

We received the following questions from members of the Delaware Valley Healthcare Council regarding our Nonemergency Ambulance Transport policy. The responses regarding this policy are below. Our policy on Nonemergency Ambulance Transport is consistent with the position of the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS).

Frequently Asked Questions Regarding Nonemergency Ambulance Transport (12.04.02a)

Q1. *The Independence Blue Cross (IBC) policy on Nonemergency Ambulance Transport (policy #12.04.02a) states that medical necessity requirements must be met in order for this service to be covered. What does “medical necessity” mean?*

A1. It is a requirement of IBC coverage that *all* covered services be medically necessary. The definition of medical necessity is contained in IBC’s patient benefit packages, Evidence of Coverage booklets, hospital participation contracts, *Hospital Manual*, and *Provider Manual*.

Nonemergency ambulance transport medical necessity requirements are met when the individual’s medical condition is such that the use of any other method of transportation (e.g., taxi, private car, wheelchair coach) would be medically contraindicated (e.g., would endanger the member’s medical condition).

However:

- If covered medically necessary services can be otherwise provided quickly, equally as safely, and more cost efficiently to the individual than by nonemergency ambulance transport, such transport is not considered to be reasonable. For example, the transport of an individual to receive wound care would not be considered reasonable if the wound care could be provided at the individual’s bedside at less cost than transporting the individual to obtain the services.
- In products requiring precertification, a medical necessity determination is based on the medical information received at the time of the request.

The lack of an available alternate mode of transportation (e.g., taxi, bus, personal car) or the inability to drive does not satisfy the medical necessity requirement. Nonemergency ambulance transport for convenience or because another means of transportation is not available is considered not medically necessary, and, therefore, not covered.

For a list of medical conditions that meet the medical necessity criteria for Nonemergency Ambulance Transport, go to: www.ibx.com/medpolicy and click on the Nonemergency Ambulance Transport policy.

Nonemergency Ambulance Transport Policy Coverage Requirements

In addition to the medical necessity requirements, the Nonemergency Ambulance Transport must meet *all* of the following coverage requirements (as listed in the policy):

- It is provided as a benefit according to the member’s contract.
- It is a means to obtain covered treatments or services.
- It meets the requirements associated with transport origin (as defined in the policy).
- It meets the requirements associated with transport destination (as defined in the policy).

Nonemergency Ambulance Transport is only covered when *all* of the requirements listed in the policy are met.

Q2. *Wheelchair van companies typically require patients to be able to sit and support themselves and to be able to navigate steps into their place of residence. Does IBC cover Nonemergency Ambulance Transport for members who, at discharge, cannot climb steps or sit safely in a car or wheelchair van?*

A2. According to the Nonemergency Ambulance Transport policy, transport is covered for members who are bed-confined, or are unable to safely support themselves in a car or wheelchair van, when *all* of the coverage requirements are met. The member's inability to navigate steps to, from, and/or in a place of residence is not included as a medical necessity criterion for determining transport coverage.

For a complete list of coverage requirements for Nonemergency Ambulance Transport, please see the complete policy and our response to the first question.

Q3. *Is Nonemergency Ambulance Transport covered for all discharged patients who require oxygen?*

A3. According to our policy, individuals who are generally mobile and clinically stable on portable oxygen systems and who can be safely transported by other means would not require Nonemergency Ambulance Transport solely because they utilize oxygen. Therefore, IBC does not cover Nonemergency Ambulance Transport solely because the member is receiving oxygen therapy. If the individual requires the continuation of oxygen therapy that was initiated during the immediate hospitalization from which the transport is being requested and the individual does not have portable oxygen equipment at the time of the transport request, Nonemergency Ambulance Transport will be considered for coverage.

However, for members who meet all of the medical necessity and coverage requirements listed in the policy, Nonemergency Ambulance Transport would be covered. For a complete list of coverage requirements for Nonemergency Ambulance Transport, please see the complete policy and our response to the first question.

Q4. *Is Nonemergency Ambulance Transport covered for members in hip spica casts?*

A4. The condition for which a member has been placed in a hip spica cast meets the medical necessity requirements listed in the Nonemergency Ambulance Transport policy. However, the transport must also meet *all* other coverage requirements listed in the policy in order for Nonemergency Ambulance Transport to be covered.

For a complete list of coverage requirements for Nonemergency Ambulance Transport, please see the complete policy and our response to the first question.

Q5. *If sling-seated wheelchairs are not recommended for patients who have undergone total hip replacement, should IBC provide ambulance services for these individuals?*

A5. During the development of this policy, we consulted with several orthopedic surgeons and physical medicine physicians, all of whom concurred that, in most cases, the medical necessity requirements for Nonemergency Ambulance Transport are typically not met *solely* because the patient has undergone a total hip replacement. However, for members who undergo a total hip replacement and meet *all* of the medical necessity and coverage requirements listed in the policy, Nonemergency Ambulance Transport would be covered.

For a complete list of coverage requirements for Nonemergency Ambulance Transport, please see the complete policy and our response to the first question.

Q6. According to Medicare guidelines, patients with conditions such as a fracture that had not been set or the possibility of a fracture (e.g., hip fracture), wounds, infections, and decreased mental status (e.g., confusion, dementia) may qualify for Nonemergency Ambulance Transport. Does IBC cover transportation for these individuals?

A6. If the member has a medical condition that satisfies all of the medical necessity requirements and *all* coverage requirements listed in the policy, then Nonemergency Ambulance Transport would be covered by IBC.

For a complete list of coverage requirements for Nonemergency Ambulance Transport, please see the complete policy and our response to the first question.

Q7. If IBC does not provide coverage for Nonemergency Ambulance Transport, and the patient is unable to pay for it, is the hospital responsible for the bill?

A7. Noncovered services are the member's financial responsibility. If the Nonemergency Ambulance Transport services are not covered by IBC, the member should receive advance notice of the noncovered services to be provided and their financial responsibility. The ambulance company should directly bill the member. *Our participating hospitals are not required to assume payment for such services.*

Q8. Hospitals are responsible for securing a safe discharge for patients. However, if the hospital determines that the safest method of transport is ambulance, and IBC disagrees, the hospital usually pays for the transport. Does the hospital have any opportunity to appeal this decision?

A8. If a hospital disagrees with a noncoverage decision, an appeal may be filed with IBC. Refer to the Appeals section of the *Provider Manual* on how to file an appeal.

Q9. According to state law, children in vehicles must be restrained. If a parent is unable to safely put a child into a car and restrain her due to a medical condition, does IBC cover Nonemergency Ambulance Transport for the child?

A9. If the child needs to be restrained due to a medical condition that satisfies all of the medical necessity requirements and *all* coverage requirements listed in the policy, then Nonemergency Ambulance Transport would be covered by IBC.

For a complete list of coverage requirements for Nonemergency Ambulance Transport, please see the complete policy and our response to the first question.
