irreversible vision loss. AMD affects the macula, the area of the eye responsible for central vision, is essential for most visual activities such as reading, driving, and facial recognition. It is the major cause of blindness in individuals 60 years of age or older. There are two types of age-related macular degeneration: wet and dry.

Dry AMD is the more common type and is associated with drusen (small, yellow deposits) in the macula. This causes the macula to lose its function and results in blurred central vision that slowly worsens.

Wet AMD accounts for approximately 15% of cases and is caused by the development of abnormal leaky blood vessels that eventually damage the macula. These abnormal vessels leak fluid and blood into the tissue at the back of the eye, causing a blister to form in the retina. This leads to scarring and the permanent impairment of central vision.

Currently there is no preventive treatment for wet AMD. However, there are several therapeutic treatments that slow the progression.

#### 1. Ocular photodynamic therapy (OPT) with verteporfin

Photodynamic therapy using verteporfin (Visudyne) allows destruction of the subfoveal choroidal neovascularization of the eye in "wet" (leaking and destructive neovascularization) AMD. A course of verteporfin therapy is a two-step process requiring administration of both drug and light. The first

step is the intravenous infusion of verteporfin. The second step is the activation of verteporfin with light from a non-thermal diode laser.

The physician should re-evaluate the patient every three months and, if choroidal neovascular leakage is detected on fluorescein angiography, verteporfin therapy should be repeated again. While bilateral treatments may be performed, it is advisable that a patient having this therapy for the first time be treated for one eye only. If the patient reacts favorably to the verteporfin therapy, the subsequent treatments may be performed bilaterally.

## 2. Pegaptanib Sodium

Pegaptanib sodium injection (Macugen®) is a sterile, aqueous solution for intravitreal injection. It is supplied in a single-dose, pre-filled syringe. Pegaptanib sodium is indicated for the treatment of neovascular (wet) age-related macular degeneration.

Pegaptanib sodium is administered every six weeks by intravitreal injection into the eye to be treated, with follow-up every three months, with additional treatment if neovascularization recurs. Pegaptanib sodium is typically administered in one eye per visit, the safety and efficacy of pegaptanib sodium therapy administered to both eyes concurrently has not been studied. The safety or efficacy of pegaptanib sodium beyond two years has not been demonstrated.

## 3. Ranibizumab

Ranibizumab (Lucentis®) is a recombinant humanized monoclonal antibody fragment designed for intraocular use. Ranibizumab binds to and inhibits the biologic activity of human vascular endothelial growth factor.

Ranibizumab is administered once a month by intravitreal injection. Although less effective, treatment may be reduced to one injection every three months after the first four injections if monthly injections are not feasible. It is supplied in a single-dose vial.

## 4. Bevacizumab

Bevacizumab (Avastin®) may be used off-label for AMD.

## 5. Aflibercept

Aflibercept (Eylea) is a vascular endothelial growth factor fusion (VEGF-Trap) protein. This prevents VEGF binding with its intended receptor targets, and prevents the growth of new blood vessels. In the eye this can prevent neovascular changes which occur as part of the age-related macular degeneration process.

### COVERAGE

Benefits may vary between groups/contracts. Please refer to the appropriate Evidence of Coverage, Subscriber Agreement for applicable surgical and injectable drug benefits/coverage.

### CODING

Blue CHiP for Medicare and Commercial

67028	67221			
J0178	J2503	J2778	J3396	J9035

### RELATED POLICIES

None

### PUBLISHED

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## REFERENCES

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