COVERAGE:

Ambulance services are medically necessary as outlined below:

- the medical transport services must comply with all local, state, and federal laws, and must have all the appropriate valid licenses;
- the ambulance or other medical transport services must have the necessary patient care equipment and supplies;
- the patient's condition must be such that any other form of transportation would be medically contraindicated;
- the patient is transported to the nearest site with the appropriate facilities for the treatment of the injury or illness involved or in the case of organ transplantation, to the approved transplant facility; and
- coverage will be extended to the next nearest facility generally equipped to provide the needed care, IF
  a) no bed is available at the nearest facility,
  b) the trauma unit is full, or
  c) a specialist or surgeon is not on call or is not available at the nearest facility.

Air or sea ambulance services are medically necessary as outlined below:

- the time needed to transport a patient by either basic or advanced life support land ambulance poses a threat to survival;
- the point of pick-up is inaccessible by land vehicle;
- great distances, limited time frames, or other obstacles are involved in getting the patient to the nearest hospital with appropriate facilities for treatment (e.g., transport of a critically ill patient to an approved transplant facility with a waiting organ).

The following services are NOT medically necessary, as they do not require ambulance transportation:

- ambulance services when the patient has been legally pronounced dead prior to the ambulance being summoned;
- services provided by an ambulance crew who do not transport a patient but only render aid.

Some examples are:

(a) ambulance dispatched to scene of an accident and crew renders aid until a helicopter can be sent;
(b) ambulance dispatched and patient refuses care; or
(c) ambulance dispatched and only basic first aid is rendered.

Non-emergency transports are defined as ambulance transports for a patient who has a medical problem requiring treatment in another location and is so disabled that the use of an ambulance is the only appropriate means of transfer. "Disabled" means the patient's physical condition limits his/her mobility and is unable to stand and sit unassisted or requires continuous life support systems.

Situations where non-emergency transportation is medically necessary for the patient described above include either of the following:

- the patient is a registered inpatient in a facility and the specialized services are not available in that facility;
- the provider of a specialized service is the nearest one with the required capabilities (i.e., renal dialysis center).

Transfers by "medical" vans or commercial transportation (such as physician owned limousines, public transportation, cabs, etc.) are NOT medical transport and are not considered medically necessary.

**DESCRIPTION:**

Ambulance services involve the use of a specially designed and equipped automotive or other vehicle, licensed by the state, and regulated by local, state and federal laws, to transport the ill or injured. Ambulances can be classified as either basic life support or advanced life support depending upon how the vehicle is equipped. This in turn regulates the level of care that can be provided in the actual transport.

Basic Life Support (BLS) vehicles must be staffed by at least two people, one of whom must be certified as an emergency medical technician (EMT) by the State or local authority where the services are being furnished. The EMT must be legally authorized to operate all lifesaving and life sustaining equipment on the vehicle.

Advanced Life Support (ALS) vehicles must be staffed by two people with one of the two staff members certified as a paramedic or an EMT who is trained and certified (by the State or local authority where the services are being furnished) to perform one or more ALS service.

**RATIONALE:**

Coverage for ambulance service is a contract issue as well as a medical necessity issue. Ambulances are sometimes misused for non-
emergency situations.

This policy describes situations where it would be medically necessary and appropriate to use ALS, BLS, or non-emergency levels of ambulance services.

PRICING:

Refer to any State specific Corporate Guidelines in effect for payment information.

REFERENCES:


DISCLAIMER:

State and federal law, as well as contract language, including definitions and specific inclusions/exclusions, takes precedence over Medical Policy and must be considered first in determining coverage. The member’s contract benefits in effect on the date that services are rendered must be used. Any benefits are subject to the payment of premiums for the date on which services are rendered. Medical technology is constantly evolving, and we reserve the right to review and update Medical Policy periodically.

HMO Blue Texas physicians who are contracted/affiliated with a capitated IPA/medical group must contact the IPA/medical group for information regarding HMO claims/reimbursement information and other general polices and procedures.