

Chelation Therapy

Policy # 00014

Original Effective Date: 06/24/2002

Current Effective Date: 06/01/2026

Applies to all products administered or underwritten by Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Louisiana and its subsidiary, HMO Louisiana, Inc. (collectively referred to as the "Company"), unless otherwise provided in the applicable contract. Medical technology is constantly evolving, and we reserve the right to review and update Medical Policy periodically.

Investigational or experimental services are not covered. This includes any drug, device, procedure, or service provided under the investigational arm of a clinical trial or clinical study. These services are excluded from coverage under benefits.

When Services May Be Eligible for Coverage

Coverage for eligible medical treatments or procedures, drugs, devices or biological products may be provided only if:

- *Benefits are available in the member's contract/certificate, and*
- *Medical necessity criteria and guidelines are met.*

Based on review of available data, the Company may consider chelation therapy to be **eligible for coverage**** when **all** of the following criteria are met:

- Individuals with relevant clinical findings suggestive of heavy metal toxicity and a probable exposure history; **AND**
- Heavy metal toxicity is confirmed by laboratory testing (Note: Testing should include blood or plasma specimens. In the case of suspected arsenic or mercury toxicity, it may be more appropriate to confirm diagnosis through a non-challenged urinalysis.); **AND**
- Request is for any of the following conditions:
 - Individuals with disorders of iron metabolism (e.g., primary or secondary hemochromatosis); **OR**
 - Lead overload in cases of acute or long-term lead exposure; **OR**
 - Individuals with disorders of copper metabolism (e.g., Wilson's disease); **OR**
 - Arsenic, cadmium, copper, gold, iron, or mercury poisoning when long-term exposure and toxicity has been confirmed; **OR**
 - Aluminum overload in individuals on chronic hemodialysis.

When Services Are Considered Not Medically Necessary

Based on review of available data, the Company considers the use of chelation therapy when patient selection criteria are not met to be **not medically necessary.****

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When Services Are Considered Investigational

Coverage is not available for investigational medical treatments or procedures, drugs, devices or biological products.

The use of chelation therapy for the treatment of all other conditions is considered to be **investigational***, including but not limited to:

- Alzheimer disease
- Atherosclerosis (e.g., coronary artery disease, secondary prevention in individuals with myocardial infarction, or peripheral vascular disease)
- Autism
- Diabetes
- Multiple sclerosis
- Arthritis (includes rheumatoid arthritis)
- Parkinson disease.

Policy Guidelines

A number of indications for chelation therapy have received U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) approval and for which chelation therapy is considered standard of care. These indications include:

- Extreme conditions of metal toxicity
- Treatment of chronic iron overload due to blood transfusions (transfusional hemosiderosis) or due to non-transfusion-dependent thalassemia
- Wilson disease (hepatolenticular degeneration)
- Lead poisoning
- Control of ventricular arrhythmias or heart block associated with digitalis toxicity
- Emergency treatment of hypercalcemia.

For the last 2 bullet points, most individuals should be treated with other modalities. Digitalis toxicity is currently treated in most individuals with Fab monoclonal antibodies. The FDA removed the approval for NaEDTA as chelation therapy due to safety concerns and recommended that other chelators be used. NaEDTA was the most common chelation agent used to treat digitalis toxicity and hypercalcemia.

Suggested toxic or normal levels of select heavy metals are listed in Appendix Table 1.

Appendix Table 1. Toxic or Normal Concentrations of Heavy Metals

Metal	Toxic Levels (Normal Levels Where Indicated)
Arsenic	24-h urine: greater than or equal to 50 µg/L urine or 100 µg/g creatinine
Bismuth	No clear reference standard
Cadmium	Proteinuria and/or greater than or equal to 15 µg/g creatinine

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Metal	Toxic Levels (Normal Levels Where Indicated)
Chromium	No clear reference standard
Cobalt	Normative excretion: 0.1-1.2 µg/L (serum), 0.1-2.2 µg/L (urine)
Copper	Normative excretion: 25 µg/24 h (urine)
Iron	• Nontoxic: less than 300 µg/dL • Severe: greater than 500 µg/dL
Lead	Pediatric • Symptoms or blood lead level greater than or equal to 45 µg/dL (blood) • CDC level of concern: 3.5 µg/dL⁴², Adult • Symptoms or blood lead level greater than or equal to 70 µg/dL • CDC level of concern: 10 µg/dL⁴³,
Manganese	No clear reference standard
Mercury	Background exposure normative limits: 1-8 µg/L (whole blood); 4-5 µg/L (urine) ^a
Nickel	• Excessive exposure: greater than or equal to 8 µg/L (blood) • Severe poisoning: greater than or equal to 500 µg/L (8-h urine)
Selenium	• Mild toxicity: greater than 1 mg/L (serum) • Serious toxicity: greater than 2 mg/L
Silver	Asymptomatic workers have mean levels of 11 µg/L (serum) and 2.6 µg/L (spot urine)
Thallium	24-hour urine thallium greater than 5 µg/L ⁴² ,
Zinc	Normative range: 0.6-1.1 mg/L (plasma), 10-14 mg/L (red cells)

Adapted from Adal (2018).
 CDC: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

^a Hair analysis is useful to assess mercury exposure in epidemiologic studies. However, hair analysis in individual patients must be interpreted with consideration of the patient's history, signs, and symptoms, and possible alternative explanations. Measurement of blood and urine mercury levels can exclude exogenous contamination; therefore, blood or urine mercury levels may be more robust measures of exposure in individual patients.

Background/Overview

Chelation Therapy

Chelation therapy is an established treatment for the removal of metal toxins by converting them to a chemically inert form that can be excreted in the urine. Chelation therapy comprises intravenous or oral administration of chelating agents that remove metal ions such as lead, aluminum, mercury, arsenic, zinc, iron, copper, and calcium from the body (see Appendix Table 1). Specific chelating agents are used for particular heavy metal toxicities. For example, deferoxamine is used for patients with iron toxicity, and calcium-ethylenediaminetetraacetic acid (EDTA) is used for patients with lead poisoning. Disodium-EDTA is not recommended for acute lead poisoning due to the increased risk of death from hypocalcemia.

Another class of chelating agents, called metal protein attenuating compounds (MPACs), is under investigation for the treatment of Alzheimer disease, which is associated with the disequilibrium of cerebral metals. Unlike traditional systemic chelators that bind and remove metals from tissues systemically, MPACs have subtle effects on metal homeostasis and abnormal metal interactions. In animal models of Alzheimer disease, MPACs promote the solubilization and clearance of β -amyloid by binding its metal-ion complex and also inhibit redox reactions that generate neurotoxic free radicals. Therefore, MPACs interrupt 2 putative pathogenic processes of Alzheimer disease. However, no MPACs have received FDA approval for treating Alzheimer disease.

Chelation therapy also has been considered as a treatment for other indications, including atherosclerosis and autism spectrum disorder. For example, EDTA chelation therapy has been proposed in patients with atherosclerosis as a method of decreasing obstruction in the arteries.

FDA or Other Governmental Regulatory Approval

U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA)

In 1953, EDTA (Versenate) was approved by the FDA for lowering blood lead levels among both pediatric and adult patients with lead poisoning. In 1991, succimer (Chemet) was approved by the FDA for the treatment of lead poisoning in pediatric patients only. The FDA approved disodium-EDTA for use in selected patients with hypercalcemia and use in patients with heart rhythm problems due to intoxication with digitalis. In 2008, the FDA withdrew approval of disodium-EDTA due to safety concerns and recommended that other forms of chelation therapy be used.

Several iron-chelating agents are FDA approved:

- In 1968, deferoxamine (Desferal[®]; Novartis) was approved by the FDA for subcutaneous, intramuscular, or intravenous injections to treat acute iron intoxication and chronic iron overload due to transfusion-dependent anemia. Several generic forms of deferoxamine have been approved by the FDA.
- In 2005, deferasirox (Exjade[®]; Novartis) was approved by the FDA, is available as a tablet for oral suspension, and is indicated for the treatment of chronic iron overload due to blood transfusions in patients age 2 years and older. Under the accelerated approval program, the FDA expanded the indications for deferasirox in 2013 to include treatment of patients age 10 years and older with chronic iron overload due to non-transfusion-dependent thalassemia syndromes and specific liver iron concentration and serum ferritin levels. A

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generic version of deferasirox tablet for oral suspension has also been approved by the FDA. In 2015, an oral tablet formulation for deferasirox (Jadenu[®])[‡] was approved by the FDA. All formulations of deferasirox carry a boxed warning because it may cause serious and fatal renal toxicity and failure, hepatic toxicity and failure, and gastrointestinal hemorrhage. As a result, treatment with deferasirox requires close patient monitoring, including laboratory tests of renal and hepatic function.

- In 2011, the iron chelator deferiprone (Ferriprox[®])[‡] was approved by the FDA for treatment of patients with transfusional overload due to thalassemia syndromes when another chelation therapy is inadequate. Deferiprone is available in tablet and oral solution. Ferriprox carries a boxed warning because it can cause agranulocytosis, which can lead to serious infections and death. As a result, absolute neutrophil count should be monitored before and during treatment.

In a June 2014 warning to consumers, the FDA advised that FDA-approved chelating agents would be available by prescription only. There are no FDA approved over-the-counter chelation products.

Rationale/Source

This medical policy was developed through consideration of peer-reviewed medical literature generally recognized by the relevant medical community, U.S. Food and Drug Administration approval status, nationally accepted standards of medical practice and accepted standards of medical practice in this community, technology evaluation centers, reference to regulations, other plan medical policies, and accredited national guidelines.

Chelation therapy, an established treatment for heavy metal toxicities and transfusional hemosiderosis, has been investigated for a variety of off-label applications, such as treatment of atherosclerosis, Alzheimer disease, and autism. This evidence review does not address indications for chelation therapy approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration. Instead, it addresses off-label indications, including Alzheimer disease, cardiovascular disease, autism spectrum disorder, diabetes, multiple sclerosis, and arthritis.

Cardiovascular Disease

A Cochrane review of several RCTs of chelation therapy did not show sufficient evidence to draw conclusions about the efficacy of EDTA chelation therapy compared to placebo. A 2022 systematic review included similar RCTs and numerous observational trials but did not perform meta-analysis on clinical outcomes. The TACT RCT included in systematic reviews has significant limitations, including a high dropout rate with differential dropout between groups, but reported that cardiovascular events were reduced in patients treated with chelation therapy. This effect was greater among patients with diabetes and post-anterior myocardial infarction. In 2025, findings from the TACT2 RCT failed to replicate the findings from the original TACT study among individuals with diabetes and a previous myocardial infarction at least 6 months prior to recruitment.

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Autism Spectrum Disorder

Based on symptom similarities between mercury poisoning and autism spectrum disorder, Bernard et al (2001) hypothesized a link between environmental mercury and autism. This theory was rejected by Nelson and Bauman (2003), who found that many characteristics of mercury poisoning, such as ataxia, constricted visual fields, peripheral neuropathy, hypertension, skin eruption, and thrombocytopenia, are never seen in autistic children. A meta-analysis by Ng et al (2007) concluded that there was no association between mercury poisoning and autism.

Clinical Context and Therapy Purpose

The purpose of chelation therapy is to provide a treatment option that is an alternative to or an improvement on existing therapies for individuals with autism spectrum disorder.

The following PICO was used to select literature to inform this review.

Populations

The population of interest is individuals with autism spectrum disorder.

Interventions

The intervention of interest is chelation therapy.

Comparators

The comparator of interest is standard medical care without chelation therapy.

Outcomes

The outcomes of interest are symptoms, change in disease status, morbid events, functional outcomes, health status measures, quality of life, and treatment-related morbidity.

Study Selection Criteria

Methodologically credible studies were selected using the following principles:

- To assess efficacy outcomes, comparative controlled prospective trials were sought, with a preference for RCTs;
- In the absence of such trials, comparative observational studies were sought, with a preference for prospective studies.
- To assess long-term outcomes and adverse events, single-arm studies that capture longer periods of follow-up and/or larger populations were sought.
- Studies with duplicative or overlapping populations were excluded.

Review of Evidence

Observational Studies

Rossignol et al (2009) published a systematic review of novel and emerging treatments for autism and identified no controlled studies. Rossignol et al (2009) stated that case series had suggested a potential role for chelation in treating some autistic people with known elevated heavy metal levels, but this possibility needed further investigation in controlled studies.

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Section Summary: Autism Spectrum Disorder

There is a lack of controlled studies on how chelation therapy affects health outcomes in patients with autism.

Diabetes

Clinical Context and Therapy Purpose

The purpose of chelation therapy is to provide a treatment option that is an alternative to or an improvement on existing therapies for individuals with diabetes.

The following PICO was used to select literature to inform this review.

Populations

The population of interest is individuals with diabetes.

Interventions

The intervention of interest is chelation therapy.

Comparators

The comparator of interest is standard medical care without chelation therapy.

Outcomes

The outcomes of interest are symptoms, change in disease status, morbid events, functional outcomes, health status measures, quality of life, and treatment-related morbidity.

Study Selection Criteria

Methodologically credible studies were selected using the following principles:

- To assess efficacy outcomes, comparative controlled prospective trials were sought, with a preference for RCTs;
- In the absence of such trials, comparative observational studies were sought, with a preference for prospective studies.
- To assess long-term outcomes and adverse events, single-arm studies that capture longer periods of follow-up and/or larger populations were sought.
- Studies with duplicative or overlapping populations were excluded.

Review of Evidence

Randomized Controlled Trials

Cardiovascular Disease in Patients With Diabetes

A trial by Cooper et al (2009) in New Zealand evaluated the effect of copper chelation using oral trientine on left ventricular hypertrophy in 30 patients with type 2 diabetes. Twenty-one (70%) of 30 participants completed 12 months of follow-up. At 12 months, there was a significantly greater reduction in left ventricular mass indexed to body surface area in the active treatment group (-

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10.6 g/m²) than in the placebo group (-0.1 g/m²; p=.01). The trial was limited by small sample size and high dropout rate.

Escolar et al (2014) published results of a prespecified subgroup analysis of diabetic patients in TACT. In this trial (also discussed above), there was a statistically significant interaction between treatment (EDTA or placebo) and presence of diabetes. Among 538 (31% of the trial sample) self-reported diabetic patients, those randomized to EDTA had a 39% reduced risk of the primary composite outcome (ie, death from any cause, reinfarction, stroke, coronary revascularization, or hospitalization for angina at 5 years) compared with placebo (HR, 0.61; 95% CI, 0.45 to 0.83; p=.02); among 1170 nondiabetic patients, risk of the primary outcome did not differ statistically between treatment groups (HR, 0.96; 95% CI, 0.77 to 1.20; p=.73). For the subsequent subgroup analysis, the definition of diabetes was broadened to include self-reported diabetes, use of oral or insulin treatment for diabetes, or fasting blood glucose of 126 mg/dL or more at trial entry. Of 1708 patients in TACT, 633 (37%) had diabetes by this definition: 322 were randomized to EDTA and 311 to placebo. Compared with all other trial participants, this subgroup of diabetic patients had higher body mass index, fasting blood glucose, and prevalence of heart failure, stroke, hypertension, peripheral artery disease, and hypercholesterolemia. Within this subgroup, baseline characteristics were similar between treatment groups. With approximately 5 years of follow-up, the primary composite endpoint occurred in 25% of the EDTA group and 38% of the placebo group (adjusted HR, 0.59; 99.4% CI, 0.39 to 0.88; p=.002). In adjusted analysis of the individual components of the primary endpoint, there were no statistically significant differences between treatment groups. Thirty-six adverse events attributable to the study drug led to trial withdrawal (16 in the EDTA group vs. 20 in the placebo group).

Several additional post-hoc analyses of TACT examined outcomes in patients with diabetes. Ujueta et al (2020) reported outcomes in 162 post-myocardial infarction patients with diabetes mellitus and peripheral artery disease. The analysis showed that chelation therapy was associated with a significant reduction in the composite primary endpoint compared with placebo (HR, 0.52; 95% CI, 0.30 to 0.92; p=.0069). Escolar et al (2020) performed a sub-analysis of diabetes mellitus patients included in TACT (n=633) to determine the association between glucose lowering therapy and outcomes. Chelation therapy was associated with a lower frequency of the primary outcome compared with placebo in patients on insulin (n=162; 26% vs. 48%; HR, 0.42; 95% CI, 0.25 to 0.74), but not in patients on oral glucose-lowering therapy or no glucose-lowering therapy.

The TACT2 RCT replicated the TACT study design but restricted enrollment to individuals with diabetes. Results from the TACT2 RCT, summarized in the cardiovascular section above, failed to replicate the original TACT study findings.

Diabetic Nephropathy

Chen et al (2012) conducted a single-blind RCT assessing the effects of chelation therapy on the progression of diabetic nephropathy in Chinese patients with high-normal lead levels. Fifty patients with diabetes, high-normal body lead burden (80 to 6000 µg), and serum creatinine of 3.8 mg/dL or lower were included. Baseline mean blood lead levels were 6.3 µg/dL in the treatment group and 7.1 µg/dL in the control group; baseline mean body lead burden was 151 µg in the treatment group and

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142 µg in the control group. According to the U.S. Occupational and Health Safety Administration, the maximum acceptable blood lead level in adults is 40 µg/dL. Patients were randomized to 3 months of calcium disodium EDTA or to placebo. During 24 months of treatment follow-up, patients in the chelation group received additional chelation treatments as needed (ie, for serum creatinine level above pretreatment levels or body lead burden >60 µg), and patients in the placebo group continued to receive placebo medication. All patients completed the 27-month trial. The primary outcome was change in estimated glomerular filtration rate. Mean yearly rate of decrease in estimated glomerular filtration rate was 5.6 mL/min/1.73 m² in the chelation group and 9.2 mL/min/1.73 m² in the control group, a statistically significant difference (p=.04). The secondary endpoint was the number of patients in whom the baseline serum creatinine doubled or who required renal replacement therapy. Nine (36%) patients in the treatment group and 17 (68%) in the control group attained the secondary endpoint, a statistically significant difference (p=.02). There were no reported adverse events of chelation therapy during the trial.

Section Summary: Diabetes

Two small RCTs with limitations and the failed TACT2 RCT represent insufficient evidence that chelation therapy is effective for treating cardiovascular disease in patients with diabetes. One small, single-blind RCT is insufficient evidence that chelation therapy is effective for treating diabetic nephropathy in patients with high-normal lead levels. Additional RCTs with larger numbers of patients that report health outcomes (eg, cardiovascular events, end-stage renal disease, mortality) are needed.

Parkinson Disease

Clinical Context and Therapy Purpose

The purpose of chelation therapy is to provide a treatment option that is an alternative to or an improvement on existing therapies for individuals with Parkinson disease.

The following PICO was used to select literature to inform this review.

Populations

The population of interest is individuals with Alzheimer disease.

Interventions

The intervention of interest is chelation therapy.

Comparators

The comparator of interest is standard medical care without chelation therapy.

Outcomes

The outcomes of interest are symptoms, change in disease status, morbid events, functional outcomes, health status measures, quality of life, and treatment-related morbidity.

Study Selection Criteria

Methodologically credible studies were selected using the following principles:

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- To assess efficacy outcomes, comparative controlled prospective trials were sought, with a preference for RCTs;
- In the absence of such trials, comparative observational studies were sought, with a preference for prospective studies.
- To assess long-term outcomes and adverse events, single-arm studies that capture longer periods of follow-up and/or larger populations were sought.
- Studies with duplicative or overlapping populations were excluded.

Review of Evidence

Iron chelation therapy is being investigated for Parkinson disease and endotoxemia. Devos et al (2022) conducted a phase 2, randomized, double-blind, 36-week trial in 372 patients with newly diagnosed Parkinson disease. Patients randomized to iron chelation with deferiprone had worse outcomes than those treated with placebo, with 22% of deferiprone-treated patients requiring initiation of dopaminergic therapy versus 2.7% of those treated with placebo. In addition, scores on the Unified Parkinson's Disease Rating Scale were worse with deferiprone, worsening by 15.6 points from baseline compared with 6.3 points in the placebo group (difference, 9.3 points; 95% CI, 6.3 to 12.2; $p < .001$). In 2025, Devos and coworkers published findings from two phase 2 multicenter studies, SKY and EMBARK. Patients on stable dopaminergic therapy were randomized 1:1 to one of four dosage cohorts of deferiprone for 9 months. EMBARK participants received a 15 mg/kg dose twice-daily, including patients on stable dopaminergic therapy or treatment-naïve individuals. In SKY, motor benefit was not seen when deferiprone was combined with L-dopa, and in EMBARK patients not treated with L-dopa, exposure to deferiprone worsened symptoms.

Section Summary: Parkinson Disease

Several phase 2 multicenter studies have failed to demonstrate motor benefits from the iron chelation agent deferiprone in individuals with Parkinson disease.

Other Potential Indications: Multiple Sclerosis and Arthritis

Clinical Context and Therapy Purpose

The purpose of chelation therapy is to provide a treatment option that is an alternative to or an improvement on existing therapies for individuals with multiple sclerosis (MS) or arthritis.

The following PICO was used to select literature to inform this review.

Populations

The population of interest is individuals with MS or arthritis.

Interventions

The intervention of interest is chelation therapy.

Comparators

The comparator of interest is standard medical care without chelation therapy.

Outcomes

The outcomes of interest are symptoms, change in disease status, morbid events, functional outcomes, health status measures, quality of life, and treatment-related morbidity.

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Study Selection Criteria

Methodologically credible studies were selected using the following principles:

- To assess efficacy outcomes, comparative controlled prospective trials were sought, with a preference for RCTs;
- In the absence of such trials, comparative observational studies were sought, with a preference for prospective studies.
- To assess long-term outcomes and adverse events, single-arm studies that capture longer periods of follow-up and/or larger populations were sought.
- Studies with duplicative or overlapping populations were excluded.

Review of Evidence

No RCTs or other controlled trials evaluating the safety and efficacy of chelation therapy for MS or arthritis were identified.

Summary of Evidence

For individuals who have Alzheimer disease, or cardiovascular disease, or autism spectrum disorder, or diabetes, or Parkinson disease, or multiple sclerosis, or arthritis who receive chelation therapy, the evidence includes a small number of randomized controlled trials (RCTs) and case series. Relevant outcomes are symptoms, change in disease status, morbid events, functional outcomes, health status measures, quality of life, and treatment-related morbidity. One RCT (the Trial to Assess Chelation Therapy [TACT]) reported that chelation therapy reduced cardiovascular events in patients with previous myocardial infarction and that the benefit was greater in diabetic patients compared with nondiabetic patients. However, this trial had significant limitations (eg, high dropout rates) and, therefore, conclusions are not definitive. Outcomes from the TACT2 RCT, which restricted enrollment to individuals with diabetes, were published in 2024 and failed to replicate the findings from the original TACT trial. For other conditions, the available RCTs did not report improvements in health outcomes with chelation therapy and, as evidence, case series are inadequate to determine efficacy. The evidence is insufficient to determine that the technology results in an improvement in the net health outcome.

Supplemental Information

Practice Guidelines and Position Statements

Guidelines or position statements will be considered for inclusion in ‘Supplemental Information if they were issued by, or jointly by, a US professional society, an international society with US representation, or National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE). Priority will be given to guidelines that are informed by a systematic review, include strength of evidence ratings, and include a description of management of conflict of interest.

American Heart Association and American College of Cardiology

In 2016, the American College of Cardiology (ACC) and the American Heart Association (AHA) published a joint guideline on the management of patients with lower extremity peripheral artery disease, which stated that chelation therapy (eg, ethylenediaminetetraacetic acid) is not beneficial for the treatment of claudication.

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In 2014, the ACC and AHA published a focused update of the guideline for the management of stable ischemic heart disease, in conjunction with the American Association for Thoracic Surgery, Preventative Cardiovascular Nurses Association, Society for Cardiovascular Angiography and Interventions, and the Society of Thoracic Surgeons. This update included a revised recommendation on chelation therapy stating that the “usefulness of chelation therapy is uncertain for reducing cardiovascular events in patients with stable IHD.” Compared to the original publication of this guideline in 2012, the recommendation was upgraded from a class III (no benefit) to class IIb (benefit $\geq$ risk), and the level of evidence from C (only consensus expert opinion, case studies, or standard of care) to B (data from a single randomized trial or nonrandomized studies). A 2023 guideline from these organizations on managing chronic coronary disease provided comments about chelation therapy but no formal recommendations.

American Heart Association

In 2023, the AHA published a scientific statement about the cardiovascular risk of contaminant metals. The authors cited the TACT trial findings of a reduced relative risk of cardiovascular events among patients who received chelation therapy, but also noted that TACT did not evaluate metal levels. Results of the TACT2 trial were not yet available at the time of publication.

American Academy of Pediatrics

In 2019, the American Academy of Pediatrics published guidance for the management of children with autism spectrum disorder. The guidance cautioned against the use of chelation therapy due to safety concerns and lack of supporting efficacy data.

U.S. Preventive Services Task Force Recommendations

Not applicable.

Medicare National Coverage

The Centers for Medicare & Medicaid have issued 2 national coverage determinations on chelation therapy relevant to this evidence review. Section 20.21 states:

“The application of chelation therapy using ethylenediamine-tetra-acetic acid (EDTA) for the treatment and prevention of atherosclerosis is controversial. There is no widely accepted rationale to explain the beneficial effects attributed to this therapy. Its safety is questioned and its clinical effectiveness has never been established by well designed, controlled clinical trials. It is not widely accepted and practiced by American physicians. EDTA chelation therapy for atherosclerosis is considered experimental. For these reasons, EDTA chelation therapy for the treatment or prevention of atherosclerosis is not covered.

Some practitioners refer to this therapy as chemoendarterectomy and may also show a diagnosis other than atherosclerosis, such as arteriosclerosis or calcinosis. Claims employing such variant terms should also be denied under this section.”

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Section 20.22 states:

“The use of EDTA as a chelating agent to treat atherosclerosis, arteriosclerosis, calcinosis, or similar generalized condition not listed by the FDA [U.S. Food and Drug Administration] as an approved use is not covered. Any such use of EDTA is considered experimental.”

These national coverage determinations are long-standing; effective dates of these versions have not been posted.

Ongoing and Unpublished Clinical Trials

Some currently unpublished trials that might influence this review are listed in Table 1.

Table 1. Summary of Key Trials

NCT No.	Trial Name	Planned Enrollment	Completion Date
<i>Ongoing</i>			
NCT03982693	Trial to Assess Chelation Therapy in Critical Limb Ischemia (TACT3a)	50	Jul 2025
NCT03754725	A Phase 1/2a Exploratory Clinical Trial to Evaluate the Safety of Oral Deferiprone (14 Days) Including Its Effect on Decreasing the Content of Iron in Subjects with Aneurysmal Subarachnoid Hemorrhage (aSAH) sIRB	66	Apr 2026
NCT06763055	The Fifth Intensive Preventing Secondary Injury in Acute Cerebral Hemorrhage Trial Within ACT-GLOBAL (INTERACT5)	2000	Jan 2028

NCT: national clinical trial.

^a Denotes industry-sponsored or cosponsored trial.

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06/20/2002	Medical Policy Committee review. Format revision. No substance change to policy.
06/24/2002	Managed Care Advisory Council approval
07/14/2005	Medical Director review
07/19/2005	Medical Policy Committee review. Format revision. Rationale/Source added. Patient selection criteria defined and: "Heavy metal toxicity, or iron or lead poisoning when toxic levels are not documented by blood levels" added to investigational statement.
08/24/2005	Managed Care Advisory Council approval
07/07/2006	Format revision including addition of FDA and or other governmental regulatory approval and rationale/source. Coverage eligibility unchanged.
09/06/2006	Medical Director review
09/20/2006	Medical Policy Committee approval. No changes to policy guidelines.
10/10/2007	Medical Director review
10/17/2007	Medical Policy Committee approval. No change to coverage eligibility.
10/01/2008	Medical Director review
10/22/2008	Medical Policy Committee approval. No change to coverage eligibility.
10/01/2009	Medical Policy Committee approval
10/14/2009	Medical Policy Implementation Committee approval. Added that when patient selection criteria are not met, or if chelation therapy is used for non-FDA approved indications, to deny investigational.
10/14/2010	Medical Policy Committee review
10/20/2010	Medical Policy Implementation Committee approval. Coverage eligibility unchanged.
10/06/2011	Medical Policy Committee review
10/19/2011	Medical Policy Implementation Committee approval. Autism and Alzheimer's disease added to investigational indications.
10/11/2012	Medical Policy Committee review
10/31/2012	Medical Policy Implementation Committee approval. Coverage eligibility unchanged.
02/04/2013	Coding revised
10/03/2013	Medical Policy Committee review
10/16/2013	Medical Policy Implementation Committee approval. "Treatment of chronic iron overload due to blood transfusions (transfusional hemosiderosis) and due to non transfusion dependent thalassemia (NDTD)" was added as eligible for coverage. Investigational statements clarified.
10/02/2014	Medical Policy Committee review
10/15/2014	Medical Policy Implementation Committee approval. No change to coverage.
12/03/2015	Medical Policy Committee review
12/16/2015	Medical Policy Implementation Committee approval. No change to coverage.
12/01/2016	Medical Policy Committee review
12/21/2016	Medical Policy Implementation Committee approval. No change to coverage.
01/01/2017	Coding update: Removing ICD-9 Diagnosis Codes
12/07/2017	Medical Policy Committee review

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12/20/2017	Medical Policy Implementation Committee approval. No change to coverage. Note added.
12/06/2018	Medical Policy Committee review
12/19/2018	Medical Policy Implementation Committee approval. No change to coverage.
12/05/2019	Medical Policy Committee review
12/11/2019	Medical Policy Implementation Committee approval. Coverage eligibility unchanged.
05/07/2020	Medical Policy Committee review
05/13/2020	Medical Policy Implementation Committee approval. Coverage eligibility unchanged.
05/06/2021	Medical Policy Committee review
05/12/2021	Medical Policy Implementation Committee approval. Coverage eligibility unchanged.
09/30/2021	Coding update
05/05/2022	Medical Policy Committee review
05/11/2022	Medical Policy Implementation Committee approval. Coverage eligibility unchanged.
05/04/2023	Medical Policy Committee review
05/10/2023	Medical Policy Implementation Committee approval. Coverage eligibility completely rewritten. Added Policy Guidelines.
05/02/2024	Medical Policy Committee review
05/08/2024	Medical Policy Implementation Committee approval. Coverage eligibility unchanged.
05/01/2025	Medical Policy Committee review
05/13/2025	Medical Policy Implementation Committee approval. Coverage eligibility unchanged.
05/07/2026	Medical Policy Committee review
05/13/2026	Medical Policy Implementation Committee approval. Parkinson disease added to the list of investigational indications. Added When Services Are Considered Not Medically Necessary section. "Based on review of available data, the Company considers the use of chelation therapy when patient selection criteria are not met is considered to be not medically necessary".

Next Scheduled Review Date: 05/2027

Coding

The five character codes included in the Louisiana Blue Medical Policy Coverage Guidelines are obtained from Current Procedural Terminology (CPT®)†, copyright 2025 by the American Medical Association (AMA). CPT is developed by the AMA as a listing of descriptive terms and five character identifying codes and modifiers for reporting medical services and procedures performed by physician.

The responsibility for the content of Louisiana Blue Medical Policy Coverage Guidelines is with Louisiana Blue and no endorsement by the AMA is intended or should be implied. The AMA

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disclaims responsibility for any consequences or liability attributable or related to any use, nonuse or interpretation of information contained in Louisiana Blue Medical Policy Coverage Guidelines. Fee schedules, relative value units, conversion factors and/or related components are not assigned by the AMA, are not part of CPT, and the AMA is not recommending their use. The AMA does not directly or indirectly practice medicine or dispense medical services. The AMA assumes no liability for data contained or not contained herein. Any use of CPT outside of Louisiana Blue Medical Policy Coverage Guidelines should refer to the most current Current Procedural Terminology which contains the complete and most current listing of CPT codes and descriptive terms. Applicable FARS/DFARS apply.

CPT is a registered trademark of the American Medical Association.

Codes used to identify services associated with this policy may include (but may not be limited to) the following:

Code Type	Code
CPT	No codes
HCPCS	J0470, J0600, J0895, J3520, M0300, S9355
ICD-10 Diagnosis	All related Diagnoses

*Investigational – A medical treatment, procedure, drug, device, or biological product is Investigational if the effectiveness has not been clearly tested and it has not been incorporated into standard medical practice. Any determination we make that a medical treatment, procedure, drug, device, or biological product is Investigational will be based on a consideration of the following:

- A. Whether the medical treatment, procedure, drug, device, or biological product can be lawfully marketed without approval of the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and whether such approval has been granted at the time the medical treatment, procedure, drug, device, or biological product is sought to be furnished; or
- B. Whether the medical treatment, procedure, drug, device, or biological product requires further studies or clinical trials to determine its maximum tolerated dose, toxicity, safety, effectiveness, or effectiveness as compared with the standard means of treatment or diagnosis, must improve health outcomes, according to the consensus of opinion among experts as shown by reliable evidence, including:
 1. Consultation with technology evaluation center(s);
 2. Credible scientific evidence published in peer-reviewed medical literature generally recognized by the relevant medical community; or
 3. Reference to federal regulations.

**Medically Necessary (or “Medical Necessity”) - Health care services, treatment, procedures, equipment, drugs, devices, items or supplies that a Provider, exercising prudent clinical judgment, would provide to a patient for the purpose of preventing, evaluating, diagnosing or treating an illness, injury, disease or its symptoms, and that are:

- A. In accordance with nationally accepted standards of medical practice;

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- B. Clinically appropriate, in terms of type, frequency, extent, level of care, site and duration, and considered effective for the patient's illness, injury or disease; and
- C. Not primarily for the personal comfort or convenience of the patient, physician or other health care provider, and not more costly than an alternative service or sequence of services at least as likely to produce equivalent therapeutic or diagnostic results as to the diagnosis or treatment of that patient's illness, injury or disease.

For these purposes, “nationally accepted standards of medical practice” means standards that are based on credible scientific evidence published in peer-reviewed medical literature generally recognized by the relevant medical community, Physician Specialty Society recommendations and the views of Physicians practicing in relevant clinical areas and any other relevant factors.

‡ Indicated trademarks are the registered trademarks of their respective owners.

NOTICE: If the Patient’s health insurance contract contains language that differs from the BCBSLA Medical Policy definition noted above, the definition in the health insurance contract will be relied upon for specific coverage determinations.

NOTICE: Medical Policies are scientific based opinions, provided solely for coverage and informational purposes. Medical Policies should not be construed to suggest that the Company recommends, advocates, requires, encourages, or discourages any particular treatment, procedure, or service, or any particular course of treatment, procedure, or service.

NOTICE: Federal and State law, as well as contract language, including definitions and specific contract provisions/exclusions, take precedence over Medical Policy and must be considered first in determining eligibility for coverage.

NOTICE: If an authorization for an ongoing course of treatment has been provided to a member and the member changes from one health plan to another health plan (e.g., a member moves from carrier A to Louisiana Blue), Louisiana Blue may honor the previous health plan’s authorization for the same service under the same type of in-network benefit for a 90-day transition period. Documentation of the authorization for the ongoing course of treatment from the previous health plan must be provided to us by the member or their provider and the services provided for the course of treatment must otherwise be a covered service under the Louisiana Blue health plan. This provision does not apply to medications covered under the plan’s pharmacy benefit.