# UNITEDHEALTHCARE® COMMUNITY PLAN: RADIOLOGY IMAGING COVERAGE DETERMINATION GUIDELINE

# Adult Oncology Imaging Guidelines (For Ohio Only)

**V2.0.2026**

Guideline Number: CSRAD010OH.F

*Effective Date: September 1, 2026*

## Application (for Ohio Only)

*This Medical Policy only applies to the state of Ohio. Any requests for services that are stated as unproven or services for which there is a coverage or quantity limit will be evaluated for medical necessity using Ohio Administrative Code 5160-1-01.*



Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

# Table of Contents

Guideline

**Related Community Plan Policies**
**Application (For Ohio Only)**
**Guideline Development (Preface-1)**
**Benefits, Coverage Policies, and Eligibility Issues (Preface-2)**
**Clinical Information (Preface-3)**
**Coding Issues (Preface-4)**
**Whole-Body Imaging (Preface-5)**
**References (Preface-6)**
**General Guidelines (ONC-1)**
**Primary Central Nervous System Tumors (ONC-2)**
**Squamous Cell Carcinomas of the Head and Neck (ONC-3)**
**Salivary Gland Cancers (ONC-4)**
**Melanomas and Other Skin Cancers (ONC-5)**
**Thyroid Cancer (ONC-6)**
**Small Cell Lung Cancer (ONC-7)**
**Non-Small Cell Lung Cancer (ONC-8)**
**Esophageal and GE Junction Cancer (ONC-9)**
**Other Thoracic Tumors (ONC-10)**
**Breast Cancer (ONC-11)**
**Sarcomas – Bone, Soft Tissue, and GIST (ONC-12)**
**Pancreatic Cancer (ONC-13)**
**Upper GI Cancers (ONC-14)**
**Neuroendocrine Cancers and Adrenal Tumors (ONC-15)**
**Colorectal and Small Bowel Cancer (ONC-16)**
**Renal Cell Cancer (RCC) (ONC-17)**
**Transitional Cell Cancer (ONC-18)**
**Prostate Cancer (ONC-19)**
**Testicular, Ovarian and Extragonadal Germ Cell Tumors (ONC-20)**
**Ovarian Cancer (ONC-21)**
**Uterine Cancer (ONC-22)**
**Cervical Cancer (ONC-23)**
**Anal Cancer & Cancers of the External Genitalia (ONC-24)**
**Multiple Myeloma and Plasmacytomas (ONC-25)**
**Leukemias, Myelodysplasia and Myeloproliferative Neoplasms (ONC-26)**
**Non-Hodgkin Lymphomas (ONC-27)**
**Hodgkin Lymphoma (ONC-28)**


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

**Hematopoietic Stem Cell Transplantation (ONC-29)**
**Medical Conditions with Cancer in the Differential Diagnosis (ONC-30)**
**Metastatic Cancer, Carcinoma of Unknown Primary Site, and Other Types of Cancer (ONC-31)**
**Policy History and Instructions for Use**


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

Click Anywhere in the Header to Return to the Main Table of Contents



# Related Community Plan Policies

Guideline

Related Community Plan Policies


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

# Related Community Plan Policies

## Related Community Plan Policies

**v2.0.2026**

| |
|---|
| General Policies<br>• Abdomen Imaging Guidelines<br>• Breast Imaging Guidelines<br>• Cardiac Imaging Guidelines<br>• Chest Imaging Guidelines<br>• Neck Imaging Guidelines<br>• Pelvis Imaging Guidelines<br>• Spine Imaging Guidelines |
| Pediatric Policies<br>• Pediatric and Special Populations Oncology Imaging Guidelines |


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

Click Anywhere in the Header to Return to the Main Table of Contents



# Application (For Ohio Only)

## Guideline

Application (For Ohio Only)


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

Click Anywhere in the Header to Return to the Main Table of Contents



# Application (For Ohio Only)

## Application for Ohio OH UHC

**v2.0.2026**

- This Medical Policy only applies to the state of Ohio. Any requests for services that are stated as unproven or services for which there is a coverage or quantity limit will be evaluated for medical necessity using Ohio Administrative Code 5160-1-01.


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

Click Anywhere in the Header to Return to the Main Table of Contents



# Guideline Development (Preface-1)

Guideline

Guideline Development (Preface-1.1)


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

Click Anywhere in the Header to Return to the Main Table of Contents



# Guideline Development (Preface-1.1)

**PRF.GG.0001.1.UOH**

**v2.0.2026**

- These evidence-based, proprietary clinical guidelines evaluate a range of advanced imaging and procedures, including NM, US, CT, MRI, PET, Radiation Oncology, Sleep Studies, as well as Cardiac, Musculoskeletal and Spine interventions.
- UnitedHealthcare reserves the right to change and update the guidelines. The guidelines undergo a formal review annually. These clinical guidelines are based on current evidence supported by major national and international association and society guidelines and criteria, peer-reviewed literature, and major treatises as well as input from health plans, and practicing academic and community-based physicians.
- These guidelines are not intended to supersede or replace sound medical judgment, but instead, should facilitate the identification of the most appropriate imaging or other designated procedure given the individual's clinical condition. These guidelines are written to cover medical conditions as experienced by the majority of individuals. However, these guidelines may not be applicable in certain clinical circumstances, and physician judgment can override the guidelines.
- These guidelines provide evidence-based, clinical benefits with a focus on health care quality and patient safety.
- Clinical decisions, including treatment decisions, are the responsibility of the individual and his/her provider. Clinicians are expected to use independent medical judgment, which takes into account the clinical circumstances to determine individual management decisions.


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

Click Anywhere in the Header to Return to the Main Table of Contents



# Benefits, Coverage Policies, and Eligibility Issues (Preface-2)

Guideline

Benefits, Coverage Policies, and Eligibility Issues (Preface-2.1)
References (Preface-2)


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

# Benefits, Coverage Policies, and Eligibility Issues (Preface-2.1)

PRF.BC.0002.1.UOH

**v2.0.2026**

### Investigational and Experimental Studies

- Certain studies, treatments, procedures, or devices may be considered experimental, investigational, or unproven for any condition, illness, disease, injury being treated if one of the following is present:
  - if there is a paucity of supporting evidence;
  - if the evidence has not matured to exhibit improved health parameters;
  - if clinical utility has not been demonstrated in any condition; OR
  - if the study, treatment, procedure, or device lacks a collective opinion of support
- Supporting evidence includes standards that are based on credible scientific evidence published in peer-reviewed medical literature (such as well conducted randomized clinical trials or cohort studies with a sample size of sufficient statistical power) generally recognized by the relevant medical community. Collective opinion of support includes physician specialty society recommendations and the views of physicians practicing in relevant clinical areas when physician specialty society recommendations are not available.

### Clinical and Research Trials

- Similar to investigational and experimental studies, clinical trial imaging requests are reviewed to determine whether they meet these evidence-based clinical guidelines.
- Imaging studies which are inconsistent with established clinical standards, or are requested for data collection and not used in direct clinical management are not medically necessary.

### CPT Codes

- The inclusion of any CPT code in the clinical guidelines does not imply that the code is under management or requires prior authorization.


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

# References (Preface-2)

**v2.0.2026**

1. 2.42 USC 300gg-8: Coverage for individuals participating in approved clinical trials. House.gov. Published 2024.


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

Click Anywhere in the Header to Return to the Main Table of Contents



# Clinical Information (Preface-3)

Guideline

Clinical Information (Preface-3.1)
References (Preface-3)


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

# Clinical Information (Preface-3.1)

PRF.CL.0003.1.UOH
**v2.0.2026**

**Clinical Documentation and Age Considerations**

- These clinical guidelines use an evidence-based approach to determine the most appropriate procedure for each individual, at the most appropriate time in the diagnostic and treatment cycle. These clinical guidelines are framed by:
  - clinical presentation of the individual, rather than the studies requested
  - adequate clinical information that must be submitted to UnitedHealthcare in order to establish medical necessity for advanced imaging or other designated procedures including, but not limited to, the following:
    - Pertinent clinical evaluation since the onset or change in symptoms including a detailed history, physical examination, appropriate laboratory studies, and appropriate prior imaging studies.
      - Condition-specific guideline sections may describe additional clinical information which is required for a pertinent clinical evaluation.
      - The Spine and Musculoskeletal guidelines require x-ray studies from when the current episode of symptoms has started or changed.
      - Advanced imaging or other designated procedures should not be ordered prior to clinical evaluation of an individual by the physician treating the individual. This may include referral to a consultant specialist who will make further treatment decisions.
      - Other meaningful technological contact (telehealth visit, telephone or video call, electronic mail or messaging) since the onset or change in symptoms by an established individual can serve as a pertinent clinical evaluation.
        - Some conditions may require a face-to-face evaluation as discussed in the applicable condition-specific guideline sections.
    - A recent clinical evaluation may be unnecessary if the individual is undergoing a guideline-supported, scheduled follow-up imaging or other designated procedural evaluation. Exceptions due to routine surveillance indications are addressed in the applicable condition-specific guideline sections.
  - The evidence-based approach to determine the most appropriate procedure for each individual requires submission of medical records pertinent to the requested imaging or other designated procedures.
- Many conditions affecting the pediatric population are different diagnoses than those occurring in the adult population. For those diseases which occur in both pediatric and adult populations, minor differences may exist in management due to individual


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

age, comorbidities, and differences in disease natural history between children and adults.
  - Individuals who are 18 years old or younger should be imaged according to the Pediatric Imaging Guidelines if discussed in the condition-specific guideline sections. Any conditions not specifically discussed in the Pediatric Imaging Guidelines should be imaged according to the General Imaging Guidelines. Individuals who are >18 years old should be imaged according to the General Imaging Guidelines, except where directed otherwise by a specific guideline section.

**General Imaging Information**

- "Standard" or "conventional" imaging is most often performed in the initial and subsequent evaluations of malignancy. Standard or conventional imaging includes plain film, CT, MRI, or US.
  - Often, further advanced imaging is needed when initial imaging, such as ultrasound, CT, or MRI does not answer the clinical question. Uncertain, indeterminate, inconclusive, or equivocal may describe these situations.
- Appropriate use of contrast is a very important component of evidence-based advanced imaging use.
  - The appropriate levels of contrast for an examination (i.e., without contrast, with contrast, without and with contrast) is determined by the evidence-based guidance reflected in the condition-specific guideline sections.
  - If, during the performance of a non-contrast imaging study, there is the unexpected need to use contrast in order to evaluate a possible abnormality, then that is appropriate.

**Ultrasound**

- Diagnostic ultrasound uses high-frequency sound waves to evaluate soft tissue structures and vascular structures utilizing grey scale and Doppler techniques.
- Ultrasound allows for dynamic real-time imaging at the bedside.
  - Ultrasound is limited in areas where there is dense bone or other calcification.
  - Ultrasound also has a relatively limited imaging window so may be of limited value in evaluating very large abnormalities.
  - In general, ultrasound is highly operator-dependent, and proper training and experience are required to perform consistent, high-quality evaluations.
- Indications for ultrasound may include, but are not limited to, the following:
  - Obstetric and gynecologic imaging
  - Soft tissue and visceral imaging of the chest, abdomen, pelvis, and extremities
  - Brain and spine imaging when not obscured by dense bony structures
  - Vascular imaging when not obscured by dense bony structures
  - Procedural guidance when not obscured by dense bony structures


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

  - Initial evaluation of ill-defined soft tissue masses or fullness and differentiating adenopathy from mass or cyst. Prior to advanced imaging, ultrasound can be very beneficial in selecting the proper modality, body area, image sequences, and contrast level that will provide the most definitive information for the individual.
- More specific guidance for ultrasound usage, including exceptions to this general guidance, can be found throughout the condition-specific guidelines.

**Computed Tomography (CT)**

- The AMA CPT® manual does not describe nor assign any minimum or maximum number of sequences for any CT study. CT imaging protocols are often influenced by the individual's clinical situation and additional sequences are not uncommon. There are numerous CT protocols that may be performed to evaluate specific clinical questions, and this technology is constantly undergoing development.
- CT utilizes ionizing radiation to create cross-sectional and volumetric images of the body.
  - Advantages over ultrasound include a much larger field of view and faster completion time in general. Disadvantages compared to ultrasound include lack of portability and exposure to ionizing radiation.
  - Advantages over MRI include faster imaging and a more spacious scanner area limiting claustrophobia. Disadvantages compared to MRI include decreased soft tissue definition, especially with non-contrast imaging, and exposure to ionizing radiation.
- CT can be performed without, with, or without and with intravenous (IV) contrast depending on the clinical indication and body area.
  - In general, non-contrast imaging is appropriate for evaluating structures with significant tissue density differences such as lung parenchyma and bony structures, or when there is a contraindication to contrast.
  - In general, CT with contrast is the most common level of contrast and can be used when there is need for improved vascular or soft tissue resolution, including better characterization of known or suspected malignancy, as well as infectious and inflammatory conditions.
  - CT without and with contrast has a limited role as the risks of doubling the ionizing radiation exposure rarely outweigh the benefits of multiphasic imaging, though there are some exceptions which include, but are not limited to, the following:
    - Characterization of a mass
    - Characterization of arterial and venous anatomy
    - CT with contrast may be used to better characterize findings on a very recent (within two weeks) inconclusive non-contrast CT where the guidelines would support CT without and with contrast.
  - More specific guidance for CT contrast usage, including exceptions to this general guidance, can be found throughout the condition-specific guidelines.


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

- Shellfish allergy:
  - It is commonly assumed that an allergy to shellfish indicates iodine allergy, and that this implies an allergy to iodinated contrast media used with CT. However, this is NOT true. Shellfish allergy is due to tropomyosins. Iodine plays no role in these allergic reactions. Allergies to shellfish do not increase the risk of reaction to iodinated contrast media any more than that of other allergens.
- Enteric contrast (oral or rectal) is sometimes used in abdominal imaging. There is no specific CPT® code which refers to enteric contrast.
- The appropriate contrast level and anatomic region in CT imaging is specific to the clinical indication, as listed in the condition-specific guideline sections.
- CT should not be used to replace MRI in an attempt to avoid sedation unless it is listed as a recommended study in the appropriate condition-specific guideline.
- There are significant potential adverse effects associated with the use of iodinated contrast media. These include hypersensitivity reactions, thyroid dysfunction, and contrast-induced nephropathy (CIN). Individuals with impaired renal function are at increased risk for CIN.
- Both contrast CT and MRI are considered to have the same risk profile with renal failure (GFR <30mL/min).
- The use of CT contrast should proceed with caution in pregnant and breastfeeding individuals. There is a theoretical risk of contrast toxicity to the fetal and infant thyroid. The procedure can be performed if the specific need for that contrast-enhanced procedure outweighs risk to the fetus. Breastfeeding individuals may reduce this risk by choosing to pump and discard breast milk for 12-24 hours after the contrast injection.
- CT without contrast is medically necessary if clinical criteria for CT with contrast are met AND the individual has/is:
  - elevated blood urea nitrogen (BUN) and/or creatinine
  - renal insufficiency
  - allergies to iodinated contrast
  - thyroid disease which could be treated with I-131
  - diabetes
  - very elderly
  - urgent or emergent settings due to availability
  - trauma
- CT is superior to other imaging modalities in certain conditions including, but not limited to, the following:
  - Screening following trauma
  - Imaging pulmonary disease
  - Imaging abdominal and pelvic viscera
  - Imaging of complex fractures


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

- Evaluation of inconclusive findings on Ultrasound or MRI, or if there is a contraindication to MRI
- More specific guidance for CT usage, including exceptions to this general guidance, can be found throughout the condition-specific guidelines.

**Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI)**

- The AMA CPT® manual does not describe nor assign any minimum or maximum number of sequences for any MRI study. MRI protocols are often influenced by the individual's clinical situation and additional sequences are not uncommon. There are numerous MRI sequences that may be performed to evaluate specific clinical questions, and this technology is constantly undergoing development.
- Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI) utilizes the interaction between the intrinsic radiofrequency of certain molecules in the body (hydrogen in most cases) and a strong external magnetic field.
  - MRI is often superior for advanced imaging of soft tissues and can also define physiological processes in some instances (e.g., edema, loss of circulation [AVN], and increased vascularity [tumors]).
  - MRI does not use ionizing radiation and even non-contrast images have much higher soft tissue definition than CT or Ultrasound.
  - MRI typically takes much longer than either CT or Ultrasound, and for some individuals may require sedation. It is also much more sensitive to individual motion that can degrade image quality than either CT or Ultrasound.
- MRI Breast and MRI Chest are not interchangeable, as they focus detailed sequences on different adjacent body parts.
- MRI may be utilized either as the primary advanced imaging modality, or when further definition is needed based on CT or ultrasound imaging.
- Most orthopedic and dental implants are not magnetic. These include hip and knee replacements; plates, screws, and rods used to treat fractures; and cavity fillings. Yet, all of these metal implants can distort the MRI image if near the part of the body being scanned.
  - Other implants, however, may have contraindications to MRI. These include the following:
    - pacemakers
    - ICD or heart valves
    - metal implants in the brain
    - metal implants in the eyes or ears
    - infusion catheters and bullets or shrapnel
  - CT can therefore be an alternative study to MRI in these scenarios.
- The contrast level and anatomic region in MRI imaging is specific to the clinical indication, as listed in the specific guideline sections.


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

- MRI utilizing Xenon Xe 129 (CPT® C9791) for contrast is considered investigational and experimental at this time. MRI with or with and without contrast in these guidelines refers to MRI utilizing gadolinium for contrast.
- MRI is commonly performed without, and without and with contrast.
  - Non-contrast imaging offers excellent tissue definition.
  - Imaging without and with contrast is commonly used when needed to better characterize tissue perfusion and vascularization.
    - Most contrast is gadolinium based and causes T2 brightening of the vascular and extracellular spaces.
    - Some specialized gadolinium and non-gadolinium contrast agents are available, and are most commonly used for characterizing liver lesions.
  - MRI with contrast only is rarely appropriate and is usually used to better characterize findings on a recent inconclusive non-contrast MRI, commonly called a completion study.
  - MRI contrast is relatively contraindicated in pregnant individuals.
  - More specific guidance for MRI contrast usage, including exceptions to this general guidance, can be found throughout the condition-specific guidelines.
- MRI may be preferred in individuals with renal failure and in individuals allergic to intravenous CT contrast.
  - Both contrast CT and MRI are considered to have the same risk profile with renal failure (GFR <30mL/min).
  - Gadolinium can cause Nephrogenic Systemic Fibrosis (NSF). The greater the exposure to gadolinium in individuals with a low GFR (especially if on dialysis), the greater the chance of individuals developing NSF.
  - Multiple studies have demonstrated potential for gadolinium deposition following the use of gadolinium-based contrast agents (GBCAs) for MRI studies. The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has noted that there is currently no evidence to suggest that gadolinium retention in the brain is harmful and restricting GBCAs use is not warranted at this time. It has been recommended that GBCA use should be limited to circumstances in which additional information provided by the contrast agent is necessary and the necessity of repetitive MRIs with GBCAs should be assessed.
- A CT is medically necessary in place of an MRI when clinical criteria are met for MRI AND there is a contraindication to having an MRI (e.g., pacemaker, ICD, insulin pump, neurostimulator, etc.).
  - When replacing MRI with CT, contrast level matching should occur as follows:
    - MRI without contrast → CT without contrast
    - MRI without and with contrast → CT with contrast or CT without and with contrast
- The following situations may impact the appropriateness for MRI and/or MR contrast:


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

  - Caution should be taken in the use of gadolinium in individuals with renal failure.
  - The use of gadolinium contrast agents is relatively contraindicated during pregnancy unless the specific need for that procedure outweighs risk to the fetus.
  - MRI can be performed for non-ferromagnetic body metals (i.e., titanium), although some imaging facilities will consider it contraindicated if recent surgery, regardless of the metal type.
- MRI should not be used as a replacement for CT for the sole reason of avoidance of ionizing radiation when MRI is not medically necessary in the condition-based guidelines, since it does not solve the problem of overutilization.
- MRI is superior to other imaging modalities in certain conditions including, but not limited to, the following:
  - Imaging the brain and spinal cord
  - Characterizing visceral and musculoskeletal soft tissue masses
  - Evaluating musculoskeletal soft tissues including ligaments and tendons
  - Evaluating inconclusive findings on ultrasound or CT
  - Individuals who are pregnant or have high radiation sensitivity
  - Suspicion, diagnosis, or surveillance of infections
- More specific guidance for MRI usage, including exceptions to this general guidance, can be found throughout the condition-specific guidelines.

**Positron Emission Tomography (PET)**

- PET is a nuclear medicine study that uses a positron emitting radiotracer to create cross-sectional and volumetric images based on tissue metabolism.
- Conventional imaging (frequently CT, sometimes MRI or bone scan) of the affected area(s) drives much of initial and restaging and surveillance imaging for malignancy and other chronic conditions. PET is not medically necessary for surveillance imaging unless specifically stated in the condition-specific guideline sections.
- PET/MRI is generally not medically necessary, see **PET-MRI (Preface-5.3)**.
- PET is rarely performed as a single modality, but is typically performed as a combined PET/CT.
  - The unbundling of PET/CT into separate PET and diagnostic CT CPT® codes is not medically necessary, because PET/CT is done as a single study.
- PET/CT lacks the tissue definition of CT or MRI but is fairly specific for metabolic activity based on the radiotracer used.
- Indications for PET/CT may include the following:
  - Oncologic Imaging for evaluation of tumor metabolic activity
  - Cardiac Imaging for evaluation of myocardial metabolic activity
  - Brain Imaging for evaluation of metabolic activity for procedural planning
- More specific guidance for PET usage, including exceptions to this general guidance, can be found throughout the condition-specific guidelines.


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

## Overutilization of Advanced Imaging

- A number of reports describe overutilization in many areas of advanced imaging and other procedures, which may include the following:
  - High-level testing without consideration of less invasive, lower cost options which may adequately address the clinical question at hand
  - Excessive radiation and costs with unnecessary testing
  - Defensive medical practice
  - CT without and with contrast (so called "double contrast studies") requests, which have few current indications
  - MRI requested in place of CT to avoid radiation without considering the primary indication for imaging
  - Adult CT settings and protocols used for smaller people and children
  - Unnecessary imaging procedures when the same or similar studies have already been conducted
- A review of the imaging or other relevant procedural histories of all individuals presenting for studies has been recognized as one of the more important processes that can be significantly improved. By recognizing that a duplicate or questionably medically necessary imaging study has been ordered for individuals, it may be possible to avoid exposing them to unnecessary risks. To avoid these unnecessary risks, the precautions below should be considered:
  - The results of initial diagnostic tests or radiologic studies to narrow the differential diagnosis should be obtained prior to performing further tests or radiologic studies.
  - The clinical history should include a potential indication such as a known or suspected abnormality involving the body part for which the imaging study is being requested. These potential indications are addressed in greater detail within the applicable guidelines.
  - The results of the requested imaging procedures should be expected to have an impact on individual management or treatment decisions.
  - Repeat imaging studies are not generally necessary unless there is evidence of disease progression, recurrence of disease, and/or the repeat imaging will affect an individual’s clinical management.
- Pre-operative imaging/pre-surgical planning imaging/pre-procedure imaging is not medically necessary if the surgery/procedure is not medically necessary. Once the procedure has been approved or if the procedure does not require prior authorization, the appropriate pre-procedural imaging may be approved.

## Health Equity Considerations

Health equity is the highest level of health for all individuals; health inequity is the avoidable difference in health status or distribution of health resources due to the social


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

conditions in which individuals are born, grow, live, work, and age. Social determinants of health are the conditions in the environment that affect a wide range of health, functioning, and quality of life outcomes and risks. Examples include the following: safe housing, transportation, and neighborhoods; racism, discrimination, and violence; education, job opportunities, and income; access to nutritious foods and physical activity opportunities; access to clean air and water; and language and literacy skills.


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

# References (Preface-3)

**v2.0.2026**

1. American College of Radiology Committee on Drugs and Contrast Media. ACR Manual on Contrast Media. Published 2025.
2. Andreucci M, Solomon R, Tasanarong A. Side Effects of Radiographic Contrast Media: Pathogenesis, Risk Factors, and Prevention. *BioMed Res Int*. 2014;2014:1-20. doi:10.1155/2014/741018
3. McDonald RJ, McDonald JS, Kallmes DF, et al. Gadolinium Deposition in Human Brain Tissues after Contrast-enhanced MR Imaging in Adult Patients without Intracranial Abnormalities. *Radiology*. 2017;285(2):546-554. doi:10.1148/radiol.2017161595
4. Kanda T, Ishii K, Kawaguchi H, Kitajima K, Takenaka D. High Signal Intensity in the Dentate Nucleus and Globus Pallidus on Unenhanced T1-weighted MR Images: Relationship with Increasing Cumulative Dose of a Gadolinium-based Contrast Material. *Radiology*. 2014;270(3):834-841. doi:10.1148/radiol.13131669
5. Olchowy C, Cebulski K, Łasecki M, et al. The presence of the gadolinium-based contrast agent depositions in the brain and symptoms of gadolinium neurotoxicity - A systematic review. Mohapatra S, ed. *PLOS ONE*. 2017;12(2):e0171704. doi:10.1371/journal.pone.0171704
6. Ryu YJ, Choi YH, Cheon JE, et al. Pediatric Brain: Gadolinium Deposition in Dentate Nucleus and Globus Pallidus on Unenhanced T1-Weighted Images Is Dependent on the Type of Contrast Agent. *Invest Radiol.* 2018;53(4):246-255. doi:10.1097/RLI.0000000000000436
7. Splendiani A, Perri M, Marsecano C, et al. Effects of serial macrocyclic-based contrast materials gadoterate meglumine and gadobutrol administrations on gadolinium-related dentate nuclei signal increases in unenhanced T1-weighted brain: a retrospective study in 158 multiple sclerosis (MS) patients. *Radiol Med*. 2018;123(2):125-134. doi:10.1007/s11547-017-0816-9
8. U.S. Food and Drug Administration. FDA Drug Safety Communication: FDA warns that gadolinium-based contrast agents (GBCAs) are retained in the body; requires new class warnings. Published May 16, 2018.
9. Amis ES Jr, Butler PF; American College of Radiology. ACR white paper on radiation dose in medicine: three years later. *J Am Coll Radiol*. 2010;7(11):865-870. doi:10.1016/j.jacr.2010.04.006
10. Powell AC, Long JW, Kren EM, Gupta AK, Levin DC. Evaluation of a Program for Improving Advanced Imaging Interpretation. *J Patient Saf*. 2019;15(1):69-75. doi:10.1097/PTS.000000000000034.5
11. U.S. Food and Drug Administration. White Paper: Initiative to Reduce Unnecessary Radiation Exposure from Medical Imaging. FDA. Published June 14, 2019
12. Fotenos A. Update on FDA Approach to Safety Issue of Gadolinium Retention after Administration of Gadolinium-Based Contrast Agents. U.S. Food and Drug Administration. Published September 20, 2018
13. Blumfield E, Swenson DW, Iyer RS, Stanescu AL. Gadolinium-based contrast agents — review of recent literature on magnetic resonance imaging signal intensity changes and tissue deposits, with emphasis on pediatric patients. *Pediatr Radiol*. 2019;49(4):448-457. doi:10.1007/s00247-018-4304-8
14. American College of Radiology. ACR – SPR – SRU Practice Parameter for the Performance and Interpretation of Diagnostic Ultrasound Examinations. Revised 2023. (Resolution 32).
15. American College of Radiology. ACR – ACNM – SNMMI – SPR Practice Parameter for Performing FDG-PET/CT in Oncology. Amended 2023. (Resolution 2c, 2d).
16. American College of Radiology. ACR Practice Parameter for Performing and Interpreting Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI). Amended 2023. (Resolution 2c).
17. American College of Radiology. ACR – SPR Practice Parameter for Performing and Interpreting Diagnostic Computed Tomography (CT). Amended 2023. (Resolution 2c, 2d).
18. Lohrke J, Frenzel T, Endrikat J, et al. 25 Years of Contrast-Enhanced MRI: Developments, Current Challenges and Future Perspectives. *Adv Ther*. 2016;33(1):1-28. doi:10.1007/s12325-015-0275-4
19. Implementation Guide: Medicaid State Plan Eligibility Eligibility Groups – Mandatory Coverage Infants and Children under Age 19. Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services.
20. History and Physicals - Understanding the Requirements: What are the key elements organizations need to understand regarding History and Physical Requirements?. The Joint Commission. Reviewed July 12, 2022.


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

21. Mammarappallil JG, Rankine L, Wild JM, Driehuys B. New Developments in Imaging Idiopathic Pulmonary Fibrosis With Hyperpolarized Xenon Magnetic Resonance Imaging. *J Thorac Imaging*. 2019;34(2):136-150. doi:10.1097/rti.0000000000000392
22. Wang JM, Robertson SH, Wang Z, et al. Using hyperpolarized 129Xe MRI to quantify regional gas transfer in idiopathic pulmonary fibrosis. *Thorax*. 2017;73(1):21-28. doi:10.1136/thoraxjnl-2017-210070
23. Committee Opinion No. 723: Guidelines for Diagnostic Imaging During Pregnancy and Lactation [published correction appears in Obstet Gynecol. 2018 Sep;132(3):786. doi: 10.1097/AOG.0000000000002858.]. *Obstet Gynecol*. 2017;130(4):e210-e216. doi:10.1097/AOG.0000000000002355


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

Click Anywhere in the Header to Return to the Main Table of Contents



# Coding Issues (Preface-4)

Guideline

3D Rendering (Preface-4.1)
CT-, MR-, or Ultrasound-Guided Procedures (Preface-4.2)
Unlisted Procedures/Therapy Treatment Planning (Preface-4.3)
CPT® 76380 Limited or Follow-up CT (Preface-4.5)
SPECT/CT Imaging (Preface-4.6)
CPT® 76140 Interpretation of an Outside Study (Preface-4.7)
Quantitative MR Analysis (Preface-4.8)
HCPCS Codes (Preface-4.9)
References (Preface-4)


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

# 3D Rendering (Preface-4.1)

PRF.CD.0004.1.UOH
**v2.0.2026**

**CPT® 76376 and CPT® 76377**

- Both codes require concurrent supervision of the image post-processing 3D manipulation of the volumetric data set and image rendering.
  - Concurrent supervision is defined as active physician participation in and monitoring of the reconstruction process including design of the anatomic region that is to be reconstructed; determination of the tissue types and actual structures to be displayed (e.g., bone, organs, and vessels); determination of the images or cine loops that are to be archived; and, monitoring and adjustment of the 3D work product. The American College of Radiology (ACR) recommended that it is best to document the physician's supervision or participation in the 3D reconstruction of images.
- These two codes differ in the need for and use of an independent workstation for post-processing.
  - CPT® 76376 reports procedures not requiring image post-processing on an independent workstation.
  - CPT® 76377 reports procedures that require image post-processing on an independent workstation.
- These 3D rendering codes should not be used for 2D reformatting.
- Two-dimensional reconstruction (e.g., reformatting an axial scan into the coronal plane) is now included in all cross-sectional imaging base codes and is not separately reimbursable.
- The codes used to report 3D rendering for ultrasound and echocardiography are also used to report the 3D post processing work on CT, MRI, and other tomographic modalities.
- Providers may be required to obtain prior authorization on these 3D codes even if prior authorization is not required for the echocardiography and/or ultrasound procedure codes. It may appear that UnitedHealthcare pre-authorizes echocardiography and/or ultrasound when, in fact, it may only be the 3D code that needs the prior authorization.
- CPT® codes for 3D rendering should not be billed in conjunction with computer-aided detection (CAD), MRA, CTA, nuclear medicine SPECT studies, PET, PET/CT, stereotactic localization (CPT® 77011 or CPT® 70486 if used), Mammogram, MRI Breast, US Breast, CT Colonography (virtual colonoscopy), Cardiac MRI, Cardiac CT, or Coronary CTA studies.


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

- CPT® 76377 (3D rendering requiring image post-processing on an independent workstation) or CPT® 76376 (3D rendering not requiring image post-processing on an independent workstation) can be considered in the following clinical scenarios:
  - Bony conditions:
    - Evaluation of congenital skull abnormalities in newborns, infants, and toddlers (usually for pre-operative planning)
    - Complex fractures (comminuted or displaced)/dislocations of any joint (for pre-operative planning when conventional imaging is insufficient)
    - Spine fractures, pelvic/acetabulum fractures, intra-articular fractures (for pre-operative planning when conventional imaging is insufficient)
    - Pre-operative planning for other complex surgical cases
    - Complex facial fractures
  - Pre-operative planning for other complex surgical cases
  - Cerebral angiography
  - Pelvis conditions:
    - Uterine intra-cavitary lesion when initial US is equivocal: See **Abnormal Uterine Bleeding (AUB) (PV-2.1)** and **Leiomyoma/Uterine Fibroids (PV-12.1)** in the Pelvis Imaging Guidelines.
    - Hydrosalpinxes or peritoneal cysts when initial US is indeterminate: See **Complex Adnexal Masses (PV-5.3)** in the Pelvis Imaging Guidelines.
    - Lost IUD (inability to feel or see IUD string) with initial US: See **Intrauterine Device (PV-10.1)** in the Pelvis Imaging Guidelines.
    - Uterine anomalies with initial US: See **Uterine Anomalies (PV-14.1)** in the Pelvis Imaging Guidelines.
    - Infertility: See **Initial Infertility Evaluation, Female (PV-9.1)** in the Pelvis Imaging Guidelines.
  - Abdomen conditions:
    - CT Urogram: See **Hematuria and Hydronephrosis (AB-39)** in the Abdomen Imaging Guidelines.
    - MRCP: See **MR Cholangiopancreatography (MRCP) (AB-27)** in the Abdomen Imaging Guidelines.


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

# CT-, MR-, or Ultrasound-Guided Procedures (Preface-4.2)

PRF.CD.0004.2.A

**v2.0.2026**

- CT-, MR-, and Ultrasound-guidance procedure codes contain all of the imaging necessary to guide a needle or catheter. It is inappropriate to routinely bill a diagnostic procedure code in conjunction with a guidance procedure code.
- Imaging studies performed as part of a CT-, MR-, or Ultrasound-guided procedure should be reported using the CPT® codes in the following table:

**TABLE: Imaging Guidance Procedure Codes**

| CPT® | Description |
|---|---|
| **19085** | Biopsy, breast, with placement of breast localization device(s), when performed, and imaging of the biopsy specimen, when performed, percutaneous; first lesion, including MR guidance |
| **19086** | Biopsy, breast, with placement of breast localization device(s), when performed, and imaging of the biopsy specimen, when performed, percutaneous; each additional lesion, including MR guidance |
| **75989** | Imaging guidance for percutaneous drainage with placement of catheter (all modalities) |
| **76942** | Ultrasonic guidance for needle placement |
| **77011** | CT guidance for stereotactic localization |
| **77012** | CT guidance for needle placement |
| **77013** | CT guidance for, and monitoring of parenchymal tissue ablation |
| **77021** | MR guidance for needle placement |
| **77022** | MR guidance for, and monitoring of parenchymal tissue ablation |


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

| CPT® | Description |
|---|---|
| **C8001** | 3D anatomical segmentation imaging for preoperative planning, data preparation and transmission, obtained from previous diagnostic CT or MR examination of the same anatomy |

### CPT® 19085 and CPT® 19086

- The proper way to bill an MRI-guided breast biopsy is CPT® 19085 (Biopsy, breast, with placement of breast localization device(s), when performed, and imaging of the biopsy specimen, when performed, percutaneous; first lesion, including MR guidance). Additional lesions should be billed using CPT® 19086.
  - **CPT® 77021** (MR guidance for needle placement) is not an appropriate code for a breast biopsy.

### CPT® 75989

- This code is used to report imaging guidance for a percutaneous drainage procedure in which a catheter is left in place.
- This code can be used to report whether the drainage catheter is placed under fluoroscopy, Ultrasound-, CT-, or MR-guidance modality.

### CPT® 77011

- A stereotactic CT localization scan is frequently obtained prior to sinus surgery. The dataset is then loaded into the navigational workstation in the operating room for use during the surgical procedure. The information provides exact positioning of surgical instruments with regard to the individual's 3D CT images.
- In most cases, the pre-operative CT is a technical-only service that does not require interpretation by a radiologist.
  - The imaging facility should report CPT® 77011 when performing a scan not requiring interpretation by a radiologist.
  - If a diagnostic scan is performed and interpreted by a radiologist, the appropriate diagnostic CT code (e.g., CPT® 70486) should be used.
  - It is not appropriate to report both CPT® 70486 and CPT® 77011 for the same CT stereotactic localization imaging session.
  - 3D Rendering (CPT® 76376 or CPT® 76377) should not be reported in conjunction with CPT® 77011 (or CPT® 70486 if used). The procedure inherently generates a 3D dataset.

### CPT® 77012 (CT) and CPT® 77021 (MR)


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

- These codes are used to report imaging guidance for needle placement during biopsy, aspiration, and other percutaneous procedures.
- They represent the radiological supervision and interpretation of the procedure and are often billed in conjunction with surgical procedure codes.
  - For example, CPT® 77012 is reported when CT guidance is used to place the needle for a conventional arthrogram.
  - Only codes representing percutaneous surgical procedures should be billed with CPT® 77012 and CPT® 77021. It is inappropriate to use with surgical codes for open, excisional, or incisional procedures.
  - **CPT® 77021** (MR guidance for needle placement) is not an appropriate code for breast or prostate biopsy.
    - CPT® 19085 would be appropriate for the first breast biopsy site and CPT® 19086 would be appropriate for additional concurrent biopsies.

**CPT® 77013 (CT) and CPT® 77022 (MR)**

- These codes include the initial guidance to direct a needle electrode to the tumor(s), monitoring for needle electrode repositioning within the lesion, and as necessary for multiple ablations to coagulate the lesion and confirmation of satisfactory coagulative necrosis of the lesion(s) and comparison to pre-ablation images.
  - **NOTE:** CPT® 77013 should only be used for non-bone ablation procedures.
    - CPT® 20982 includes CT guidance for bone tumor ablations.
  - Only codes representing percutaneous surgical procedures should be billed with CPT® 77013 and CPT® 77022. It is inappropriate to use with surgical codes for open, excisional, or incisional procedures.
- CPT® 77012 and CPT® 77021 (as well as guidance codes CPT® 76942 [US], and CPT® 77002 - CPT® 77003 [fluoroscopy]) describe radiologic guidance by different modalities.
  - Only one unit of any of these codes should be reported per individual encounter (date of service). The unit of service is considered to be the individual encounter, not the number of lesions, aspirations, biopsies, injections, or localizations.


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

# Unlisted Procedures/Therapy Treatment Planning (Preface-4.3)

PRF.CD.0004.3.UOH
**v2.0.2026**

## Unlisted Procedures

| CPT ® | Description |
|---|---|
| **76497** | Unlisted CT procedure (e.g., diagnostic or interventional) |
| **76498** | Unlisted MR procedure (e.g., diagnostic or interventional) |
| **78999** | Unlisted procedure, diagnostic nuclear medicine |

- For general information related to unlisted procedures, please refer to **Management of Unlisted Codes**.
- These unlisted codes should be reported whenever a diagnostic or interventional CT or MR study is performed in which an appropriate anatomic site-specific code is not available.
  - A Category III code that describes the procedure performed must be reported rather than an unlisted code if one is available.
- CPT® 76497 or CPT® 76498 (Unlisted CT or MRI procedure) is medically necessary in the following clinical scenarios:
  - Studies done for navigation and planning for neurosurgical procedures (i.e., Stealth or Brain Lab Imaging)
  - Custom joint arthroplasty planning (not as an alternative recommendation): See **Osteoarthritis (MS-12.1)** in the Musculoskeletal Imaging Guidelines.
  - Any procedure/surgical planning if thinner cuts or different positional acquisition (than those on the completed diagnostic study) are needed. These could include navigational bronchoscopy: See **Navigational Bronchoscopy and Biopsy (CH-1.7)** in the Chest Imaging Guidelines.

## Therapy Treatment Planning

- Radiation Therapy Treatment Planning: See **Unlisted Procedure Codes in Oncology (ONC-1.5)** in the Oncology Imaging Guidelines.


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

Click Anywhere in the Header to Return to the Main Table of Contents



# CPT® 76380 Limited or Follow-up CT (Preface-4.5)

**PRF.CD.0004.5.UOH**

**v2.0.2026**

- CPT® 76380 describes a limited or follow-up CT scan. The code is used to report any CT scan, for any given area of the body, in which the work of a full diagnostic code is not performed.
- Common examples include, but are not limited to, the following:
  - Limited sinus CT imaging protocol
  - Limited or follow-up slices through a known pulmonary nodule
  - Limited slices to assess a non-healing fracture (such as the clavicle)
- Limited CT (CPT® 76380) is not medically necessary for treatment planning purposes. See **Unlisted Procedure Codes in Oncology (ONC-1.5)** in the Oncology Imaging Guidelines.
- It is inappropriate to report CPT® 76380, in conjunction with other diagnostic CT codes, to cover 'extra slices' in certain imaging protocols.
  - There is no specific number of sequences or slices defined in any CT CPT® code definition.
  - The AMA, in *CPT® 2019*, does not describe nor assign any minimum or maximum number of sequences or slices for any CT study.
    - A few additional slices or sequences are not uncommon.
    - CT imaging protocols are often influenced by the individual's clinical situation. Sometimes the protocols require more time and sometimes less.


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

# SPECT/CT Imaging (Preface-4.6)

PRF.CD.0004.6.A

**v2.0.2026**

- SPECT/CT involves SPECT (Single Photon Emission Computed Tomography) nuclear medicine imaging and CT for optimizing location, accuracy, and attenuation correction and combines functional and anatomic information.
  - Common studies using this modality include $^{123}$I- or $^{131}$I-Metaiodobenzylguanidine (MIBG) and octreotide scintigraphy for neuroendocrine tumors.
- Hybrid Nuclear/CT scan can be reported as CPT® 78830 (single area and single day), CPT® 78831 (2 or more days), or CPT® 78832 (2 areas with one day and 2-day study).
- CPT® 78072 became effective January 1, 2013 for SPECT/CT parathyroid nuclear imaging.


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

# CPT® 76140 Interpretation of an Outside Study (Preface-4.7)

**PRF.CD.0004.7.UOH**

**v2.0.2026**

- It is inappropriate to use diagnostic imaging codes for interpretation of a previously performed exam that was completed at another facility.
  - If the outside exam is being used for comparison with a current exam, the diagnostic code for the current examination includes comparison to the prior study.
  - CPT® 76140 is the appropriate code to use for an exam which was completed elsewhere and a secondary interpretation of the images is requested.


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

Click Anywhere in the Header to Return to the Main Table of Contents



# Quantitative MR Analysis (Preface-4.8)

**PRF.CD.0004.8.A**

**v2.0.2026**

- Category III CPT® codes for quantitative analysis of multiparametric-MR (mp-MRI) data with and without an associated diagnostic MRI have been established. Quantitative mp-MRI uses software to analyze tissue physiology of visceral organs and other anatomic structures non-invasively.
- For criteria associated with these types of studies, please see the condition-specific guidelines.


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

# HCPCS Codes (Preface-4.9)

PRF.CD.0004.9.UOH

**v2.0.2026**

- Healthcare Common Procedure Coding System (HCPCS) codes are utilized by some hospitals in favor of the typical Level-III CPT® codes. These codes are typically 4 digits preceded by a C or S.
  - Many of these codes have similar code descriptions to Level-III CPT® codes (i.e., C8931 – MRA with dye, Spinal Canal; and, CPT® 72159 – MRA Spinal Canal).
  - If cases are submitted with HCPCS codes with similar code descriptions to the typical Level-III CPT® codes, those procedures should be managed in the same manner as the typical CPT® codes.
  - HCPCS code management is discussed further in the applicable guideline sections.
- Requests for many Healthcare Common Procedure Coding System (HCPCS) codes, including non-specific codes such as S8042 (Magnetic resonance imaging [MRI], low-field), should be redirected to a more appropriate and specific CPT® code. Exceptions are noted in the applicable guideline sections.


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

# References (Preface-4)

**v2.0.2026**

1. Intraoperative MRI. Brainlab.com. Published 2024.
2. Neves CA, Vaisbuch Y, Leuze C, et al. Application of holographic augmented reality for external approaches to the frontal sinus. *Int Forum Allergy Rhinol*. 2020;10(7):920-925. doi:10.1002/alr.22546
3. Chung CY, Alson MD, Duszak R, Degnan AJ. From imaging to reimbursement: what the pediatric radiologist needs to know about health care payers, documentation, coding and billing. *Pediatr Radiol*. 2018;48(7):904-914. doi:10.1007/s00247-018-4104-1
4. Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services. Healthcare Common Procedure Coding System (HCPCS). Cms.gov. Published 2025.


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

Click Anywhere in the Header to Return to the Main Table of Contents



# Whole-Body Imaging (Preface-5)

Guideline

Whole-Body CT Imaging (Preface-5.1)
Whole-Body MR Imaging (Preface-5.2)
PET/MRI (Preface-5.3)
References (Preface-5)


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

# Whole-Body CT Imaging (Preface-5.1)

**PRF.WB.0005.1.UOH**

**v2.0.2026**

- Whole-body CT or LifeScan (CT Brain, Chest, Abdomen, and Pelvis) for screening of asymptomatic individuals is not a covered benefit. The performance of whole-body screening CT examinations in healthy individuals does not meet any of the current validity criteria for screening studies and there is no clear documentation of benefit versus radiation risk.
- Whole-body low-dose skeletal CT is supported for oncologic staging in Multiple Myeloma. See **Multiple Myeloma and Plasmacytomas (ONC-25)** in the Oncology Imaging Guidelines.


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

# Whole-Body MR Imaging (Preface-5.2)

**PRF.WB.0005.2.A**

**v2.0.2026**

- Whole-body MRI (WBMRI) is, with the exception of select cancer predisposition syndromes and autoimmune conditions discussed below, generally not medically necessary at this time due to lack of standardization in imaging technique and lack of evidence that WBMRI improves outcome for any individual disease state.
  - While WBMRI has the benefit of whole-body imaging and lack of radiation exposure, substantial variation still exists in the number of images, type of sequences (STIR vs. diffusion weighting, for example), and contrast agent(s) used.
- Coding considerations:
  - There are no established CPT® or HCPCS codes for reporting WBMRI.
  - WBMRI is at present only reportable using CPT® 76498. All other methods of reporting whole-body MRI are inappropriate including the following:
    - Separate diagnostic MRI codes for multiple individual body parts
    - MRI Bone Marrow Supply (CPT® 77084)
- Disease-specific considerations:
  - Cancer screening:
    - Interval WBMRI is recommended for cancer screening in individuals with select cancer predisposition syndromes. Otherwise, WBMRI has not been shown to improve outcomes for cancer screening.
      - For additional information, see **Li-Fraumeni Syndrome (LFS) (PEDONC-2.2)**, **Neurofibromatosis 1 and 2 (NF1 and NF2) (PEDONC-2.3)**, **Rhabdoid Tumor Predisposition Syndrome (PEDONC-2.11)**, **Hereditary Paraganglioma-Pheochromocytoma (HPP) Syndromes (PEDONC-2.13)**, **Constitutional Mismatch Repair Deficiency (CMMRD or Turcot Syndrome) (PEDONC-2.15)**, **Infantile Myofibromatosis (PEDONC-2.18)**, or **Bloom Syndrome (PEDONC-2.19)** in the Pediatric and Special Populations Oncology Imaging Guidelines.
  - Cancer staging and restaging:
    - Whole-body MRI has limited indications in staging and restaging of multiple myeloma. See **Multiple Myeloma and Plasmacytomas (ONC-25)** in the Oncology Imaging Guidelines for additional details.
    - Evidence has not been published establishing WBMRI as a standard evaluation for any other type of cancer.
  - Autoimmune disease:
    - WBMRI can be approved in some situations for individuals with chronic recurrent multifocal osteomyelitis.


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

- For additional information, see **Chronic Recurrent Multifocal Osteomyelitis (PEDMS-10.2)** in the Pediatric Musculoskeletal Imaging Guidelines.


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

# PET/MRI (Preface-5.3)

**PRF.WB.0005.3.A**

**v2.0.2026**

- PET/MRI is generally not medically necessary for a vast majority of oncologic and neurologic conditions due to lack of standardization in imaging technique and interpretation. However, it is medically necessary in select circumstances when the following criteria are met:
  - The individual meets condition-specific guidelines for PET/MRI OR
  - The individual meets ALL of the following:
    - The individual meets guideline criteria for PET/CT, **AND**
    - PET/CT is not available at the treating institution, **AND**
    - The provider requests PET/MRI in lieu of PET/CT
- When the above criteria are met, PET/MRI is reported using the code combination of PET Whole-Body (CPT® 78813) and MRI Unlisted (CPT® 76498). All other methods of reporting PET/MRI are inappropriate.
  - When clinically appropriate, diagnostic MRI codes can be medically necessary at the same time as the PET/MRI code combination.
- For more information, please see the appropriate condition-based guideline.


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

# References (Preface-5)

**v2.0.2026**

1. Bojadzieva J, Amini B, Day SF, et al. Whole body magnetic resonance imaging (WB-MRI) and brain MRI baseline surveillance in TP53 germline mutation carriers: experience from the Li-Fraumeni Syndrome Education and Early Detection (LEAD) clinic. *Fam Cancer.* 2018;17(2):287-294. doi:10.1007/s10689-017-0034-6
2. Li J, Zhou H, Zhang X, Song F, Pang X, Wei Z. A two-way comparison of whole-body 18FDG PET-CT and whole-body contrast-enhanced MRI for distant metastasis staging in patients with malignant tumors: a meta-analysis of 13 prospective studies. *Ann Palliat Med*. 2020;9(2):247-255. doi:10.21037/apm.2020.02.30
3. Zhang C, Liang Z, Liu W, Zeng X, Mo Y. Comparison of whole-body 18F-FDG PET/CT and PET/MRI for distant metastases in patients with malignant tumors: a meta-analysis. *BMC Cancer*. 2023;23(1):37. Published 2023 Jan 10. doi:10.1186/s12885-022-10493-8
4. Petralia G, Padhani AR. Whole-Body Magnetic Resonance Imaging in Oncology: Uses and Indications. *Magn Reson Imaging Clin N Am*. 2018;26(4):495-507. doi:10.1016/j.mric.2018.06.003
5. Sato TS, Watal P, Ferguson PJ. Imaging mimics of chronic recurrent multifocal osteomyelitis: avoiding pitfalls in a diagnosis of exclusion. *Pediatr Radiol.* 2020;50(1):124-136. doi:10.1007/s00247-019-04510-5
6. Krout JC, Rees AB, Goldin AN, et al. Chronic Recurrent Multifocal Osteomyelitis: A Review of the Noninfectious Inflammatory Bone Disease and Lessons for More Timely Diagnosis. *Orthopedics*. 2023;46(3):e149-e155. doi:10.3928/01477447-20220719-08
7. National Comprehensive Cancer Network® (NCCN®). NCCN Clinical Practice Guidelines in Oncology (NCCN Guidelines®): Genetic/Familial High-Risk Assessment: Breast, Ovarian, Pancreatic, and Prostate. Version 2.2026. October 10 10, 2025. Referenced with permission from the NCCN Clinical Practice Guidelines in Oncology (NCCN Guidelines®) for Genetic/Familial High-Risk Assessment: Breast, Ovarian, Pancreatic, and Prostate V2.2026. ©2025 National Comprehensive Cancer Network, Inc. All rights reserved. The NCCN Guidelines® and illustrations herein may not be reproduced in any form for any purpose without the express written permission of the NCCN. To view the most recent and complete version of the NCCN Guidelines®, go online to NCCN.org.
8. National Comprehensive Cancer Network® (NCCN®). NCCN Clinical Practice Guidelines in Oncology (NCCN Guidelines®): Multiple Myeloma. Version 4.2026 - November 26, 2025. Referenced with permission from the NCCN Clinical Practice Guidelines in Oncology (NCCN Guidelines®) for Multiple Myeloma V4.2026. ©2024 National Comprehensive Cancer Network, Inc. All rights reserved. The NCCN Guidelines® and illustrations herein may not be reproduced in any form for any purpose without the express written permission of the NCCN. To view the most recent and complete version of the NCCN Guidelines®, go online to NCCN.org.


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

Click Anywhere in the Header to Return to the Main Table of Contents



# References (Preface-6)

Guideline

References (Preface-6.1)


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

# References (Preface-6.1)

**PRF.RF.0006.1.A**

**v2.0.2026**

- Complete reference citations for the journal articles are embedded within the body of the guidelines and/or may be found on the Reference pages at the end of some guideline sections.


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

Click Anywhere in the Header to Return to the Main Table of Contents



# General Guidelines (ONC-1)

Guideline

Abbreviations for Oncology Imaging Guidelines
General Guidelines (ONC-1.0)
Key Principles (ONC-1.1)
Nuclear Medicine (NM) Imaging in Oncology (ONC-1.3)
PET Imaging in Oncology (ONC-1.4)
Unlisted Procedure Codes in Oncology (ONC-1.5)
Predisposition Syndromes (ONC-1.6)
References (ONC-1)


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

# Abbreviations for Oncology Imaging Guidelines

**ON.GG.Abbreviations.A**
**v2.0.2026**

| Abbreviations for Oncology Imaging Guidelines | |
|---|---|
| ACTH | adrenocorticotropic hormone |
| AFP | alpha-fetoprotein |
| ALKP | alkaline phosphatase |
| AP | anteroposterior |
| betaHCG | beta human chorionic gonadotropin |
| CA 125 | cancer antigen 125 test |
| CA 19-9 | cancer antigen 19-9 |
| CA 15-3 | cancer antigen 15-3 |
| CA 27-29 | cancer antigen 27-29 |
| CBC | complete blood count |
| CEA | carcinoembryonic antigen |
| CNS | central nervous system |
| CR | complete response |
| CTA | computed tomography angiography |
| DCIS | ductal carcinoma in situ |
| DLBCL | diffuse large B cell lymphomas |
| DRE | digital rectal exam |
| EGD | esophagogastroduodenoscopy |
| ENT | ear, nose, throat |
| EOT | end of therapy |
| ERCP | endoscopic retrograde cholangiopancreatography |
| ESR | erythrocyte sedimentation rate |


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

| Abbreviations for Oncology Imaging Guidelines | |
|---|---|
| EUA | exam under anesthesia |
| EUS | endoscopic ultrasound |
| FDG | fluorodeoxyglucose |
| FNA | fine needle aspiration |
| FUO | fever of unknown origin |
| GE | gastroesophageal |
| GI | gastrointestinal |
| GU | genitourinary |
| GTR | gross total resection |
| HG | high-grade |
| HIV | human immunodeficiency disease |
| HRPC | hormone refractory prostate cancer |
| hypermet | hypermetabolic |
| IFRT | involved field radiation therapy |
| inv | invasive |
| LAR | low anterior resection |
| LCIS | lobular carcinoma in situ |
| LDH | lactate dehydrogenase |
| LFT | liver function tests |
| LND | lymph node dissection |
| LVI | lymphovascular invasion |
| MALT | mucosa associated lymphoid tissue |
| maint | maintenance |
| MEN | multiple endocrine neoplasia |
| MG | myasthenia gravis |
| MGUS | monoclonal gammopathy of unknown significance |
| MIBG | I-123 metaiodobenzylguanidine scintigraphy |


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

| Abbreviations for Oncology Imaging Guidelines | |
|---|---|
| MRA | magnetic resonance angiography |
| MRCP | magnetic resonance cholangiopancreatography |
| MRI | magnetic resonance imaging |
| MUGA | 'multiple gated acquisition' cardiac nuclear scan |
| MWA | microwave ablation |
| NaF | sodium fluoride |
| NET | neuroendocrine tumor |
| NCCN® | National Comprehensive Cancer Network |
| NHL | non-Hodgkin's lymphoma |
| NPC | nasopharyngeal carcinoma |
| NSABP | National Surgical Adjuvant Breast and Bowel Project |
| NSAIDS | nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs |
| NSCLC | non-small cell lung cancer |
| NSGCT | non-seminomatous germ cell tumor |
| PA | posteroanterior |
| PCI | prophylactic cranial irradiation |
| PET | positron emission tomography |
| COG | Children's Oncology Group |
| PSA | prostate specific antigen |
| RFA | radiofrequency ablation |
| RPLND | retroperitoneal lymph node dissection |
| SqCCa | squamous cell carcinoma |
| SCLC | small cell lung cancer |
| SIADH | syndrome of inappropriate secretion of antidiuretic hormone |
| TCC | transitional cell carcinoma |
| TLH | total laparoscopic hysterectomy |
| TNM | tumor node metastasis staging system |


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

| Abbreviations for Oncology Imaging Guidelines | |
|---|---|
| TSH | thyroid-stimulating hormone |
| TURBT | trans-urethral resection of bladder tumor |
| VIPoma | vasoactive intestinal polypeptide |
| WLE | wide local incision |
| WB-MRI | whole body MRI |
| WM | Waldenstrom's macroglobulinemia |
| WBXRT | whole brain radiation therapy |


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

# General Guidelines (ONC-1.0)

**ON.GG.0001.0.A**

**v2.0.2026**

- A relevant clinical evaluation or meaningful contact (telephone call, electronic mail or messaging) should be performed prior to considering advanced imaging, unless the individual is undergoing guideline-supported scheduled off therapy surveillance evaluation or cancer screening. The clinical evaluation may include a relevant history and physical examination, including biopsy, appropriate laboratory studies, and results of non-advanced or advanced imaging modalities.
- Unless otherwise stated in the disease-specific guideline, a histological confirmation of malignancy (or recurrence) and the stage of disease is required to perform a medical necessity review of the requested imaging.
- Generally, the studies listed in the disease-specific sections reflect the studies supported by current literature and research for that condition. If a study is not listed, then it is not medically necessary.
- Routine imaging of brain, spine, neck, chest, abdomen, pelvis, bones, or other body areas is not medically necessary except where explicitly stated in a diagnosis-specific guideline section, or if one of the following applies:
  - Known prior disease involving the requested body area
  - New or worsening symptoms or physical exam findings involving the requested body area (including non-specific findings such as ascites or pleural effusion)
  - New finding on basic imaging study such as plain x-ray or ultrasound
  - New finding on adjacent body area CT/MRI study (i.e., pleural effusion observed on CT Abdomen)
- Unless otherwise stated in the disease-specific guideline, advanced imaging of asymptomatic individuals is not routinely medically necessary without signs or symptoms of systemic involvement of cancer.
- Repeat imaging studies are not generally medically necessary unless there is evidence of disease progression, recurrence of disease, and/or the repeat imaging will affect an individual's clinical management.
- Conventional imaging performed prior to diagnosis should not be repeated unless there is a delay of at least 6 weeks since previous imaging and treatment initiation or there are new or significantly worsening clinical signs or symptoms.
- If an individual is late for a specified imaging, the imaging may be approved late. However, the interval between the late imaging and the subsequent imaging must adhere to the interval in the disease-specific guidelines.


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

### Phases of Oncology Imaging and General Phase-Related Considerations

The following provides general clarity regarding the categories used to describe the phases of imaging throughout these guidelines.

- Screening
  - Imaging requested for individuals at increased risk for a particular cancer in the absence of known clinical signs or symptoms
- Suspected diagnosis
  - Imaging requested to evaluate a suspicion of cancer, prior to histological confirmation
- Initial work-up and staging
  - Imaging requested after biopsy confirmation and prior to starting specific treatment
- Treatment response or interim restaging
  - Imaging performed during active treatment with chemotherapy, targeted therapy, immunotherapy, radiation therapy, or endocrine therapy. Can be curative or non-curative.
- Restaging of locally treated lesions
  - Imaging performed to evaluate response to primary or metastatic lesion(s) following lesion directed therapy (e.g., cryotherapy, ablation, radioembolization, chemoembolization, radiation therapy).
- Restaging/suspected recurrence
  - Imaging requested when there is suspicion for progression or recurrence of known cancer based on clinical signs or symptoms, laboratory tests, or basic imaging studies.
- Surveillance
  - Imaging performed in individuals who are asymptomatic or have chronic stable symptoms, have no clinical suspicion of change in disease status, and are not receiving active anti-tumor treatment or are receiving maintenance treatment.

The table below provides descriptions of treatment phases, their definitions, and general timeframes.

| Treatment Phase | Phase Definition | Imaging Timeframe |
|---|---|---|
| After definitive local therapy of primary tumor | Treatment intended to be curative typically using a combination of surgery, radiation therapy, and chemotherapy | Follow surveillance guidelines |


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

| Treatment Phase | Phase Definition | Imaging Timeframe |
|---|---|---|
| During/after neoadjuvant chemotherapy | Treatment given prior to definitive intended curative therapy (usually surgery and/or radiation therapy based), to shrink the cancer to make the definitive curative therapy more effective | Follow initial work-up/staging or restaging/recurrence guidelines |
| During adjuvant chemotherapy | Adjuvant is given after the primary cancer treatment (primary treatment is usually surgery or radiation) with the goal of destroying any remaining cancer cells that cannot be visualized but may still be present, to reduce the risk of recurrence and improve cure/ survival rates beyond initial curative treatments (e.g., colorectal, breast). | Follow surveillance guidelines |
| After ablative therapy | Minimally invasive medical procedure that destroys abnormal tissue (cancer cells) using heat, cold or other methods, often used as an alternative to surgery or in conjunction with other treatments. Ablative therapy can be considered curative or palliative depending on numerous factors such as other sites of disease, cancer subtype, and ablative technique used. | See disease-specific guidelines |


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

| Treatment Phase | Phase Definition | Imaging Timeframe |
|---|---|---|
| Chemotherapy or immunotherapy for active disease | • Measurable disease: Cancerous lesions that can be accurately measured in size to allow for assessment of tumor response. Solid lesions need to be 1cm or greater while lymph nodes should be 1.5cm or greater (short axis)<br>• Non-measurable active disease: Lesions that cannot be accurately measured based on size (see above) in addition to lesions such as bone, pleural effusions, ascites, and carcinomatosis.<br>• Active disease: Cancer thought to be "active" whether it is measurable or non-measurable. For lesions that are not clear (i.e., due to small size, chronically stable, not proven to be malignant), provider discretion is to be used to include modality. | Every 2 cycles (generally every 6 to 8 weeks) |
| During endocrine/ hormonal therapy alone for active disease | E.g., tamoxifen, letrozole, anastrozole, exemestane | Every 3 months (12 weeks) |
| Active disease on maintenance therapy | Maintenance therapy is given to help keep cancer from coming back after it has shrunk or disappeared following initial therapy and may be given for a finite or indefinite timeframe. | See disease-specific guidelines |
| Active metastatic disease being monitored off therapy | | Every 3 months (12 weeks) |


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

| Treatment Phase | Phase Definition | Imaging Timeframe |
|---|---|---|
| Metastatic disease in complete response on or off therapy | Defined as all measurable and non-measurable disease has disappeared (to include normalized tumor markers if applicable) and rarely translates into cure but remission can be sustained for years | • Once complete remission (CR) has been achieved, frequency of imaging should be no sooner than every 3 months and continue for up to 5 years from the time of CR<br>• Follow surveillance guidelines |
| Metastatic disease in complete response due to definitive treatment (surgery, XRT, ablation) agnostic to histology | Defined as all measurable disease has been definitively removed/treated but individual is not considered cured. | See disease-specific guideline; if not in guideline, determined on a case-by-case basis. |

- Advanced imaging is not medically necessary for evaluation of in situ or non-invasive cancers or cancer surveillance after complete surgical removal of primary disease unless otherwise stated in the cancer-specific guidelines.
- Advanced imaging is not medically necessary for monitoring disease in individuals who choose to not receive standard oncologic therapy but may be receiving alternative therapies or palliative care and/or hospice. All advanced imaging medically necessary for initial staging of the specific cancer type can be approved once when the individual is considering initiation of a standard therapeutic approach (surgery, chemotherapy, or radiation therapy).
- Brain imaging is performed for signs or symptoms of brain disease
  - MRI Brain without and with contrast (CPT® 70553) is the recommended study for evaluation of suspected or known brain metastases. If a non-contrast CT head shows suspicious lesion, MRI Brain is medically necessary to further characterize the lesion.
  - CT without and with contrast (CPT® 70470) is medically necessary when MRI is contraindicated or not available, or if there is skull bone involvement.
  - Certain malignancies including, but not limited to, melanoma and lung cancer have indications for brain imaging for asymptomatic individuals.


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

  - If stage IV disease is demonstrated elsewhere or if systemic disease progression is noted, refer to disease specific guidelines.
  - Initiation of angiogenesis therapy is not an indication for advanced imaging of the brain in asymptomatic individuals (Avastin/Bevacizumab; <3% risk of bleeding and <1% risk of serious bleeding).
- Bone Scan:
  - Primarily used for evaluation of bone metastases in individuals with solid malignancies.
  - Bone scan MAY be medically necessary in individuals with history of malignancy, including bone pain, rising tumor markers, elevated alkaline phosphatase or in individuals with primary bone tumor.
  - For evaluation of suspected or known bony metastases, CPT® 78306 (Nuclear bone scan whole body), is medically necessary.
  - Radiopharmaceutical Localization scan SPECT (CPT® 78803 or CPT® 78831) or SPECT/CT (CPT® 78830 or CPT® 78832) is medically necessary as an add-on test for further evaluation of a specific area of interest.
  - CPT® codes 78300 (Nuclear bone scan limited), 78305 (Nuclear bone scan multiple areas) or 78315 do not have any indications in oncology nuclear medicine imaging.
- Bone scan supplemented by plain x-rays are the initial imaging modalities for suspected malignant bone pain. For specific imaging indications, see also:
  - **Nuclear Medicine (NM) Imaging in Oncology (ONC-1.3)**
  - **Bone (Non-Vertebral) Metastases (ONC-31.5)**
  - **Spinal/Vertebral Metastases (ONC-31.6)**
  - **Carcinoma of Unknown Primary Site (ONC-31.7)**
- Advanced imaging used for radiation therapy treatment planning should not be authorized using any of the diagnostic imaging codes for CT, MRI, or PET.
  - Advanced imaging performed in support of radiation therapy treatment planning should be reported with CPT® 76498 for Unlisted MRI or CPT® 76497 for Unlisted CT scan.
- Delay PET/CT for at least 12 weeks after completion of radiation treatment, unless required sooner for imminent surgical resection.
- PET/CT may be medically necessary prior to biopsy in order to determine a more favorable site for biopsy when a prior biopsy was nondiagnostic or a relatively inaccessible site is contemplated which would require invasive surgical intervention for biopsy attempt.
- PET/CT is medically necessary if:
  - conventional imaging (CT, MRI or bone scan) reveals findings that are inconclusive or negative, with continued suspicion for recurrence


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

- Unless specified in diagnosis-specific guideline section, PET/CT Imaging is NOT medically necessary for:
  - infection, inflammation, trauma, post-operative healing, granulomatous disease, rheumatological conditions
  - concomitant use with separate diagnostic CT studies
  - conclusive evidence of distant or diffuse metastatic disease on recent conventional imaging studies
  - metastatic disease in the central nervous system (CNS)
  - lesions less than 8mm in size
  - follow up after localized therapy (e.g., radiofrequency ablation, embolization, stereotactic radiation, etc.)
  - rare malignancies, due to lack of available evidence regarding the diagnostic accuracy of PET in rare cancers
  - surveillance
    - Serial monitoring of individuals who are not currently receiving anti-tumor treatment or are receiving maintenance treatment
    - Serial monitoring of FDG avidity until resolution.
    - PET/CT avidity in a residual mass at the end of planned therapy is not an indication for PET/CT imaging during surveillance.
    - Residual mass that has not changed in size since the last conventional imaging does not justify PET imaging
- Unless otherwise specified for a specific cancer type, once PET has been documented to be negative for a given individual's cancer or all PET-avid disease has been surgically resected, PET is not medically necessary for continued disease monitoring or surveillance.
- PET/MRI is generally not medically necessary for a vast majority of oncologic conditions due to lack of standardization in imaging technique and interpretation. However, it may be approved in select circumstances when the following criteria are met:
  - The individual meets condition-specific guidelines for PET/MRI OR
  - The individual meets ALL of the following:
    - The individual meets guideline criteria for PET/CT, AND
    - PET/CT is not available at the treating institution, AND
    - The provider requests PET/MRI in lieu of PET/CT
  - When the above criteria are met, PET/MRI may be reported using the code combination of PET Whole-Body (CPT® 78813) and MRI Unlisted (CPT® 76498). All other methods of reporting PET/MRI are inappropriate.
    - When clinically appropriate, diagnostic MRI codes may be medically necessary at the same time as the PET/MRI code combination.


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

- The specific radiotracer planned to be used with PET/CT imaging is required to perform a medical necessity review. Indications for PET/CT imaging using non-FDG radiotracers are listed in diagnosis-specific guidelines.
  - Supported radiotracers:
    - $^{18}$F-FDG
    - $^{68}$Gallium DOTATATE (NETSPOT®) for low-grade neuroendocrine tumors and medullary thyroid cancer
    - $^{64}$Cu-DOTATATE (DETECTNET®) for low-grade neuroendocrine tumors
    - $^{68}$Ga-DOTA-TOC for low-grade neuroendocrine tumors
    - $^{11}$C Choline for prostate cancer
    - $^{18}$F-Fluciclovine (AXUMIN®) for prostate cancer
    - $^{68}$Ga PSMA-11 for prostate cancer
    - $^{18}$F Piflufolastat (Pylarify®) for prostate cancer
    - $^{68}$Ga Gozetotide (Illuccix®, Locametz®, and Gozellix®) for prostate cancer
    - $^{18}$F Flotufolastat (Posluma®) for prostate cancer
    - $^{18}$F Fluoroestradiol (Cerianna®) for breast cancer
    - $^{18}$F Na Fluoride PET bone scan for breast cancer and prostate cancer
  - Unsupported radiotracers:
    - PET/CT imaging using isotopes other than those specified above
- Octreotide scan:
  - Specific for low and intermediate grade neuroendocrine tumors which express specific cell surface somatostatin receptors. See cancer specific guidelines for recommended use.
  - One of the following codes may be approved when Octreotide scan is requested:
  - CPT® 78802 (Radiopharmaceutical localization of tumor whole-body single day study)
  - CPT® 78804 (Radiopharmaceutical localization of tumor whole-body two or more days)
  - In addition to one of the above CPT codes, CPT® 78803 (Radiopharmaceutical localization of tumor SPECT), SPECT CPT® 78831, or hybrid SPECT/CT (CPT® 78830 or 78832) may be approved as an add-on test for further evaluation of a specific area of interest.

**Clinical Trials**

- Similar to investigational and experimental studies, clinical trial imaging requests will be considered to determine whether they meet these evidence-based guidelines.
- Imaging studies which are inconsistent with established clinical standards, or are requested for data collection and not used in direct clinical management are not medically necessary.


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

## Health Equity Considerations

Health equity is the highest level of health for all individuals; health inequity is the avoidable difference in health status or distribution of health resources due to the social conditions in which individuals are born, grow, live, work, and age. Social determinants of health are the conditions in the environment that affect a wide range of health, functioning, and quality of life outcomes and risks. Examples include the following: safe housing, transportation, and neighborhoods; racism, discrimination, and violence; education, job opportunities, and income; access to nutritious foods and physical activity opportunities; access to clean air and water; and language and literacy skills.


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

# Key Principles (ONC-1.1)

**ON.GG.0001.1.A**
**v2.0.2026**

| AGE APPROPRIATE GUIDELINES | |
|---|---|
| **Age of Individual** | **Appropriate Imaging Guidelines** |
| ≥18 years old at initial diagnosis | • General Oncology Imaging Guidelines, except where directed otherwise by a specific guideline section |
| <18 years old at initial diagnosis | • Pediatric and Special Populations Oncology Imaging Guidelines, except where directed otherwise by a specific guideline section |
| 15 to 39 years old at initial diagnosis (defined as Adolescent and Young Adult (AYA) oncology individuals) | • When unique guidelines for a specific cancer type exist only in either General Oncology or Pediatric and Special Populations Oncology, AYA individuals should be imaged according to the guideline section for their specific cancer type, regardless of the individual's age<br>• When unique guidelines for a specific cancer type exist in both General Oncology and Pediatric and Special Populations Oncology, AYA individuals should be imaged according to the age rule in the previous bullet |

- Conventional Imaging (mostly CT, sometimes MRI or bone scan) of the affected area(s) drives much of initial and re-staging and surveillance. PET is not medically necessary for surveillance imaging unless specifically stated in the diagnosis-specific guideline sections.
- Brain imaging is performed for signs or symptoms of brain disease.
  - MRI Brain without and with contrast (CPT® 70553) is the preferred study for evaluation of suspected or known brain metastases.
  - MRI Brain without and with contrast (CPT® 70553) is medically necessary if a non-contrast CT Head shows suspicious lesion.
  - CT Head without and with contrast (CPT® 70470) is medically necessary when MRI is contraindicated or not available, or if there is skull bone involvement.
  - Initiation of angiogenesis therapy is not an indication for advanced imaging of the brain in asymptomatic individuals (Avastin/Bevacizumab; <3% risk of bleeding and <1% risk of serious bleeding).


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

- Individuals receiving cardiotoxic chemotherapy (such as doxorubicin, trastuzumab, pertuzumab, mitoxantrone, etc.) may undergo cardiac evaluation – at baseline and for monitoring while on active therapy.
  - See: **Oncologic Indications for Cancer Therapeutics-Related Cardiac Dysfunction (CTRCD) (CD-12.1)** in the Cardiology Imaging Guidelines
- CTA or MRA of a specific anatomic region is medically necessary when requested for surgical planning when there is suspected vascular proximity to proposed resection margin.
- Screening adults (≥18 years) with a diagnosis of Li-Fraumeni Syndrome (LFS) for malignancy with a Whole-Body MRI (CPT® 76498) is medically necessary on an annual basis. Annual Brain MRI (CPT® 70553) may be performed as part of Whole-Body MRI or as a separate exam. Due to lack of standardization of technique, interpretation, and availability of Whole-Body MRI, individuals with LFS are encouraged to participate in clinical trials.

**Use of Contrast**

- CT imaging should be performed with contrast for known or suspected body regions, unless contraindicated.
  - Shellfish allergy is not a contraindication to contrast. Individuals with known shellfish allergy do not have contrast reaction any more often than other atopic individuals or individuals with other food allergies.
  - For iodinated contrast dye allergy, either CT scans without contrast or MRI scans without and with contrast are medically necessary.
  - If CT scanning is medically necessary in an individual with known contrast allergy, CT with contrast may be considered to be safely performed following prednisone pre-medication over a 24-hour period prior to the study.
- For individuals with renal insufficiency which precludes contrast use, CT without contrast appropriate disease-specific areas is medically necessary. Further imaging (such as MRI) is medically necessary if non-contrast CT results are inconclusive.
- Severe renal insufficiency (i.e., an eGFR less than 30) is a contraindication for an MRI using a gadolinium-based contrast agent (GBCA) as well. In individuals with eGFR greater than 40, GBCA administration can be safely performed. GBCA administered to individuals with acute kidney injury or severe chronic kidney disease can result in a syndrome of nephrogenic systemic fibrosis (NSF), but GBCAs are not considered nephrotoxic at dosages approved for MRI.
- Gadolinium deposition has been found in individuals with normal renal function following the use of gadolinium based contrast agents (GBCAs).
  - The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) is investigating the risk of brain deposits following repeated use of GBCAs.
  - The FDA has noted that, “It is unknown whether these gadolinium deposits are harmful or can lead to adverse health effects.” and have recommended:


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

- To reduce the potential for gadolinium accumulation, health care professionals should consider limiting GBCA use to clinical circumstances in which the additional information provided by the contrast is necessary.
- Health care professionals are also urged to reassess the necessity of repetitive GBCA MRIs in established treatment protocols.

**Radiation Exposure**

- The use of MRI in place of CT scans to reduce risk of secondary malignancy from radiation exposure during CT is not supported by the peer-reviewed literature. Unless otherwise specified in the Guidelines, MRI in place of CT scans for this purpose alone is not medically necessary. In some instances (i.e., testicular cancer surveillance), MRI may be considered inferior to CT scans.


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

# Nuclear Medicine (NM) Imaging in Oncology (ONC-1.3)

**ON.GG.0001.3.A**

**v2.0.2026**

- This section does not apply to PET imaging. PET imaging considerations can be found in **PET Imaging in Oncology (ONC-1.4)**
- Bone Scan:
  - Primarily used for evaluation of bone metastases in individuals with solid malignancies.
  - Indications for bone scan in individuals with history of malignancy include – bone pain, rising tumor markers, elevated alkaline phosphatase or in individuals with primary bone tumor.
  - For evaluation of suspected or known bony metastases, CPT® 78306 (Nuclear bone scan whole-body), is medically necessary.
    - Radiopharmaceutical Localization scan SPECT (CPT® 78803 or CPT® 78831) or SPECT/CT (CPT® 78830 or CPT® 78832) is medically necessary as an add-on test for further evaluation of a specific area of interest or clinically suspected lesions with negative whole body bone scan or documented bone metastasis in the setting of inconclusive or negative findings.
  - CPT® codes 78300 (Nuclear bone scan limited), 78305 (Nuclear bone scan multiple areas) or 78315 do not have any indications in oncology nuclear medicine imaging.
- Octreotide scan:
  - Specific for low and intermediate grade neuroendocrine tumors which express specific cell surface somatostatin receptors. See cancer specific guidelines for recommended use.
  - One of the following codes may be approved when Octreotide scan is requested:
    - CPT® 78802 (Radiopharmaceutical localization of tumor whole-body single day study)
    - CPT® 78804 (Radiopharmaceutical localization of tumor whole-body two or more days)
  - In addition to one of the above CPT codes, CPT® 78803 (Radiopharmaceutical localization of tumor SPECT), SPECT CPT® 78831, or hybrid SPECT/CT (CPT® 78830 or 78832) may be approved as an add-on test for further evaluation of a specific area of interest.
- Bone marrow imaging:


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

  - This study is rarely performed for evaluation of the entire bone marrow in conditions like myeloproliferative disorders, sickle cell bone infarct or ischemia, avascular necrosis or myeloma.
  - The correct CPT code for this study is CPT® 78104 (Diagnostic Nuclear Medicine Procedures on the Hematopoietic, Reticuloendothelial and Lymphatic System).
- Brain imaging SPECT with Technetium-99m or thallium-201 (CPT® 78803 or CPT® 78830):
  - Immunocompromised individuals with mass lesion detected on CT or MRI for differentiation between lymphoma and infection
  - In distinguishing recurrent brain tumor from radiation necrosis
- Radiopharmaceutical localization of tumor or distribution of radiopharmaceutical agent(s):
  - CPT® 78800, CPT® 78801, CPT® 78802, CPT® 78804, CPT® 78803, CPT® 78831 (SPECT), or CPT® 78830 or CPT® 78832 (SPECT/CT)
  - for evaluation of fever of unknown origin and osteomyelitis
  - for suspected infections such as infected central lines, grafts or shunts
- Gallium Isotope Scan:
  - Radiopharmaceutical Localization of tumor (CPT® 78800, CPT® 78801, CPT® 78802, CPT® 78803, or CPT® 78804), SPECT CPT® 78831, or hybrid SPECT/CT CPT® 78830 or 78832
  - This may be rarely used in place of PET/CT scan when PET/CT scan not available and PET/CT is indicated by guidelines for lymphoma, sarcoma, melanoma or myeloma.


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

# PET Imaging in Oncology (ONC-1.4)

**ON.GG.0001.4.A**
**v2.0.2026**

- CPT codes:
  - PET imaging in oncology should use PET/CT fusion (CPT® 78815 or CPT® 78816). Unbundling PET/CT imaging into separate PET and diagnostic CT codes is otherwise not supported.
  - The decision whether to use skull base to mid-femur (“eyes to thighs”) procedure code for PET (CPT® 78812 or CPT® 78815) or whole-body PET (CPT® 78813 or CPT® 78816) is addressed in the diagnosis-specific guideline sections.
  - ”Limited area” protocol is done infrequently, but may be considered, and is reported with PET (CPT® 78811) or for PET/CT (CPT® 78814).
- Radiotracers:
  - Unless specified otherwise, the term “PET” refers to $^{18}$F-FDG-PET and PET/CT fusion studies.
  - Indications for PET/CT imaging using non-FDG radiotracers are listed in diagnosis-specific guidelines. The indications may be as follows:
- Supported radiotracers:
  - $^{18}$F-FDG
  - $^{68}$Gallium DOTATATE (NETSPOT®) for low-grade neuroendocrine tumors and medullary thyroid cancer
  - $^{64}$Cu-DOTATATE (DETECTNET®) for low-grade neuroendocrine tumors
  - $^{68}$Ga-DOTA-TOC for low-grade neuroendocrine tumors
  - $^{11}$C Choline for prostate cancer
  - $^{18}$F-Fluciclovine (AXUMIN®) for prostate cancer
  - $^{68}$Ga PSMA-11 for prostate cancer
  - $^{18}$F Piflufolastat (Pylarify®) for prostate cancer
  - $^{68}$Ga Gozetotide (Illuccix®, Locametz®, and Gozellix®) for prostate cancer
  - $^{18}$F Flotufolastat (Posluma®) for prostate cancer
  - $^{18}$F Fluoroestradiol (Cerianna®) for breast cancer
  - $^{18}$F Na Fluoride PET bone scan for breast cancer and prostate cancer
- Unsupported radiotracers:
  - PET/CT imaging using isotopes other than those specified above


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

| CPT/ HCPCS Code | Code Description | Brand or common name | Guideline Section and Cancer Type |
|---|---|---|---|
| A9552 | $^{18}$F Fluoro deoxyglucose | FDG | Various guideline sections where PET is indicated |
| A9580 | $^{18}$F Sodium fluoride | N/A | ONC-11: Breast Cancer, ONC-19: Prostate Cancer |
| A9587 | $^{68}$Ga-68 Dotatate | NETSPOT® | ONC-15: Low-grade neuroendocrine tumors, ONC-6: Medullary thyroid cancer |
| A9515 | $^{11}$C Choline | N/A | ONC-19, Prostate Cancer |
| A9588 | $^{18}$F-Fluciclovine | AXUMIN® | ONC-19, Prostate Cancer |
| A9593<br>A9594 | $^{68}$Ga PSMA-11 | N/A | ONC-19, Prostate Cancer |
| A9595 | $^{18}$F Piflufolastat | Pylarify® | ONC-19, Prostate Cancer |
| A9596 | $^{68}$Ga Gozetotide | Illuccix® | ONC-19, Prostate Cancer |
| A9800 | $^{68}$Ga Gozetotide | Locametz® | ONC-19, Prostate Cancer |
| A9616 | $^{68}$Ga Gozetitide | Gozellix® | ONC-19, Prostate Cancer |
| A9608 | $^{18}$F Flotufolastat | Posluma® | ONC-19, Prostate Cancer |
| A9591 | $^{18}$F Fluoroestradiol | Cerianna® | ONC-11, Breast Cancer |
| A9592 | $^{64}$Cu Copper dotatate | Detectnet® | ONC-15, Low-grade neuroendocrine tumors |
| C9067 | $^{68}$Ga Gallium-DOTA-TOC | N/A | ONC-15, Low-grade neuroendocrine tumors |

- Unless specified in diagnosis-specific guideline section, PET/CT Imaging is NOT medically necessary for:


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

- infection, inflammation, trauma, post-operative healing, granulomatous disease, rheumatological conditions
- concomitant use with separate diagnostic CT studies
- conclusive evidence of distant or diffuse metastatic disease on recent conventional imaging studies
- metastatic disease in the central nervous system (CNS)
- lesions less than 8mm in size
- follow up after localized therapy (i.e., radiofrequency ablation, embolization, stereotactic radiation, etc.)
- rare malignancies, due to lack of available evidence regarding the diagnostic accuracy of PET in rare cancers
- surveillance:
  - Serial monitoring of individuals who are not currently receiving anti-tumor treatment or are receiving maintenance treatment
  - Serial monitoring of FDG avidity until resolution.
  - PET/CT avidity in a residual mass at the end of planned therapy is not an indication for PET/CT imaging during surveillance.
  - Residual mass that has not changed in size since the last conventional imaging does not justify PET imaging
- Unless otherwise specified for a specific cancer type, once PET has been documented to be negative for a given individual's cancer or all PET-avid disease has been surgically resected, PET should not be used for continued disease monitoring or surveillance.

- PET/CT is medically necessary if:
  - Conventional imaging (CT, MRI or bone scan) reveals findings that are inconclusive or negative, with continued suspicion for recurrence.
  - The individual is undergoing salvage treatment for a recurrent solid tumor with residual measurable disease on conventional imaging and confirmed repeat negative PET imaging will allow the individual to transition from active treatment to surveillance.
  - PET/CT may be considered prior to biopsy in order to determine a more favorable site for biopsy when a prior biopsy was nondiagnostic or a relatively inaccessible site is contemplated which would require invasive surgical intervention for biopsy attempt.
- PET/CT for rare malignancies is not covered by these guidelines due to lack of available evidence regarding diagnostic accuracy of PET/CT in the majority of rare cancers. Conventional imaging studies should be used for initial staging and treatment response for these diagnoses. PET/CT is medically necessary if all of the following apply:


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

  - Conventional imaging (CT, MRI or bone scan) reveals equivocal or suspicious findings.
  - No other specific metabolic imaging (MIBG, octreotide, technetium, etc.) is appropriate for the disease type.
  - The submitted clinical information describes a specific decision regarding the individual's care that will be made based on the PET/CT results.
- Delay PET/CT for at least 12 weeks after completion of radiation treatment, unless required sooner for imminent surgical resection.
- PET mammography (PEM, generally reported with CPT® 78811) is considered experimental and investigational at this time.
- PET/MRI is generally not medically necessary for a vast majority of oncologic conditions due to lack of standardization in imaging technique and interpretation. However, it may be approved in select circumstances when the following criteria are met:
  - The individual meets condition-specific guidelines for PET/MRI OR
  - The individual meets ALL of the following:
    - The individual meets guideline criteria for PET/CT, AND
    - PET/CT is not available at the treating institution, AND
    - The provider requests PET/MRI in lieu of PET/CT
  - When the above criteria are met, PET/MRI may be reported using the code combination of PET Whole-Body (CPT® 78813) and MRI Unlisted (CPT® 76498). All other methods of reporting PET/MRI are inappropriate.
    - When clinically appropriate, diagnostic MRI codes may be indicated at the same time as the PET/MRI code combination.


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

# Unlisted Procedure Codes in Oncology (ONC-1.5)

**ON.GG.0001.5.A**

**v2.0.2026**

- There is often no unique procedure code for a service performed solely for treatment planning purposes. AMA instructions in the CPT state that if no specific code exists for a particular service, the service is reported with an unlisted code.
- Advanced imaging being used for radiation therapy treatment planning should not be authorized using any of the diagnostic imaging codes for CT, MRI or PET. Advanced imaging performed in support of radiation therapy treatment planning should be reported with:
  - **CPT® 76498 for Unlisted MRI** – when MRI will be used for treatment planning of radiation therapy to be delivered ONLY to the brain, prostate and cervix. The use of this code for radiation treatment planning of any other cancers/body parts not listed above may be reviewed on a case-by-case basis. Also on a case-by-case basis, an additional diagnostic study may be medically necessary if there is an additional clinical question requiring reading and interpretation of the study by a diagnostic radiologist (i.e., the study is not used exclusively for radiation treatment planning).
  - **CPT® 76497 for Unlisted CT** – may NOT be used for radiation treatment planning. CT imaging performed in support of radiation therapy treatment planning is bundled in with the concurrent radiation treatment authorization codes and a separate authorization for treatment planning is not required.
  - Imaging associated with image-directed biopsy should be reported with the corresponding interventional codes. See also: **CT-, MR-, or Ultrasound-Guided Procedures (Preface-4.2)** in the Preface Imaging Guidelines.
  - For advanced imaging used solely for the purpose of Surgical planning, see: **Unlisted Procedures/Therapy treatment planning (Preface-4.3)** in the Preface Imaging Guidelines


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

# Predisposition Syndromes (ONC-1.6)

**ON.GG.0001.6.A**

**v2.0.2026**

- For predisposition syndrome screening in adult individuals, see: **Screening Imaging in Cancer Predisposition Syndromes (PEDONC-2)** in the Pediatric and Special Populations Oncology Imaging Guidelines


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

# References (ONC-1)

**v2.0.2026**

1. ACR Committee on Drugs and Contrast Media. *ACR Manual on Contrast Media*. Reston, VA: American College of Radiology; 2024.
2. The American College of Radiology. *Practice parameter for the performance of skeletal scintigraphy (bone scan)*. Resolution 23. Rev. 2021.
3. The American College of Radiology. *Practice parameter for performing FDG-PET/CT in oncology.* Resolution 2c,2d. Rev. 2023.
4. The American College of Radiology. *Practice parameter for the performance of neuroendocrine tumor gamma camera scintigraphy*. Resolution 28. Rev. 2025.
5. Erdi YE. Limits of tumor detectability in nuclear medicine and PET. *Mol Imaging Radionucl Ther.* 2012;21(1):23-28. doi:10.4274/Mirt.128.
6. Zhu X, Tian X, Yu C, Hong J, Fang J, Chen H. Increased risk of hemorrhage in metastatic colorectal cancer patients treated with bevacizumab: An updated meta-analysis of 12 randomized controlled trials. *Medicine (Baltimore)*. 2016;95(34):e4232. doi:10.1097/MD.0000000000004232
7. American College of Radiology ACR Appropriateness Criteria®. *Pretreatment Evaluation and Follow-up of Invasive Cancer of the Cervix*. Rev. 2023.
8. American College of Radiology ACR Appropriateness Criteria®. *External Beam Radiation therapy treatment planning for clinically localized prostate cancer.* Rev. 2016.
9. McGee KP, Cao M, Das IJ, et al. The Use of Magnetic Resonance Imaging in Radiation Therapy Treatment Simulation and Planning. *J Magn Reson Imaging*. 2024;60(5):1786-1805. doi:10.1002/jmri.29246
10. Daly MB, Pal T, AlHilli Z, et. al. National Comprehensive Cancer Network (NCCN) Guidelines Version 2.2026 – October 10, 2025, Genetic/Familial High Risk Assessment: Breast, Ovarian, Pancreatic, and Prostate available at: https://www.nccn.org/professionals/physician_gls/pdf/genetics_bopp.pdf Referenced with permission from the NCCN Clinical Practice Guidelines in Oncology (NCCN Guidelines™) for Genetic/Familial High Risk Assessment: Breast and Ovarian V2.2026 – October 10, 2025 ©2025 National Comprehensive Cancer Network, Inc. All rights reserved. The NCCN Guidelines™ and illustrations herein may not be reproduced in any form for any purpose without the express written permission of the NCCN. To view the most recent and complete version of the NCCN Guidelines™, go online to NCCN.org.
11. Coverage of Clinical Trials under the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act; 42 U.S.C.A. § 300gg-8.
12. Bergsland E, Goldner WS, Benson III AB, et al. National Comprehensive Cancer Network (NCCN) Guidelines Version 3.2025 – October 1, 2025. Neuroendocrine and Adrenal Tumors, available at: https://www.nccn.org/professionals/physician_gls/pdf/neuroendocrine.pdf. Referenced with permission from the NCCN Clinical Practice Guidelines in Oncology (NCCN Guidelines™) for Neuroendocrine and Adrenal Tumors V3.2025 – October 1, 2025. ©2025 National Comprehensive Cancer Network, Inc. All rights reserved. The NCCN Guidelines™ and illustrations herein may not be reproduced in any form for any purpose without the express written permission of the NCCN. To view the most recent and complete version of the NCCN Guidelines™, go online to NCCN.org.
13. American Society of Clinical Oncology (ASCO). Choosing Wisely: ASCO's Top Five List in Oncology. American Society of Clinical Oncology. https://www.asco.org/. Published 2021.


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

# Primary Central Nervous System Tumors (ONC-2)

Guideline

Primary Central Nervous System Tumors – General Considerations (ONC-2.1)
Low Grade Gliomas (ONC-2.2)
High Grade Gliomas (ONC-2.3)
Medulloblastoma (MDB), Other CNS Embryonal Tumors, and Pineoblastoma (ONC-2.4)
Ependymoma (ONC-2.5)
Central Nervous System Germ Cell Tumors (ONC-2.6)
CNS Lymphoma (Also Known as Microglioma) (ONC-2.7)
Meningiomas (Intracranial and Intraspinal) (ONC-2.8)
Spinal Cord Tumors (Benign and Malignant) (ONC-2.9)
Choroid Plexus Tumors (ONC-2.10)
References (ONC-2)


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

# Primary Central Nervous System Tumors – General Considerations (ONC-2.1)

ON.CN_0002.1.A
**v2.0.2026**

- This guideline section applies to primary CNS tumors only. For imaging guidelines in metastatic brain cancer, see the appropriate diagnosis-specific section or **Brain Metastases (ONC-31.3)** for imaging guidelines.
- Primary brain tumors presenting only with uncomplicated headache are very uncommon. Most primary brain tumors present with specific CNS symptoms.
- Histologic confirmation is critical. Therapeutic decisions should not be made on radiographic findings alone, except for ANY of the following:
  - Medically fragile individuals for whom attempted biopsy carries excess medical risk, as stated in writing by both the attending physician and surgeon.
  - Brain stem tumors or other sites where the imaging findings are pathognomonic and the risk of permanent neurological damage is excessive with even a limited biopsy attempt.
- For evaluation of known or suspected spinal cord compromise, see: **Spinal/Vertebral Metastases (ONC-31.6)**
- For suspected brain tumors in neurofibromatosis, see: **Screening Imaging in Cancer Predisposition Syndromes (PEDONC-2)** in the Pediatric and Special Populations Oncology Imaging Guidelines
- Rare tumors occurring more commonly in the pediatric population should be imaged according to the imaging guidelines in: **Pediatric Central Nervous System Tumors (PEDONC-4)** in the Pediatric and Special Populations Oncology Imaging Guidelines.

| Indication | Medically Necessary Imaging Study |
|---|---|
| Characterization and follow up of all brain tumors | ANY or ALL of the following:<br>• MRI Brain without and with contrast (CPT® 70553)<br>• CT Head without and with contrast (CPT® 70470) when MRI is contraindicated or not available, or there is skull bone involvement<br>• CT Head (contrast as requested) for preoperative planning when requested by the operating surgeon |


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

| Indication | Medically Necessary Imaging Study |
|---|---|
| Preoperative planning or to clarify inconclusive findings on MRI or CT | • MRA Head (CPT® 70544) or CTA Head (CPT® 70496) |
| Within 24 to 72 hours following brain tumor surgery | • MRI Brain without and with contrast (CPT® 70553) |
| Clinical deterioration or development of new neurological features | • MRI Brain without and with contrast (CPT® 70553)<br>• MRI Spine without and with contrast (Cervical-CPT® 72156, Thoracic-CPT® 72157, Lumbar-CPT® 72158) for signs/symptoms of spinal involvement or if spinal involvement is suspected |

**MR Spectroscopy in Brain Tumors (MRS, CPT® 76390)**

- MRS is only medically necessary for use in brain tumors of specified histologies where diagnostic accuracy has been established in peer-reviewed literature.
  - See diagnosis-specific guidelines for MRS indications
- MRS is considered not medically necessary for all other histologies and indications not listed in a diagnosis-specific guideline section.

**PET Brain Imaging (CPT® 78608 and CPT® 78609)**

- PET Brain Metabolic Imaging (CPT® 78608) is only medically necessary for use in brain tumors of specified histologies where diagnostic accuracy has been established in peer-reviewed literature.
- PET Brain metabolic imaging (CPT® 78608) is considered not medically necessary for all other histologies and indications not listed in a diagnosis-specific guideline section.
- PET Brain perfusion imaging (CPT® 78609) is not medically necessary in the evaluation or management of primary CNS tumors.
- Body PET studies (CPT® 78811, CPT® 78812, and CPT® 78813) and fusion PET/CT studies (CPT® 78814, CPT® 78815, or CPT® 78816) are not medically necessary in the evaluation or management of primary CNS tumors.
- See: **Other Imaging Studies (HD-24)** in the Head Imaging Guidelines for details on other advanced neuro-imaging studies.


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

## Evidence Discussion

Primary central nervous system tumors account for 1.4% of all new cancer diagnoses in the United States and 2.7% of deaths due to cancer. Primary central nervous system tumors develop within any region of the brain. Utilizing the World Health Organization (WHO) classification of tumors, Low grade tumors (WHO I, II) are the most common primary brain tumors (71.7% of all tumors). High grade tumors (WHO II/IV) account for 28.3% of all tumors. Meningioma is the most common low grade tumor accounting for 39.7% of all tumors. Glioblastoma is the most common malignant glioma accounting for 15.4% of all tumors. The most recent classification of these tumors is based on histology and on molecular diagnostics.

The primary imaging modality for the evaluation of primary brain tumors is an MRI Brain and Spine (with and without contrast). The standard MRI protocol minimally includes T1 and T2, fluid-attenuated inversion recovery (FLAIR), gradient-echo/susceptibility, diffusion-weighted imaging, and post contrast T1-weighted images to characterize the tumor. MRI provides much better characterization of intracranial parenchymal tumors in comparison to CT. MRI is more sensitive in detecting lesions in the posterior fossa and in evaluation of leptomeningeal spread of tumor. CT imaging (with and/or without contrast) is valuable in the emergent scenario to assist in initial description of the disease. CT imaging of brain and spine should be used in individuals with a contraindication for use of MRI (those with metallic implants or those who experience claustrophobia). If there is bone involvement, CT imaging may be included with MRI for disease assessment.

Advanced imaging modalities may be included to complement standard imaging to further characterize tumors and assist in treatment decisions. MRI perfusion measures blood flow in the tumor and can be useful in differentiating viable tumor versus radiation necrosis, in determining tumor grade and in determining optimal site for biopsy. MR Spectroscopy involves analysis of the levels of certain chemicals in pre-selected voxels (small regions) on an MRI scan done at the same time. MR spectroscopy may be useful in defining grade of tumor or differentiate viable tumor from radiation necrosis. The use of MR spectroscopy is limited to specific histologies based on peer-reviewed literature. A major limitation of both modalities is the added imaging time. Brain FDG-PET imaging may also be considered to differentiate viable tumor versus radiation necrosis, to determine optimal biopsy site and to determine tumor grade. The use of Brain FDG-PET imaging is limited to specific histologies based on peer-reviewed literature.[1,7-12]


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

# Low Grade Gliomas (ONC-2.2)

**ON.CN.0002.2.A**
**v2.0.2026**

- These tumors are defined as having a World Health Organization (WHO) histologic grade of I or II (out of IV), can occur anywhere in the CNS, and includes the following tumors:
  - Pilocytic Astrocytoma
  - Fibrillary (or Diffuse) Astrocytoma
  - Optic Pathway Gliomas
  - Pilomyxoid Astrocytoma
  - Oligodendroglioma
  - Oligoastrocytoma
  - Oligodendrocytoma
  - Subependymal Giant Cell Astrocytoma (SEGA)
  - Ganglioglioma
  - Gangliocytoma
  - Dysembryoplastic infantile astrocytoma (DIA)
  - Dysembryoplastic infantile ganglioglioma (DIG)
  - Dysembryoplastic neuroepithelial tumor (DNT)
  - Tectal plate gliomas
  - Cervicomedullary gliomas
  - Pleomorphic xanthoastrocytoma (PXA)
  - Any other glial tumor with a WHO grade of I or II

| Indication | Medically Necessary Imaging Study |
|---|---|
| Initial Staging | • MRI Brain without and with contrast (CPT® 70553) if not already done<br>• MRI Spine without and with contrast (Cervical-CPT® 72156, Thoracic-CPT® 72157, Lumbar-CPT® 72158)<br>◦ MRI Spine with contrast only (Cervical-CPT® 72142, Thoracic-CPT® 72147, Lumbar-CPT® 72149) if being performed immediately following a contrast-enhanced MRI Brain |


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

| Indication | Medically Necessary Imaging Study |
|---|---|
| After initial resection or other treatment (radiation therapy, etc.) | • MRI Brain without and with contrast (CPT® 70553) |
| For individuals undergoing chemotherapy treatment | • MRI Brain without and with contrast (CPT® 70553) every 2 cycles<br>• Individuals with spinal cord involvement at diagnosis can have MRI without and with contrast of the involved spinal region on the same schedule as MRI brain |
| ONE of the following:<br>• Determine need for biopsy when transformation to high-grade glioma is suspected based on clinical symptoms or recent MRI findings<br>• Evaluate a brain lesion of indeterminate nature when the study will be used to determine whether biopsy/resection can be safely postponed | ANY of the following:<br>• PET Brain Metabolic Imaging (CPT® 78608)<br>• MRI Perfusion imaging (CPT® 70553) |
| ONE of the following:<br>• Distinguish low-grade from high-grade gliomas<br>• Evaluate a brain lesion of indeterminate nature when the study will be used to determine whether biopsy/resection can be safely postponed<br>• Distinguish radiation-induced tumor necrosis from progressive disease within 18 months of completing radiotherapy | ANY of the following:<br>• MR Spectroscopy (CPT® 76390)<br>• MRI Perfusion imaging (CPT® 70553) |
| Suspected intracranial or intraspinal recurrence | • All imaging supported for initial staging |


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

| Indication | Medically Necessary Imaging Study |
|---|---|
| Surveillance, grade I | • MRI Brain without and with contrast (CPT® 70553) every 3 months for up to 5 years<br>• Individuals with spinal cord involvement at diagnosis: MRI Spine without and with contrast (Cervical-CPT® 72156, Thoracic-CPT® 72157, Lumbar-CPT® 72158) on the same schedule as MRI Brain |
| Surveillance, grade II (Karnofsky Performance Score ≥60, not poor performance status as below) | • MRI Brain without and with contrast (CPT® 70553) every 3 months for 5 years, then every 6 months thereafter<br>• Individuals with spinal cord involvement at diagnosis: MRI Spine without and with contrast (Cervical- CPT® 72156, Thoracic- CPT® 72157, Lumbar- CPT® 72158) on the same schedule as MRI Brain |
| Surveillance, grade II and poor performance status (Karnofsky Performance Score <60) | • MRI Brain without and with contrast (CPT® 70553) every 2 months for 3 years, then every 3 months thereafter<br>• Individuals with spinal cord involvement at diagnosis: MRI Spine without and with contrast (Cervical- CPT® 72156, Thoracic- CPT® 72157, Lumbar- CPT® 72158) on the same schedule as MRI Brain |

**Evidence Discussion**

The primary brain tumors classified as low grade gliomas are listed in the guideline. Initial staging in low grade glioma includes both MRI Brain as well as MRI Whole Spine. Whole spine MRI imaging is medically necessary for initial staging as the finding of spinal metastases, leptomeningeal disease will impact prognosis, and treatment approaches. MRI studies should be completed both without and with gadolinium contrast. However, MRI Spine with contrast only can be approved if being performed immediately following a contrast-enhanced MRI Brain for individual-centricity to limit time in the MRI machine if requested since the non-contrast component is less essential for the evaluation of spine. MRI imaging is completed after initial resection or radiation to establish a new baseline for disease monitoring. If intracranial or intraspinal recurrence


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

is suspected or documented, MRI imaging that was completed for initial staging is repeated.

In individuals undergoing active therapy, MRI imaging may be repeated after every 2 cycles of therapy for disease assessment. If there is spine involvement, MRI Spine of the involved spinal region can be included on this same schedule.

Advanced imaging modalities such as MRI perfusion imaging, MR Spectroscopy and/or PET Brain Metabolic Imaging used in conjunction with standard MRI imaging can be performed to characterize non-invasive changes in the tumor not noted on standard MRI or as problem solving tools with inconclusive findings on MRI imaging. Results of these advanced imaging modalities may be the basis to pursue additional treatment and/or surgical intervention; to define transition of the tumor to a higher grade or to distinguish between radiation-induced radiation necrosis and progressive disease within 18 months of completing radiation therapy.

Surveillance imaging is conducted at a frequency and interval based on published standards noted in the NCCN guidelines. Individuals with poor performance status require more frequent imaging than others because of their higher risk for complications or recurrence.[1] More frequent imaging may be done as clinically indicated by the treating physician, in the event of clinical changes such as development of seizures or neurologic deterioration that are suspicious for disease progression.[1,7-12]


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

# High Grade Gliomas (ONC-2.3)

**ON.CN.0002.3.A**
**v2.0.2026**

- These tumors are defined as having a WHO histologic grade of III or IV (out of IV can occur anywhere in the CNS (though the majority occur in the brain), and include the following tumors:
  - Anaplastic astrocytoma
  - Glioblastoma multiforme
  - Diffuse intrinsic pontine glioma (DIPG, or “brainstem glioma”)
  - Gliomatosis cerebri
  - Gliosarcoma
  - Anaplastic oligodendroglioma
  - Anaplastic ganglioglioma
  - Anaplastic mixed glioma
  - Anaplastic mixed ganglioneuronal tumors
  - Any other glial tumor with a WHO grade of III or IV

| Indication | Medically Necessary Imaging Study |
|---|---|
| Initial Staging | • MRI Brain without and with contrast (CPT® 70553) if not already done<br>• MRI Spine without and with contrast (Cervical-CPT® 72156, Thoracic-CPT® 72157, Lumbar-CPT® 72158)<br>◦ MRI Spine with contrast only (Cervical-CPT® 72142, Thoracic-CPT® 72147, Lumbar-CPT® 72149) if being performed immediately following a contrast-enhanced MRI Brain |
| Immediately following partial or complete resection | • MRI Brain without and with contrast (CPT® 70553) |
| Immediately following radiation therapy (XRT) | • MRI Brain without and with contrast (CPT® 70553) once within 2 to 8 weeks following completion of treatment, and then go to surveillance imaging |


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

| Indication | Medically Necessary Imaging Study |
|---|---|
| For individuals undergoing chemotherapy treatment | • MRI Brain without and with contrast (CPT® 70553) every 2 cycles<br>• Individuals with spinal cord involvement at diagnosis: MRI without and with contrast of the involved spinal region on the same schedule as MRI Brain |
| ONE of the following:<br>• Distinguish low-grade from high-grade gliomas<br>• Evaluate a brain lesion of indeterminate nature when the study will be used to determine whether biopsy/resection can be safely postponed<br>• Distinguish radiation-induced tumor necrosis from progressive disease within 18 months of completing radiotherapy | ANY of the following:<br>• MR Spectroscopy (CPT® 76390)<br>• MRI Perfusion imaging (CPT® 70553) |
| ONE of the following:<br>• Distinguish radiation-induced tumor necrosis from progressive disease<br>• Evaluate inconclusive MRI findings when the study will be used to determine need for biopsy or change in therapy, including a change from active therapy to surveillance<br>• Evaluate a brain lesion of indeterminate nature when the study will be used to determine whether biopsy/resection can be safely postponed | ANY of the following:<br>• MRI Perfusion imaging (CPT® 70553)<br>• PET Brain metabolic imaging (CPT® 78608)<br>◦ PET Brain is not medically necessary in gliomas occurring in the brain stem due to poor uptake and lack of impact on individual outcomes |
| Suspected intracranial or intraspinal recurrence | • All imaging supported for initial staging |


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

| Indication | Medically Necessary Imaging Study |
|---|---|
| Surveillance | • MRI Brain without and with contrast (CPT® 70553) every 2 months for 3 years and every 3 months thereafter<br>• Individuals with spinal cord involvement at diagnosis: MRI Spine without and with contrast (Cervical-CPT® 72156, Thoracic-CPT® 72157, Lumbar-CPT® 72158) on the same schedule as MRI Brain |

**Evidence Discussion**

The primary brain tumors classified as high grade gliomas are listed in the guideline. Initial staging in high grade glioma includes both MRI Brain as well as MRI Whole spine. Whole spine MRI imaging is indicated for initial staging as the finding of spinal metastases and leptomeningeal disease will impact prognosis and treatment approaches. MRI studies should be completed both without and with gadolinium contrast. However, MRI Spine with contrast only can be approved if being performed immediately following a contrast-enhanced MRI Brain for individual-centricity to limit time in the MRI machine if requested, since the non-contrast component is less essential for the evaluation of spine. MRI imaging is medically necessary after initial resection or radiation to establish a new baseline for disease monitoring. If intracranial or intraspinal recurrence is suspected or documented, MRI imaging that was completed for initial staging is repeated.

In individuals undergoing active therapy, MRI imaging may be repeated after every 2 cycles of therapy for disease assessment. If there is spine involvement, MRI spine of the involved spinal region can be included on this same schedule.

Advanced imaging modalities such as MRI perfusion imaging, MR Spectroscopy and/or PET Brain Metabolic Imaging used in conjunction with standard MRI imaging can be performed as problem solving tools to characterize non-invasive changes in the tumor noted on standard MRI. Results of these advanced imaging modalities may be the basis to pursue additional treatment and/or surgical intervention; to distinguish low-grade from high-grade gliomas; to distinguish between radiation-induced radiation necrosis and progressive disease within 18 months of completing radiation therapy.

Surveillance imaging is conducted at a frequency and interval based on published standards noted in the NCCN guidelines. More frequent imaging may be done as clinically indicated by the treating physician, in the event of a clinical change such as development of seizures or neurologic deterioration that is suspicious for disease progression.[1,7-12]


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

# Medulloblastoma (MDB), Other CNS Embryonal Tumors, and Pineoblastoma (ONC-2.4)

**ON.CN.0002.4.A**

**v2.0.2026**

- Medulloblastoma and sPNET imaging indications in adult individuals are identical to those for pediatric individuals. See: **Medulloblastoma (MDB), Other CNS Embryonal Tumors, and Pineoblastoma (PEDONC-4.4)** in the Pediatric and Special Populations Oncology Imaging Guidelines.


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

# Ependymoma (ONC-2.5)

**ON.CN.0002.5.A**

**v2.0.2026**

- Ependymoma imaging indications in adult individuals are identical to those for pediatric individuals. See: **Ependymoma (PEDONC-4.8)** in the Pediatric and Special Populations Oncology Imaging Guidelines.


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

# Central Nervous System Germ Cell Tumors (ONC-2.6)

**ON.CN.0002.6.A**

**v2.0.2026**

- Central nervous system germ cell tumor imaging indications in adult individuals are identical to those for pediatric individuals. See: **CNS Germinomas and Non-Germinomatous Germ Cell Tumors (NGGCT) (PEDONC-4.7)** in the Pediatric and Special Populations Oncology Imaging Guidelines.


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

# CNS Lymphoma (Also Known as Microglioma) (ONC-2.7)

**ON.CN.0002.7.A**
**v2.0.2026**

| Indication | Medically Necessary Imaging Study |
|---|---|
| Initial Staging | ALL of the following:<br>• MRI Brain without and with contrast (CPT® 70553)<br>• MRI Cervical Spine without and with contrast (CPT® 72156)<br>• MRI Thoracic Spine without and with contrast (CPT® 72157)<br>• MRI Lumbar Spine without and with contrast (CPT® 72158) |
| Extra-neural evaluation to confirm CNS primary<br>*Individuals with CNS Lymphoma that is metastatic should be imaged according to:<br>• **Non-Hodgkin Lymphomas (ONC-27)** for individuals age ≥18 years<br>• **Pediatric Aggressive Mature B-Cell Non-Hodgkin Lymphomas (NHL) (PEDONC-5.3)** in the Pediatric Oncology Imaging Guidelines for individuals age ≤17 years | ANY or ALL of the following:<br>• CT Chest with contrast (CPT® 71260)<br>• CT Abdomen and Pelvis with contrast (CPT® 74177)<br>• PET/CT (CPT® 78815) for evaluation of inconclusive findings on CT imaging |
| Treatment Response | • MRI without and with contrast of all positive disease sites every 2 cycles |
| Suspected intracranial or intraspinal recurrence | • All imaging supported for initial staging |


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

| Indication | Medically Necessary Imaging Study |
|---|---|
| Surveillance | • For patients with brain involvement only, MRI Brain (CPT® 70553) without and with contrast every 2-3 months for 2 years, then every 6 months to year 5, then annually thereafter<br>• In individuals with a history of leptomeningeal disease, MRI without and with contrast of Brain and Spine (CPT® 70553, 72156, 72157, and/or 72158) every 2-3 months for 2 years, then every 6 months to year 5, then annually thereafter |

**Evidence Discussion**

Primary central nervous system lymphoma is an aggressive non-Hodgkin lymphoma that can occur in any location within the intracranial neuraxis (brain, spine, cranial nerves, and leptomeninges). This malignancy can occur in immunocompromised individuals or immunocompetent individuals and represents approximately 4% of all intracranial malignancies. Individuals may present with focal neurological deficits or nonspecific neurological findings depending on the specific location of tumor involvement.

For initial staging, MRI Brain without and with contrast and whole spine imaging without and with gadolinium contrast are indicated. CNS lymphoma has potential to spread throughout the intracranial neuraxis. For confirmation as a primary central nervous system lymphoma, extra neural evaluation is medically necessary and follows the ONC-27 Non-Hodgkin Lymphoma Guideline. This evaluation includes CT Chest with contrast and CT Abdomen and Pelvis with contrast. FDG PET/CT can be approved if extra-neural CT imaging is inconclusive. Evaluation of treatment response can be assessed after every 2 cycles of treatment with MRI without and with contrast of all positive disease sites. All imaging obtained for initial staging is repeated for suspected disease recurrence to evaluate for metastatic disease. Surveillance imaging includes MRI Brain without and with of all positive disease sites on a schedule outlined in the guideline.[1,12,16]


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

Click Anywhere in the Header to Return to the Main Table of Contents



# Meningiomas (Intracranial and Intraspinal) (ONC-2.8)

**ON.CN.0002.8.A**
**v2.0.2026**

| Indication | Medically Necessary Imaging Study |
|---|---|
| Inconclusive MRI Brain or CT Head and further imaging is needed to confirm diagnosis | • Dotatate PET/CT Brain (CPT® 78814) |
| Initial Staging of Intracranial Meningioma | ANY or ALL of the following:<br>• MRI Brain without and with contrast (CPT® 70553)<br>• CT Head (contrast as requested) |
| Initial staging of Intraspinal Meningioma | ONE of the following:<br>• MRI without and with contrast of appropriate spinal region (Cervical CPT® 72156, Thoracic CPT® 72157, and Lumbar CPT® 72158)<br>OR<br>• CT without and with contrast of the appropriate spinal region (Cervical CPT® 72127, Thoracic CPT® 72130, and Lumbar CPT® 72133) |
| Treatment Response | • MRI without and with contrast of all positive disease sites every 2 cycles |
| Suspected recurrence of intracranial or intraspinal disease | • All imaging supported for initial staging |
| Suspected recurrence with inconclusive findings on MRI | Any ONE of the following studies:<br>• Octreotide SPECT Brain (CPT® 78803)<br>• Octreotide SPECT/CT Brain (CPT® 78830)<br>• Dotatate PET/CT Brain (CPT® 78814) |


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

| Indication | Medically Necessary Imaging Study |
|---|---|
| Surveillance for Grade I (low-grade), or unspecified Grade intracranial meningioma<br><br>(partially resected and unresected) | • MRI Brain without and with contrast (CPT® 70553) every 3 months in year 1, then every 6 months for 5 years, then annually up to 11 years |
| Surveillance for Grade II (atypical) intracranial meningioma (partially resected and unresected) | • MRI Brain without and with contrast (CPT® 70553) every 3 months in year 1, then every 6 months for 5 years, then annually indefinitely |
| Surveillance for Grade I (low-grade), and Grade II (atypical) or unspecified Grade intraspinal meningioma (completely resected, partially resected and unresected) | ONE of the following at 3, 6, and 12 months, and then every 6 months for 5 years, then 1-3 years thereafter as requested:<br><br>• MRI without and with contrast (CPT® 72156 [Cervical spine], CPT® 72157 [Thoracic spine], CPT® 72158 [Lumbar spine]) of the involved spinal level<br><br>OR<br><br>• CT without and with contrast (CPT® 72127 [Cervical spine], CPT® 72130 [Thoracic spine], CPT® 72133 [Lumbar spine]) of the involved spinal level |
| Surveillance for Grade I (low-grade), completely resected meningiomas | Annual MRI of the involved region followed by discontinuation of surveillance if there is no recurrence after 11 years |
| Surveillance for Grade II (atypical), completely resected meningiomas | Annual MRI of the involved region indefinitely |
| Surveillance for Grade III (malignant or anaplastic) Meningioma | MRI of the involved region every 3-4 months for 2 years, then every 6 months indefinitely |

### Evidence Discussion

Meningiomas are the most frequent primary central nervous system tumors, accounting for approximately 34% of all primary brain and spine tumors. Meningiomas are extra-axial, dural-based tumors that are derived from the dura and occur throughout the neuroaxis. Meningiomas are a heterogeneous group of tumors that have been classified in three histologic grades, WHO Grades I (benign), II and III (aggressive). Meningiomas


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

can involve bone resulting in bone overgrowth or infiltration into bony structures. Meningiomas are associated with genetic syndromes and molecular alterations. Approaches for classification are evolving to incorporate histopathologic, genetic and molecular characteristics.

The standard imaging modality is MRI without and with contrast. CT imaging is supported, as there is potential for bone involvement. Meningioma overexpresses somatostatin receptors. PET imaging using various radiolabeled somatostatin receptor ligands (SSAs) such as 68Ga-DOTA-Tyr3-octreotide (DOTATOC), 68Ga-DOTA-d-Phe1-Tyr3-octreotide (DOTATATE), or 68Ga-DOTA-l-Nal3-octreotide (DOTANOC) have been used for the diagnostic evaluation of meningioma. PET imaging with these ligands is supported for restaging to clarify inconclusive findings on MRI imaging.[111] In-octreotide scintigraphy (octreotide) imaging has a similar imaging indication as $^{68}$Ga-DOTATATE PET/CT. In surveillance, the schedule for follow-up MRI/CT imaging is based on tumor grade and extent of residual disease.[1,17-19]


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

Click Anywhere in the Header to Return to the Main Table of Contents



# Spinal Cord Tumors (Benign and Malignant) (ONC-2.9)

**ON.CN.0002.9.A**

**v2.0.2026**

- See: **Low Grade Gliomas (ONC-2.2)** and **High Grade Gliomas (ONC-2.3)** for imaging guidelines of low-grade and high-grade gliomas of the spinal cord
- See: **Malignant Tumors of the Spinal Cord (PEDONC-4.9)** in the Pediatric and Special Populations Oncology Imaging Guidelines for other malignant spinal cord tumors
- See: **Neurofibromatosis 1 and 2 (NF1 and NF2) (PEDONC-2.3)** in the Pediatric and Special Populations Oncology Imaging Guidelines for spinal tumors in individuals with Neurofibromatosis 1 or 2
- See: **Spinal/Vertebral Metastases (ONC-31.6)** for known secondary malignancy involving the spine/spinal canal/spinal cord


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

# Choroid Plexus Tumors (ONC-2.10)

**ON.CN.0002.10.A**

**v2.0.2026**

- Choroid Plexus Tumor imaging indications in adult individuals are identical to those for pediatric individuals. See: **Choroid Plexus Tumors (PEDONC-4.13)** in the Pediatric and Special Populations Oncology Imaging Guidelines.


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

# References (ONC-2)

**v2.0.2026**

1. Nabors LB, Portnow J, Baehring J, et. al. National Comprehensive Cancer Network (NCCN) Guidelines Version 3.2025 – December 5, 2025 Central Nervous System Cancers, available at: https://www.nccn.org/professionals/physician_gls/pdf/cns.pdf. Referenced with permission from the NCCN Clinical Practice Guidelines in Oncology (NCCN Guidelines™) for Central Nervous System Tumors Cancer V3.2025. – December 5, 2025 ©2025 National Comprehensive Cancer Network, Inc. All rights reserved. The NCCN Guidelines™ and illustrations herein may not be reproduced in any form for any purpose without the express written permission of the NCCN. To view the most recent and complete version of the NCCN Guidelines™, go online to NCCN.org.
2. Weinberg BD, Kuruva M, Shim H, Mullins ME. Clinical Applications of Magnetic Resonance Spectroscopy in Brain Tumors: From Diagnosis to Treatment. *Radiol Clin North Am*. 2021;59(3):349-362. doi:10.1016/j.rcl.2021.01.004
3. Wang YC, Chuang CC, Wei KC, et al. Long Term Surgical Outcome and Prognostic Factors of Atypical and Malignant Meningiomas. *Sci Rep*. 2016;6:35743. Published 2016 Oct 20. doi:10.1038/srep35743
4. Higgins D, Shah AH, Komotar RJ, Ivan ME. Management of Atypical and Anaplastic Meningiomas. *Neurosurg Clin N Am*. 2023;34(3):437-446. doi:10.1016/j.nec.2023.02.011
5. Horská A, Barker PB. Imaging of brain tumors: MR spectroscopy and metabolic imaging. *Neuroimaging Clin N Am*. 2010;20(3):293-310. doi:10.1016/j.nic.2010.04.003.
6. Chuang MT, Liu YS, Tsai YS, Chen YC, Wang CK. Differentiating Radiation-Induced Necrosis from Recurrent Brain Tumor Using MR Perfusion and Spectroscopy: A Meta-Analysis. *PLoS One*. 2016;11(1):e0141438. Published 2016 Jan 7. doi:10.1371/journal.pone.0141438
7. American College of Radiology. ACR–ASNR-SPR practice parameter for the performance of intracranial magnetic resonance perfusion imaging. 2017.
8. Mabray MC, Barajas Jr. RF, Cha S. Modern brain tumor imaging. *Brain Tumor Res. Treat*. 2015;3:8–23.
9. Ostrom QT, Price M, Neff C, et al. CBTRUS statistical report: primary brain and other central nervous system tumors diagnosed in the United States in 2015-2019. *Neuro Oncol.* 2022;24(Suppl 5):v1.
10. American College of Radiology. ACR–ASNR-SPR practice parameter for the performance and interpretation of magnetic resonance spectroscopy of the central nervous system. 2013.
11. Brain tumours (primary) and brain metastases in adults. London: National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE); 2021 Jan 29. (NICE Guideline, No. 99.) ISBN-13: 978-1-4731-3001-2.
12. Louis, D. N., Perry, A., Wesseling, P., Brat, D. J., Cree, I. A., Figarella-Branger, D., Hawkins, C., Ng, H. K., Pfister, S. M., Reifenberger, G., Soffietti, R., von Deimling, A., & Ellison, D. W. (2021). The 2021 WHO Classification of Tumors of the Central Nervous System: a summary. *Neuro-oncology*, 23(8), 1231–1251. https://doi.org/10.1093/neuonc/noab106
13. Kong Z, Wang Y, Dai C, Yao Y, Ma W, Wang Y. Central Nervous System Germ Cell Tumors: A Review of the Literature. *J Child Neurol*. 2018;33(9):610-620. doi:10.1177/0883073818772470
14. Jung AY. Basics for Pediatric brain tumor imaging: techniques and protocol recommendations. *BrainTumor Res Treat*. 2024;12:1-13. doi:10.14791/btrt.2023.0037
15. Jaju A, Li Y, Dahmoush et al. Imaging of pediatric brain tumors: A COG Diagnostic Imaging Committee/SPROncology Committee/ASPNR White Paper. *Pediatr Blood Cancer.* 2023;70(Suppl. 4):e30147. doi:10.1002/pbc.30147.
16. Grommes C, Rubenstein JL et al. Comprehensive approach to diagnosis and treatment of newly diagnosed primary CNS lymphoma. *Neuro-Oncol*. 2018;21(3):296-305. doi:10.1093/neuonc/noy192.
17. Galldiks N, Albert NL et al. PET imaging in patients with meningioma-report of the RANO/PET Group. *Neuro Oncol.* 2017;19(12):1576.
18. Huntoon K, Toland AMS, Dahiya S. Meningioma: a review of clinicopathological and molecular aspects. *Front Oncol*. 2020;10:579599. doi:10.3389/fonc.2020.579599.
19. Maas SLN, Stichel D et al. Integrated molecular-morphologic meningioma classification: a multicenter retrospective analysis, retrospectively and prospectively validated. *J Clin Oncol*. 2021;39(34):3839.


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

20. Han S, Suh CH, Woo S, Kim YJ, Lee JJ. Performance of 68Ga-DOTA-conjugated somatostatin receptor-targeting peptide PET in detection of pheochromocytoma and paraganglioma: a systematic review and metaanalysis. *J Nucl Med*. 2019; 60:369–376.
21. Miller KD, Ostrom QT, Kruchko C, et al. Brain and other central nervous system tumor statistics, 2021. *CA Cancer J Clin*. 2021;71(5):381-406. doi:10.3322/caac.21693
22. Owusu-Adjei B, Lim JC, Hou CC, et al. An evidence-based framework for postoperative surveillance of meningioma. *Neurooncol Pract*. 2024;12(3):478-488. Published 2024 Dec 2. doi:10.1093/nop/npae117


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

Click Anywhere in the Header to Return to the Main Table of Contents



# Squamous Cell Carcinomas of the Head and Neck (ONC-3)

Guideline

Squamous Cell Carcinomas of the Head and Neck – General Considerations (ONC-3.0)
Squamous Cell Carcinomas of the Head and Neck – Suspected/Diagnosis (ONC-3.1)
Squamous Cell Carcinomas of the Head and Neck – Initial Work-up/Staging (ONC-3.2)
Squamous Cell Carcinomas of the Head and Neck – Restaging/Recurrence (ONC-3.3)
Squamous Cell Carcinomas of the Head and Neck – Surveillance/Follow-up (ONC-3.4)
References (ONC-3)


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

# Squamous Cell Carcinomas of the Head and Neck – General Considerations (ONC-3.0)

**ON.HN.0003.0.A**

**v2.0.2026**

- Individuals with esthesioneuroblastoma should be imaged according to this guideline section.
- Stage III/IV disease encompasses any primary tumor larger than 4cm or documented lymph node positive disease.


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

# Squamous Cell Carcinomas of the Head and Neck – Suspected/Diagnosis (ONC-3.1)

**ON.HN.0003.1.A**

**v2.0.2026**

- See: **Neck Masses - Imaging (NECK-5.1)** in the Neck Imaging Guidelines for evaluation of suspected malignancy in the neck.
- PET is medically necessary prior to biopsy in order to determine a more favorable site for biopsy when:
  - a prior biopsy was nondiagnostic or
  - a relatively inaccessible site is contemplated which would require invasive surgical intervention for biopsy attempt


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

# Squamous Cell Carcinomas of the Head and Neck – Initial Work-up/Staging (ONC-3.2)

**ON.HN.0003.2.A**
**v2.0.2026**

| Indication | Medically Necessary Imaging Study |
|---|---|
| All Stages of Disease | • CT Neck with contrast (CPT® 70491) **or** MRI Orbits/Face/Neck (OFN) without and with contrast (CPT® 70543)<br>• CT Chest with contrast (CPT® 71260) or CT Chest without contrast (CPT® 71250) |
| For sentinel lymph node evaluation when nodes are not clinically positive | • Lymph system imaging (lymphoscintigraphy, CPT® 78195)<br>◦ SPECT/CT (CPT® 78830) if requested |
| Nasal cavity and paranasal sinuses (bony erosion or skull base and intracranial involvement) | ONE of the following:<br>• CT Maxillofacial with contrast (CPT® 70487)<br>• CT Neck with contrast (CPT® 70491)<br>• MRI Orbits/Face/Neck without and with contrast (CPT® 70543) |
| Nasopharyngeal (NPC) Cancer | • PET/CT (CPT® 78815)<br>• MRI Orbits/Face/Neck without and with contrast (CPT® 70543) is the preferred study<br>◦ CT Neck (CPT® 70491) **and/or** CT Maxillofacial (CPT® 70487) with contrast if contraindication to MRI<br>• CT Chest with contrast (CPT® 71260) |


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

| Indication | Medically Necessary Imaging Study |
|---|---|
| For ANY of the following:<br>• Known stage III or IV disease<br>• To determine role for upfront surgery vs chemoradiation in T3-T4 size tumor<br>• Prior to start of primary chemoradiotherapy and have not undergone definitive surgical resection<br>• Inconclusive findings on conventional imaging (CT, MRI)<br>• In order to direct laryngoscopy/exam under anesthesia for biopsy<br>• Pulmonary nodule(s) ≥8mm in size<br>• Cervical lymph node biopsy positive for squamous cell carcinoma and no primary site identified on CT or MRI Neck and Chest<br>• Inconclusive findings suggestive of disease outside the head and neck area | • PET/CT (CPT® 78815) |
| Signs or symptoms of abdominal metastatic disease including, but not limited to, elevated liver function tests | • CT Abdomen with contrast (CPT® 74160) |
| Any head and neck cancer with neurological findings or suspicion of skull base invasion | • MRI Brain without and with contrast (CPT® 70553) |

**Evidence Discussion**

Accurate initial staging guides prognosis and management options. CT Neck with contrast or MRI Neck with and without contrast is required for correct tumor, nodal, and metastases (TNM) staging. A contrasted CT of the chest is also medically necessary if requested.

- Classification of tumor staging involves determination of mass size and extent of invasion, if present, of surrounding structures.
- Size and location (including laterality and nodal basin) of pathologic lymph nodes is also required for accurate nodal staging, which will further direct treatment


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

planning to include the extent of potential neck dissection and/or field of radiation. Lymphoscintigraphy is medically necessary, with SPECT if requested, for sentinel node evaluation when nodes are not clinically obviously positive.

- Assessment for potential distant metastases ("M") is based on clinical signs/ symptoms and the presence of advanced locoregional primary disease. Discovery of distant metastasis, or a second primary, shifts management to more systemic options. A heavy smoking history also may be a separate indication for advanced imaging of the chest. Up to 7% to 14% of individuals may have a separate lung primary at the time of initial staging of head and neck SCCa. The use of IV contrast improves the detection of mediastinal and hilar adenopathy, and generally, CT Chest with contrast is preferred. Given the rarity of abdominal or pelvic metastatic disease, abdominopelvic imaging is only supported for signs and symptoms of metastatic disease.
  - Nasopharyngeal carcinoma (NPC) has a relatively high rate of distant metastases compared with other head and neck cancers, being found in 5% to 11% of individuals at the time of initial diagnosis. The most common sites of metastasis are bone (20%), lung (13%), and liver (9%).
- FDG-PET/CT Skull Base to Mid-Thigh detects and localizes primary tumor site, and can be helpful in squamous cell carcinoma (SCCa) of the head and neck with unknown primary. It is also equivalent to and possibly superior to contrast-enhanced CT Neck for accurate diagnosis of regional nodal disease. It is helpful in confirming distant metastases as well. The National Comprehensive Cancer Network (NCCN) recommended FDG-PET/CT for initial staging of any NPC, as well as for individuals with locoregionally advanced SCCa (ie, T3-T4 primary or >/= N1 nodal staging).
  - PET/CT alone, however, is not sufficient for initial staging. It does not provide the necessary anatomic detail of the primary tumor's extent for accurate "T" staging, which is required for best selection of local disease management options. Contrast-enhanced CT Neck or MRI Neck are necessary adjuncts.
  - If imaging fails to reveal an obvious primary, PET/CT should be completed before exam under anesthesia, biopsies, and tonsillectomy, to help identify potential primary sites before any intervention occurs.[1,6-12]


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

# Squamous Cell Carcinomas of the Head and Neck – Restaging/Recurrence (ONC-3.3)

**ON.HN.0003.3.A**
**v2.0.2026**

| Indication | Medically Necessary Imaging Study |
|---|---|
| Following primary chemoradiotherapy or radiation therapy or resection or any combination of these modalities | ONE of the following:<br>• CT Neck with contrast (CPT® 70491); **or**<br>• MRI Orbits/Face/Neck without and with contrast (CPT® 70543); **or**<br>• PET/CT (CPT® 78815) no sooner than 12 weeks (3 months) post completion of radiation therapy<br>◦ If post-treatment PET/CT scan is negative, further surveillance imaging is not medically necessary. |
| Post-treatment PET is positive for residual disease | ONE of the following:<br>• CT Neck with contrast (CPT® 70491); **or**<br>• MRI Orbits/Face/Neck without and with contrast (CPT® 70543) |
| Post-treatment PET is equivocal for residual disease | PET/CT (CPT® 78815) 3-6 months from prior post-treatment PET/CT |
| Induction chemotherapy response | • CT Neck with contrast (CPT® 70491) or MRI Orbits/ Face/Neck without and with contrast (CPT® 70543)<br>• PET not medically necessary to assess response to induction chemotherapy |
| Concern for progression seen on imaging performed at completion of induction chemotherapy | EITHER or ALL of the following:<br>• CT Chest with contrast (CPT® 71260) or CT Chest without contrast (CPT® 71250)<br>• PET/CT (CPT® 78815) |


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

| Indication | Medically Necessary Imaging Study |
|---|---|
| Measurable or metastatic disease undergoing active treatment | Every 2 cycles (6-8 weeks):<br>• CT Neck with contrast (CPT® 70491)<br>OR<br>• MRI Orbits/ Face/Neck without and with contrast (CPT® 70543)<br>AND<br>• CT with contrast of involved body sites |
| Suspected local recurrence | • CT Neck with contrast (CPT® 70491) or MRI Orbits/ Face/Neck without and with contrast (CPT® 70543)<br>• CT Chest with contrast (CPT® 71260) |
| Biopsy proven local recurrence | ONE of the following:<br>• PET/CT (CPT® 78815)<br>**or**<br>• CT Neck with contrast (CPT® 70491) or MRI Orbits/ Face/Neck without and with contrast (CPT® 70543) and CT Chest with contrast (CPT® 71260) or CT Chest without contrast (CPT® 71250) |
| Inconclusive conventional imaging (CT or MRI) | • PET/CT (CPT® 78815) |
| If suspected non-response while on treatment | • An additional CT Neck with contrast (CPT 70491) or MRI Orbits/Face/Neck without and with contrast (CPT 70543) |
| Any of the following:<br>• Known prior thoracic disease<br>• New or worsening pulmonary symptoms<br>• New or worsening chest x-ray findings | • CT Chest with contrast (CPT® 71260) or CT Chest without contrast (CPT® 71250) |


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

## Evidence Discussion

Follow-up imaging is medically necessary for the evaluation of treatment response. In alignment with the NCCN, a PET/CT is supported following primary chemoradiotherapy in individuals who have not undergone surgical resection of the primary tumor or neck dissection. For individuals receiving induction chemotherapy prior to definitive therapy, a CT or MRI of the primary tumor site to assess response is recommended by NCCN after 2-3 cycles of induction, but a repeat PET/CT is not routinely recommended by NCCN unless there are unclear findings on this CT or MRI. For individuals with metastatic disease on active treatment, cross sectional imaging of involved body areas is supported every 2 cycles. PET/CT is supported for only as a problem-solving tool for inconclusive conventional imaging, as the incidence of false positive findings is high in the setting of ongoing inflammation with known disease.

For individuals treated with primary chemoradiotherapy, a negative PET at the 3-6 month timeframe predicts improved survival at 2 years, with a negative predictive value of 95% to 97%. PET/CT performed earlier than this timeframe is associated with higher false-positive findings and should be avoided. CT or MRI neck may be performed **in lieu of** PET/CT, but PET/CT has excellent sensitivity and specificity in this setting, so these studies are generally not medically necessary **in addition to** a PET/CT as they add additional radiation without a clear impact on management.

For suspected local recurrence, CT or MRI of the primary site (neck/face) is supported, as well as CT of the chest as lung and mediastinal nodes are the most common site of metastatic disease at recurrence, often without pulmonary symptoms. PET/CT has a relatively high false-positive rate due to ongoing inflammatory changes, and thus, these guidelines do not support PET/CT for suspected recurrence until recurrence is proven by biopsy.[1,6-12]


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

# Squamous Cell Carcinomas of the Head and Neck – Surveillance/Follow-up (ONC-3.4)

**ON.HN.0003.4.A**
**v2.0.2026**

| Indications | Medically Necessary Imaging Study |
|---|---|
| If post-resection (with or without post-operative radiation therapy) CT or MRI imaging shows residual abnormalities | ONE of the following, once within 6 months of prior imaging:<br>• CT Neck with contrast (CPT® 70491)<br>OR<br>• MRI Orbits/Face/Neck without and with contrast (CPT® 70543) |
| Individuals treated with definitive radiotherapy | • A second PET/CT (CPT® 78815) is medically necessary 6 months after completion of therapy (i.e., 3 months from the prior PET) |
| Individuals treated with definitive radiation therapy or combined chemoradiation, and 6-month PET imaging is negative | Further surveillance imaging is not routinely medically necessary |
| After initial post-treatment study, for ANY of the following:<br>• Nasopharyngeal primary site<br>• Difficult physical exam due to the effects of treatment (e.g., scarring, etc.) or unable to visualize deep-seated primary site | Annually for 3 years:<br>• CT Neck with contrast (CPT® 70491) **or** MRI Orbits/Face/Neck without and with contrast (CPT® 70543) |
| • CT Chest is not medically necessary for surveillance. Individuals with smoking history may undergo annual low dose CT cancer screening if criteria are met (See: **Lung Cancer Screening (CH-33)** in the Chest Imaging Guidelines) | |


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

## Evidence Discussion

Timely detection and accurate assessment of the extent of recurrent disease will direct salvage therapy and improve prognosis. A thorough head and neck clinical examination will typically guide any additional imaging that may be necessary, after post-treatment baseline imaging. There is no controlled prospective data showing a survival benefit for long term surveillance imaging. 3-year disease free survival in individuals undergoing surveillance imaging vs those undergoing clinical surveillance only is not significantly different (41% vs 46%, P=0.91). Given the excellent NPV of PET/CT 3-6 months post therapy, and the fact that median time to recurrence is 6 months, cross sectional imaging is medically necessary once within 6 months of completion of therapy, following the initial post treatment PET/CT. For individuals whose primary tumor site cannot be evaluated with physical exam and for individuals with nasopharyngeal primary tumors, CT Neck or MRI Face/Orbit/Neck are medically necessary annually for 3 years, as 80% to 90% of recurrences occur within 3 years.

The role of annual CT Chest screening for surveillance of lung metastasis is controversial in head and neck cancer, following primary definitive treatment (surgery, XRT, or systemic therapy/XRT). Further study is needed to determine the extent of the positive effect and/or cost-effectiveness of this approach. Individuals with a heavy smoking history may be at increased risk, and may meet criteria for low-dose CT lung cancer screening as defined in CH-33 in the Chest Imaging Guidelines.[1,6-12]


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

# References (ONC-3)

**v2.0.2026**

1. Pfister DG, Spencer S, Adkins D, et al. National Comprehensive Cancer Network (NCCN) Guidelines Version 1.2026 – December 8, 2025 Head and Neck Cancers, available at: https://www.nccn.org/professionals/physician_gls/pdf/head-and-neck.pdf. Referenced with permission from the NCCN Clinical Practice Guidelines in Oncology (NCCN Guidelines™) for Head and Neck Cancer V1.2026 – December 8, 2025 ©2025 National Comprehensive Cancer Network, Inc. All rights reserved. The NCCN Guidelines™ and illustrations herein may not be reproduced in any form for any purpose without the express written permission of the NCCN. To view the most recent and complete version of the NCCN Guidelines™, go online to NCCN.org.
2. Goel R, Moore W, Sumer B, Khan S, Sher D, Subramaniam RM. Clinical practice in PET/CT for the management of head and neck squamous cell cancer. *AJR Am J Roentgenol.* 2017;209(2):289-303. doi:10.2214/AJR.17.18301.
3. Moncrieff M, Pywell S, Snelling A, et. al. Effectiveness of SPECT/CT imaging for sentinel node biopsy staging of primary cutaneous melanoma and patient outcomes. *Ann Surg Oncol.* 2022;29(2):767-775. doi:10.1245/s10434-021-10911-4.
4. Quartuccio N, Garau LM, Arnone A, et. al. Comparsion of 99mTc-labeled colloid SPECT/CT and planar lymphoscintigraphy in sentinel lymph node detection in patients with melanoma: a meta-analysis. *J Clin Med*. 2020;9(6):1680. doi:10.3390/jcm9061680.
5. Trinh BB, Chapman BC, Gleisner A, et al. SPECT/CT Adds Distinct Lymph Node Basins and Influences Radiologic Findings and Surgical Approach for Sentinel Lymph Node Biopsy in Head and Neck Melanoma. *Ann Surg Oncol*. 2018;25(6):1716-1722. doi:10.1245/s10434-017-6298-0
6. Gule-Monroe MK, Calle S, Policeni B, et al. ACR Appropriateness Criteria® Staging and Post-Therapy Assessment of Head and Neck Cancer. *J Am Coll Radiol*. 2023;20(11S):S521-S564. doi:10.1016/j.jacr.2023.08.008.
7. Marcus C. Use of FDG PET for Staging and Re-Staging of Head and Neck Squamous Cell Carcinoma. *Cancers (Basel)*. 2025;17(19):3140. Published 2025 Sep 27. doi:10.3390/cancers17193140
8. Moeller BJ, Rana V, Cannon BA, et al. Prospective risk-adjusted [18F] Fluorodeoxyglucose positron emission tomography and computed tomography assessment of radiation response in head and neck cancer. *J Clin Oncol.* 2009;27(15):2509-15. doi:10.1200/JCO.2008.19.3300.
9. Lowe VJ, Duan F, Subramaniam RM, et al. Multicenter Trial of [18F] fluorodeoxyglucose positron emission tomography/computed tomography staging of head and neck cancer and negative predictive value and surgical impact in the N0 neck: results from ACRIN 6685. *J Clin Oncol*. 2019;37(20):1704-1712. doi:10.1200/JCO.18.01182.
10. Awan MJ, Lavertu P, Zender C, et al. Post-treatment PET/CT and p16 status for predicting treatment outcomes in locally advanced head and neck cancer after definitive radiation. *Eur J Nucl Med Mol Imaging*. 2017;44(6):988-997. doi:10.1007/s00259-016-3612-1.
11. Chen AM, Harris JP, Gan M, et al. Posttreatment Surveillance Imaging After Radiation for Head and Neck Cancer. *JAMA Netw Open*. 2023;6(11):e2342825. doi:10.1001/jamanetworkopen.2023.42825
12. Heineman TE, Kuan EC, St John MA. When should surveillance imaging be performed after treatment for head and neck cancer? *Laryngoscope*. 2017;127:533-534.


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

Click Anywhere in the Header to Return to the Main Table of Contents



# Salivary Gland Cancers (ONC-4)

Guideline

Salivary Gland Cancers – General Considerations (ONC-4.0)
Salivary Gland Cancers – Suspected/Diagnosis (ONC-4.1)
Salivary Gland Cancers – Initial Work-up/Staging (ONC-4.2)
Salivary Gland Cancers – Restaging/Recurrence (ONC-4.3)
Salivary Gland Cancers – Surveillance/Follow-up (ONC-4.4)
References (ONC-4)


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

# Salivary Gland Cancers – General Considerations (ONC-4.0)

**ON.SG.0004.0.A**

**v2.0.2026**

- Salivary gland tumors may originate within the parotid, submandibular, sublingual or minor salivary glands in the mouth.
- Histological subtypes include:
  - mucoepidermoid
  - acinic
  - adenocarcinoma
  - adenoid cystic carcinoma
  - malignant myoepithelial tumors
  - squamous cell carcinoma
  - lymphoma and metastatic squamous carcinoma can occur in the parotid gland
- Over 80% of parotid gland tumors are benign. A bilateral parotid tumor is most likely Warthin's tumor.


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

# Salivary Gland Cancers – Suspected/ Diagnosis (ONC-4.1)

**ON.SG.0004.1.A**

**v2.0.2026**

- See: **Salivary Gland Disorders (NECK-11)** and **Neck Masses – Imaging (NECK-5.1)** in the Neck Imaging Guidelines for evaluation of salivary gland masses, salivary gland stones, and neck masses.


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

# Salivary Gland Cancers – Initial Work-up/ Staging (ONC-4.2)

**ON.SG.0004.2.A**
**v2.0.2026**

| Indication | Medically Necessary Imaging Study |
|---|---|
| Biopsy-proven malignancy | ONE of the following:<br>• MRI Orbits/Face/Neck without and with contrast (CPT® 70543)<br>• CT Neck with contrast (CPT® 70491)<br>• CT Neck without contrast (CPT® 70490) |
| Skull base invasion | • MRI Brain without and with contrast (CPT® 70553) |
| • Adenoid cystic carcinoma<br>• Lymphadenopathy in the neck<br>• Pulmonary signs or symptoms<br>• Abnormal chest x-ray | • CT Chest with contrast (CPT® 71260) or CT Chest without contrast (CPT® 71250) |
| Inconclusive findings on conventional imaging | • PET/CT (CPT® 78815) |

### Evidence Discussion

There are over 40 histologies of salivary gland malignancies, with different patterns of presentation and invasiveness. The choice of MRI vs CT depends on location of tumor, specific symptoms, and individual characteristics. CT may be useful to assess stones and sialadenitis, which may mimic tumor, and is superior for assessing cortical bone erosion. MRI is superior in the assessment of extent of soft tissue disease and perineural invasion. Contrast is recommended in all studies to better outline primary site and to better assess nodal involvement.

In individuals who present with metastatic disease outside the neck, 90% are lung/ chest node metastases. Metastatic disease to lung is most common with adenoid cystic carcinoma and chest imaging is supported in all individuals with this histology. Contrast should be used to allow for assessment of nodal disease in the chest. In other histologies, metastatic disease is less common, and thus chest imaging is only medically necessary in individuals with neck adenopathy, abnormal chest x-ray, or pulmonary signs and symptoms.


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

Perineural and skull base invasion may occur with salivary gland cancers, particularly with adenoid cystic carcinoma, where perineural spread is seen in 50% to 60% of individuals. When skull base invasion is clinically suspected, an MRI Brain with and without contrast is medically necessary in the interest of individual safety. MRI with and without gadolinium and with fat-saturated, T1 weighted MRI sequences is the most sensitive technique to evaluate for invasion of skull base and perineural invasion.

The role of PET/CT remains controversial in salivary gland cancers. Several studies show no statistically significant different in outcomes with imaging with PET/CT vs conventional imaging. The rate of change in treatment plan based on imaging with PET/CT is widely variable across studies, ranging from 15% to 47%. PET/CT is not adequate to distinguish benign from malignant parotid tumors. Benign tumors such as Warthin's tumor can have FDG uptake, and low-grade malignant tumors may not take up FDG. Healthy salivary glands may also exhibit FDG uptake and obscure tumors. While there is emerging evidence in the use of FDG-PET/CT and PET/MRI to assess for distant disease and perineural spread, it is not considered routine at this time and is not routinely recommended by the NCCN. PET/CT thus remains reserved as a problem-solving tool when conventional imaging is inconclusive.[1-13]


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

# Salivary Gland Cancers – Restaging/ Recurrence (ONC-4.3)

**ON.SG.0004.3.A**
**v2.0.2026**

| Indication | Medically Necessary Imaging Study |
|---|---|
| After complete surgical resection | One-time imaging to establish baseline within 3-4 months of surgical resection is medically necessary using ONE of the following:<br>• MRI Orbits/Face/Neck without and with contrast (CPT® 70543)<br>• CT Neck with contrast (CPT® 70491)<br>• CT Neck without contrast (CPT® 70490) |
| Individuals with unresected disease receiving systemic therapy (chemotherapy) | Every 2 cycles:<br>• CT Neck with contrast (CPT® 70491) OR MRI Orbits/Face/Neck without and with contrast (CPT® 70543)<br>• CT with contrast or MRI without and with for any other sites of disease |
| Recurrence or progression suspected based on new or worsening signs or symptoms | ONE of the following:<br>• CT Neck with contrast (CPT® 70491)<br>• MRI Orbits/Face/Neck without and with contrast (CPT® 70543)<br>In addition, for all individuals:<br>• CT Chest with contrast (CPT® 71260) |
| Inconclusive findings on conventional imaging | • PET/CT (CPT® 78815) |
| All other individuals | • No routine advanced imaging |

## Evidence Discussion

NCCN supported one-time imaging with CT or MRI to establish a new baseline for future comparison.[1] CT or MRI based on initial tumor and individual characteristics


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

is medically necessary every 2 cycles of systemic chemotherapy. If recurrence of progression is clinically suspected at any time, CT neck with contrast or MRI without and with contrast is medically necessary based on prior tumor characteristics and symptoms, per NCCN recommendations and American College of Radiology ACR Appropriateness Criteria®. The incidence of metastatic disease to the chest is higher at recurrence than at initial presentation, with 63% of individuals with metastatic recurrence presenting with metastatic disease to the chest, so CT Chest is medically necessary for suspected recurrence. Contrast should be used to allow better assessment of nodal disease, in addition to parenchymal lesions. PET/CT remains a tool for the clarification of inconclusive findings on conventional imaging. Any CNS symptoms warrant MRI with further guidance in guideline ONC-31.3.[1-13]


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

# Salivary Gland Cancers – Surveillance/ Follow-up (ONC-4.4)

**ON.SG.0004.4.A**
**v2.0.2026**

| Indication | Medically Necessary Imaging Study |
|---|---|
| Total surgical resection | • No routine advanced imaging |
| Unresectable or partially resected disease, including those treated with radiation therapy | • Either CT Neck with contrast (CPT® 70491) or MRI Orbits/Face/Neck without and with contrast (CPT® 70543) once within 6 months of completion of treatment |
| Adenoid cystic carcinoma | ANY of the following, annually for up to 10 years:<br>• CT Neck with contrast (CPT® 70491) or MRI Orbits/Face/Neck without and with contrast (CPT® 70543)<br>• CT Chest with contrast (CPT® 71260) or CT Chest without contrast (CPT® 71250) |

## Evidence Discussion

The mainstay of surveillance for head and neck cancers including salivary gland carcinoma are frequent history and physical examination. For most histologies, no survival benefit has been documented with imaging surveillance over clinical surveillance. The NCCN notes most recurrences are picked up by individual report of symptoms. For all histologies other than adenoid cystic carcinoma, guidelines support imaging of the primary tumor site once within 6 months from completion of therapy to establish post-treatment baseline, with further imaging guided by signs and symptoms of recurrence. Adenoid cystic carcinoma has the highest incidence of metastatic disease, with over 60 percent of individuals presenting with metastatic disease at recurrence having a history of this histology. They also have the longest risk of recurrence, with a median time to recurrence of 3 years with some recurrences occurring as late as 10 years from diagnosis. For individuals with a history of adenoid cystic carcinoma, CT Neck with contrast or MRI Orbit/Face/Neck as well as CT Chest with or without contrast are medically necessary annually for up to 10 years.[1-13]


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

# References (ONC-4)

**v2.0.2026**

1. Pfister DG, Spencer S, Adkins D et al. National Comprehensive Cancer Network (NCCN) Guidelines Version 1.2026 December 8, 2025 Head and Neck Cancers, available at: https://www.nccn.org/professionals/physician_gls/pdf/head-and-neck.pdf. Referenced with permission from the NCCN Clinical Practice Guidelines in Oncology (NCCN Guidelines™) for Head and Neck Cancer 1.2026 December 8, 2025. ©2025 National Comprehensive Cancer Network, Inc. All rights reserved. The NCCN Guidelines™ and illustrations herein may not be reproduced in any form for any purpose without the express written permission of the NCCN. To view the most recent and complete version of the NCCN Guidelines™, go online to NCCN.org.
2. Broski SM, Johnson DR, Packard AT, Hunt CH. 18F-fluorodeoxyglucose PET/Computed Tomography: Head and Neck Salivary Gland Tumors. *PET Clin*. 2022;17(2):249-263. doi:10.1016/j.cpet.2021.12.002
3. Seo YL, Yoon DY, Baek S, et al. Incidental focal FDG uptake in the parotid glands on PET/CT in patients with head and neck malignancy. *Eur Radiol*. 2015;25(1):171-177. doi:10.1007/s00330-0140339701.
4. Ma S, Liu Y. Diagnostic value of fluorine-18 fluorodeoxyglucose positron emission tomography/computed tomography in sublingual and submandibular salivary gland tumors. *Mol Clin Oncol*. 2020;13(4):27. doi:10.3892/mco.2020.2097
5. Nakajima R, Patel SG, Katabi N, et al. Diagnostic and Prognostic Utility of 18F-FDG PET/CT in Recurrent Salivary Gland Cancers. *AJR Am J Roentgenol*. 2021;216(5):1344-1356. doi:10.2214/AJR.20.23259
6. Garg M, Tudor-Green B, Bisase B. Current thinking in the management of adenoid cystic carcinoma of the head and neck. *British Journal of Oral and Maxillofacial Surgery*. 2019;57(8):716-721. doi:10.1016/j.bjoms.2019.07.021.
7. Geiger JL, Ismaila N, Beadle B, et al. Management of salivary gland malignancy: ASCO guideline. *Journal of Clinical Oncology*. 2021;39(17):1909-1941. doi:10.1200/JCO.21.00449.
8. Gule-Monroe MK, Calle S, Policeni B, et al. ACR Appropriateness Criteria® Staging and Post-Therapy Assessment of Head and Neck Cancer. *J Am Coll Radiol*. 2023;20(11S):S521-S564. doi:10.1016/j.jacr.2023.08.008.
9. National Cancer Institute PDQ for Salivary Gland Cancer Treatment-Health Professional Version. Salivary Gland Cancer Treatment (PDQ®) - NCI.
10. Bianchini C, Caracciolo M, Urso L, et al. Role of 18F-FDG PET/CT in evaluating lymph node status in patients with head and neck squamous cell carcinoma. *Acta Otorhinolaryngol Ital*. 2023;43(4):235-244. doi:10.14639/0392-100X-N2370
11. Larson CR, Wiggins RH. FDG-PET imaging of salivary gland tumors. *Semin Ultrasound CT MR*. 2019;40(5):391-399. doi:10.1053/j.sult.2019.07.003.
12. Yousem DM, Kraut MA, Chalian AA. Major salivary gland imaging. *Radiology*. 2000;216(1):19-29. doi:10.1148/radiology.216.1.r00jl4519.
13. Mimica X, McGill M, Hay A, et al. Distant metastasis of salivary gland cancer: Incidence, management, and outcomes. *Cancer*. 2020;126(10):2153-2162. doi:10.1002/cncr.32792.


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

Click Anywhere in the Header to Return to the Main Table of Contents



# Melanomas and Other Skin Cancers (ONC-5)

## Guideline

Melanoma – General Considerations (ONC-5.0)
Melanoma – Suspected/Diagnosis (ONC-5.1)
Melanoma – Initial Work-up/Staging (ONC-5.2)
Melanoma – Restaging/Recurrence (ONC-5.3)
Melanoma – Surveillance/Follow-up (ONC-5.4)
Non-Melanoma Skin Cancers – General Considerations (ONC-5.5)
Non-Melanoma Skin Cancers – Initial Work-up/Staging (ONC-5.6)
Non-Melanoma Skin Cancers – Restaging/Recurrence (ONC-5.7)
Non-Melanoma Skin Cancers – Surveillance/Follow-up (ONC-5.8)
Ocular Melanoma (ONC-5.9)
References (ONC-5)


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

# Melanoma – General Considerations (ONC-5.0)

**ON.SC.0005.0.A**

**v2.0.2026**

- Melanomas can metastasize in an unpredictable fashion.


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

# Melanoma – Suspected/Diagnosis (ONC-5.1)

**ON.SC.0005.1.A**

**v2.0.2026**

| Indication | Medically Necessary Imaging Study |
|---|---|
| All | • Imaging is not medically necessary until histologic diagnosis is confirmed |


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

Click Anywhere in the Header to Return to the Main Table of Contents



# Melanoma – Initial Work-up/Staging (ONC-5.2)

**ON.SC.0005.2.A**
**v2.0.2026**

| Indication | Medically Necessary Imaging Study |
|---|---|
| Stage 0 or IA (in situ or disease <1mm) | • Routine advanced imaging is not medically necessary |
| • Stage IB (<0.8mm with ulceration or 0.8-1mm without or with ulceration)<br>• Stage II (lesions >1mm thick, but node negative) | • CT with contrast or MRI without and with contrast of specific areas, only if signs or symptoms indicate need for further evaluation |
| For sentinel lymph node evaluation in stages IB and II | • Lymph system imaging (lymphoscintigraphy, CPT® 78195)<br>◦ SPECT/CT (CPT® 78830) if requested |
| Any of the following:<br>• Stage III (sentinel node positive, palpable regional nodes)<br>• Stage IV (metastatic) | • MRI Brain without and with contrast (CPT® 70553)<br>AND one of the following:<br>• PET/CT (CPT® 78815 or CPT® 78816)<br>OR<br>• CT Chest with contrast (CPT® 71260) and CT Abdomen and Pelvis with contrast (CPT® 74177) |
| • Head or neck primary site<br>• Palpable lymphadenopathy in the neck<br>• Mucosal melanoma of the head or neck region | In addition to above initial staging imaging, if PET/CT not performed:<br>• CT Neck with contrast (CPT® 70491) |
| • Primary site of melanoma is unknown **and** CT Chest, Abdomen, and Pelvis are negative | • PET/CT (CPT® 78815 or CPT® 78816) |


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

## Evidence Discussion

Formal diagnosis and clinical staging of melanoma needs to take place before any imaging is completed as 84% of individuals present with localized disease, 9% with regional disease, and 4% with distant metastatic disease. Stage 0 (in situ) or 1A does not require routine advanced imaging as the 5 year survival rate is >98% with very little risk for recurrence or metastases. For Stage IB or II disease, sentinel lymph node mapping is medically necessary and depending on results, survival rates range from 50% to 90% - that also incorporates tumor thickness, ulceration and mitotic rate. The yield of imaging in screening individuals with clinical Stage 0-II disease for asymptomatic distant metastatic disease is very low due to low sensitivity and false positive findings. Therefore, the NCCN does not recommend imaging unless needed for surgical planning or to evaluate specific signs or symptoms of disease. Stage III or IV disease can be staged using PET/CT or CT Chest/Abdomen/Pelvis, with PET/CT often preferred due to its superiority over CT in detecting distant metastases. Baseline MRI brain is medically necessary with or without symptoms due to high risk of CNS involvement estimated to be 15.8% at 5 years for Stage III and up to 60% overall in individuals with advanced stage disease. If primary site of melanoma is unknown and CT Chest/Abdomen/Pelvis negative, PET/CT can be performed due to its higher sensitivity and ability to image the extremities.[1,7,17-19]


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

# Melanoma – Restaging/Recurrence (ONC-5.3)

**ON.SC.0005.3.A**

**v2.0.2026**

- All recurrences should be confirmed histologically, except when excessive morbidity from a biopsy may occur, such as a biopsy requiring craniotomy.

| Indication | Medically Necessary Imaging Study |
|---|---|
| Individuals receiving chemotherapy, with measurable disease, every 2 cycles (commonly every 6 to 8 weeks) | • CT Chest with contrast (CPT® 71260); **and** CT Abdomen and Pelvis with contrast (CPT® 74177) |
| All in situ recurrences | • Restaging imaging is not medically necessary after adequate aggressive local therapy (See Surveillance below) |
| Documented or clinically suspected (see top of page regarding biopsy morbidity) recurrence at:<br>• True scar recurrence (if re-excision suggests more than in situ disease)<br>• In-transit disease<br>• Regional lymph nodes<br>• Metastatic site | • CT Chest with contrast (CPT® 71260); **and** CT Abdomen and Pelvis with contrast (CPT® 74177)<br>In addition, for all individuals:<br>• MRI Brain without and with contrast (CPT® 70553)<br>In addition, for head or neck primary:<br>• CT Neck with contrast (CPT® 70491) |
| ANY of the following:<br>• Inconclusive findings on conventional imaging<br>• Isolated metastatic site found on conventional imaging | • PET/CT (CPT® 78815 or CPT® 78816) |


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

| Indication | Medically Necessary Imaging Study |
|---|---|
| Brain imaging for:<br>• New discovery of metastatic disease or progression of metastatic disease<br>• Signs or symptoms of CNS disease<br>• If considering Interleukin (IL-2) therapy | • MRI Brain without and with contrast (CPT® 70553) |

**Evidence Discussion**

Individuals receiving chemotherapy with measurable disease can undergo CT Chest/Abdomen/Pelvis every 2 cycles. In situ recurrences do not require restaging imaging due to its high cure rate while recurrence at the primary site, in-transit disease, regional nodes and metastatic site can undergo CT Chest/Abdomen/Pelvis and MRI Brain due to the higher risk of CNS involvement. PET/CT is reserved for inconclusive findings or isolated metastatic site found on CT imaging to guide decisions on local versus systemic therapy. MRI Brain is also medically necessary for newly diagnosed or progressive metastatic disease, signs or symptoms of CNS involvement, or if IL-2 therapy is being considered.[1]


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

Click Anywhere in the Header to Return to the Main Table of Contents



# Melanoma – Surveillance/Follow-up (ONC-5.4)

**ON.SC.0005.4.A**
**v2.0.2026**

| Indication | Medically Necessary Imaging Study |
|---|---|
| Stage 0, IA, IB and IIA Melanomas | • No routine advanced imaging |
| Stage IIB, IIC, IIIA and IIIB Melanomas | • CT Chest (CPT® 71260) **and** CT Abdomen and Pelvis (CPT® 74177) with contrast every 6 months for 2 years, then annually for 3 years<br>• For melanoma arising from extremities, advanced imaging of the primary site is not routinely medically necessary for surveillance in asymptomatic individuals. |
| Stage IIIC and IV Melanomas | • CT Chest (CPT® 71260) **and** CT Abdomen and Pelvis (CPT® 74177) with contrast every 3 months for 2 years, then every 6 months for 3 years<br>• MRI Brain without and with contrast (CPT® 70553) annually for 3 years<br>• For melanoma arising from extremities, advanced imaging of the primary site is not routinely medically necessary for surveillance in asymptomatic individuals. |
| Mucosal Melanoma of the head or neck region | In addition to above stage-based surveillance imaging, ONCE within 6 months of completing all treatment:<br>• CT Neck with contrast (CPT® 70491) or MRI Orbits/Face/Neck without and with contrast (CPT® 70543)<br>• CT with contrast of any other involved body area |
| Liver metastases treated with focal therapy | • See: **Liver Metastases (ONC-31.2)** |


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

| Indication | Medically Necessary Imaging Study |
|---|---|
| Vulvar or vulvovaginal melanoma stage 0, IA, IB and IIA | Ultrasound of the Abdomen (CPT® 76700 or 76705) and/or Pelvis (CPT® 76856 or 76857) |
| Vulvar or vulvovaginal melanoma stage IIB or higher | CT Chest with contrast (CPT® 71260) and CT Abdomen and Pelvis with contrast (CPT® 74177) every 3 months for 2 years, and then every 6 months for 3 years |

**Evidence Discussion**

The majority of recurrences, especially in those with early stage disease, are detected clinically by either the individual or during physical exam thus supporting no surveillance imaging in stage 0, 1A, 1B and IIA disease. Furthermore, additional studies have reported low yield, significant false positivity (often associated with increased anxiety and medical costs), and risks of cumulative radiation exposure. Individuals with more advanced disease are more likely to recur, and recur more quickly, with the risk of recurrence reaching low levels after only 2.7 years, thereby supporting stage IIB/IIC as well as stage IIIA/IIIB undergoing CT Chest/Abdomen/Pelvis every 6 months for 2 years then annually for 3 years. Due to the even high risk of early distant recurrence, Stage IIIC/IV should undergo CT Chest/Abdomen/Pelvis every 3 months for 2 years then every 6 months for 3 years as well as MRI brain annually for 3 years. The utility of PET/CT scan in sentinel lymph positive stage III melanoma was minimal with only 2 out of 38 individuals (108 total scans) being true positive with 9 scans showing false positive results thus supporting CT rather than PET/CT imaging in this setting. For melanoma arising from extremities, advanced imaging of the primary site is not medically necessary in asymptomatic individuals. Mucosal melanoma of the head or neck region can also undergo on a one-time basis CT Neck or MRI Orbits/Face/Neck or CT of any other involved body area within 6 months of completing treatment.

The NCCN did not specify the type of imaging required during the workup, response assessment, or surveillance other than listing "cross-sectional with or without brain imaging" thus allowing the provider to determine if CT or PET/CT may be most appropriate. Among the many factors playing a role in this decision are cost, convenience, false positives/false negatives, dye, and radiation exposure.[1,21,22]


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

# Non-Melanoma Skin Cancers – General Considerations (ONC-5.5)

**ON.SC.0005.5.A**

**v2.0.2026**

- Advanced imaging is generally not medically necessary for basal cell and squamous cell skin cancers.
- PET/CT scan is not medically necessary for evaluation of non-melanoma skin cancers unless specified within the guidelines below (e.g., Merkel cell carcinoma).
- Merkel cell carcinoma is an unusual skin cancer with neuroendocrine-like histologic features, which has a high propensity (25% to 33%) for regional lymph node spread and occasionally, metastatic spread to lungs.
- Merkel cell carcinoma may present as a primary cancer or as a skin metastasis from a non-cutaneous primary neuroendocrine carcinoma (i.e., small cell lung cancer).

### Evidence Discussion

Advanced imaging to include PET/CT is generally not medically necessary for basal cell (BCC) or squamous cell (SCC) skin cancers. The incidence of metastatic BCC was found to be <1% at 14 years of follow-up while metastatic SCC is noted to be rare.[3,15,16]


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

# Non-Melanoma Skin Cancers – Initial Work-up/Staging (ONC-5.6)

**ON.SC.0005.6.A**
**v2.0.2026**

| Indication | Medically Necessary Imaging Study |
|---|---|
| Body area with unexplained signs or symptoms | • CT with contrast of that body area |
| Perineural invasion or local regional extension (i.e., bone; deep soft tissue) involvement | ONE of the following of the primary site:<br>• MRI without contrast **or** without and with contrast<br>• CT (contrast as requested) |
| Skin lesion may be a dermal metastasis from distant primary | • CT Chest (CPT® 71260) and CT Abdomen and Pelvis (CPT® 74177) with contrast<br>• PET/CT (CPT® 78815 or CPT® 78816) if conventional imaging (CT or MRI) is unable to identify a primary site |
| Squamous cell carcinoma head or neck skin with regional lymphadenopathy | • CT Neck (CPT® 70491) and CT Chest (CPT® 71260) with contrast |
| Merkel Cell carcinoma | • Lymph system imaging (lymphoscintigraphy, CPT® 78195) for sentinel lymph node evaluation<br>◦ SPECT/CT (CPT® 78830) if requested)<br>• PET/CT (CPT® 78815 or CPT® 78816) OR CT Chest with contrast (CPT® 71260) and CT Abdomen and Pelvis with contrast (CPT® 74177)<br>• CT with contrast of other involved body area(s) |
| Signs or symptoms of CNS involvement | • MRI Brain with and without contrast (CPT® 70553) |


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

## Evidence Discussion

A body area with unexplained signs or symptoms can undergo imaging with CT with contrast. For SCC, MRI or CT of the primary site with MRI favored if there is perineural or deep soft tissue involvement while CT is preferred for bone disease. If the skin lesion is felt to be a dermal metastasis from a distant primary, CT Chest/Abdomen/ Pelvis with contrast is the initial recommended imaging with PET/CT indicated if conventional imaging is unable to identify a primary site and especially if the primary tumor may involve an extremity.[3-5] For Merkel Cell carcinoma, whole-body FDG-PET/CT is preferred.[3]


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

# Non-Melanoma Skin Cancers – Restaging/Recurrence (ONC-5.7)

**ON.SC.0005.7.A**

**v2.0.2026**

- All recurrences should be confirmed histologically, except when excessive morbidity from a biopsy may occur, such as a biopsy requiring craniotomy.

| Indication | Medically Necessary Imaging Study |
|---|---|
| Recurrence where planned therapy is more extensive than simple wide local excision | • CT with contrast of the primary and recurrent site(s) |
| Suspected recurrence of Merkel cell carcinoma | • CT Chest (CPT® 71260) **and** CT Abdomen and Pelvis (CPT® 74177) with contrast<br>• CT with contrast of other symptomatic body area(s) |
| For the following (for Merkel cell carcinoma):<br>• Inconclusive findings on conventional imaging<br>• If no conventional imaging has been performed, and ONE of the following:<br>◦ Biopsy-proven recurrence<br>◦ Suspected in-transit metastatic disease from a primary site in the extremities | • PET/CT (CPT® 78815 or 78816) |
| Signs or symptoms of CNS involvement | • MRI Brain without and with contrast (CPT® 70553) |


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

## Evidence Discussion

For recurrences where planned therapy is more extensive than simple wide local excision, CT with contrast of primary site and recurrent site(s) is indicated. Merkel cell carcinoma recurrence can be evaluated with CT Chest/Abdomen/Pelvis plus any other symptomatic areas. PET/CT is medically necessary to evaluate for in-transit metastatic disease if the primary site is in the extremities. MRI Brain is medically necessary for signs or symptoms of CNS involvement.[3-5]


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

# Non-Melanoma Skin Cancers – Surveillance/Follow-up (ONC-5.8)

**ON.SC.0005.8.UOH**

**v2.0.2026**

| Indication | Medically Necessary Imaging Study |
|---|---|
| Merkel cell cancer with any of the following high-risk factors:<br>• Stage II-IV<br>• Male individuals<br>• Immunosuppression<br>• Merkel Cell polyomavirus negative status<br>• Age ≥70<br>• Non-sentinel lymph node metastases | • CT Chest (CPT® 71260) and CT Abdomen and Pelvis (CPT® 74177) with contrast every 6 months for 5 years<br>• Add CT Neck with contrast (CPT® 70491) if known prior neck disease or scalp/facial/neck disease |
| All others | • Routine advanced imaging for surveillance is not medically necessary<br>• Imaging only for signs and symptoms of recurrent disease |

**Evidence Discussion**

In node positive Merkel cell carcinoma, recurrence rates have been found to be up to 33% at 5 years. In addition, males are twice as likely to develop Merkel Cell carcinoma. Also, the likelihood of developing Merkel Cell increases with age. One study showed that 73.6% of Merkel Cell cases are diagnosed at age greater than 70.[24] Additional risk factors for recurrence of Merkel Cell are polyomavirus negative status, non-sentinel lymph node metastases, and immunosuppression. Routine imaging is not medically necessary for SCC or BCC in the absence of signs and symptoms of recurrence.[3-5]


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

# Ocular Melanoma (ONC-5.9)

ON.SC.0005.9.A
**v2.0.2026**

## General Considerations

- Approximately 95% of ocular melanomas arise from the uvea (iris, ciliary body and choroid) and 5% arise from the conjunctiva or orbit.
- Biopsy is usually not necessary for initial diagnosis of uveal melanoma but may be useful in cases when diagnosis is uncertain (e.g., amelanotic tumors, retinal detachment) or for prognostic analysis and risk stratification.
- Treatment is directed to the affected eye with systemic therapy reserved only for known metastatic disease.
- The most common site of metastatic disease is the liver.
- Surveillance of the affected eye is with clinical examination only; advanced imaging is supported for surveillance of systemic metastatic disease based on individual risk factors. See risk categories below for surveillance recommendations.

### Ocular Melanoma Risk Categories

| Low Risk | Medium Risk | High-Risk |
|---|---|---|
| T1 | T2 and T3 | T4 |
| Class IA | Class IB | Class 2 |
| Spindle cell histology | Mixed Spindle and Epitheloid cells | Epitheloid cell histology |
| No extraoccular extension | No extraoccular extension | Extraoccular extension present |
| No ciliary body involvement | No ciliary body involvement | Ciliary body involvement present |
| Chromosome mutations:<br>• Disomy 3<br>• EIF1AX mutation<br>• Gain of chromosome 6p | Chromosome mutations:<br>• SF3B1 mutation | Chromosome mutations:<br>• BAP1 mutation<br>• PRAME mutation<br>• Monosomy 3<br>• Gain of chromosome 8q |


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

| Indication | Medically Necessary Imaging Study |
|---|---|
| Initial staging of suspected or biopsy-proven uveal melanoma | ANY or ALL of the following:<br>• CT Chest with contrast (CPT® 71260)<br>• CT Abdomen and Pelvis with contrast (CPT® 74177), OR MRI Abdomen without and with contrast (CPT® 74183) with CT Pelvis with contrast (CPT® 72193), OR MRI Abdomen without and with contrast (CPT® 74183) with MRI Pelvis without and with contrast (CPT® 72197)<br>• MRI Orbits/Face/Neck without and with contrast (CPT® 70543) |
| Neurological signs/ symptoms | • MRI Brain without and with contrast (CPT® 70553) |
| Restaging/Suspected Recurrence | ANY or ALL of the following:<br>• MRI Brain without and with contrast (CPT® 70553)<br>• MRI Orbits/Face/Neck without and with contrast (CPT® 70543)<br>• CT Chest with contrast (CPT® 71260)<br>AND one of the following:<br>• CT Abdomen and Pelvis with contrast (CPT® 74177) OR<br>• MRI Abdomen without and with contrast (CPT® 74183) with CT Pelvis with contrast (CPT® 72193) OR<br>◦ Ultrasound Abdomen substituted for MRI Abdomen if requested<br>• MRI Abdomen without and with contrast (CPT® 74183) with MRI Pelvis without and with contrast (CPT® 72197) |
| Surveillance for Low Risk disease | Annually for 10 years:<br>• CT Chest with contrast (CPT® 71260)<br>• CT Abdomen with contrast (CPT® 74160) or MRI Abdomen without and with contrast (CPT® 74183) |
| Surveillance for Medium Risk disease | Every 6 months up to year 10:<br>• CT Chest with contrast (CPT® 71260)<br>• CT Abdomen with contrast (CPT® 74160) or MRI Abdomen without and with contrast (CPT® 74183) |


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

| Indication | Medically Necessary Imaging Study |
|---|---|
| Surveillance for High-risk disease | Every 3 months for 5 years, then every 6 months up to year 10:<br>• CT Chest with contrast (CPT® 71260)<br>• CT Abdomen with contrast (CPT® 74160) or MRI Abdomen without and with contrast (CPT® 74183) |

**Evidence Discussion**

Approximately 95% of ocular melanoma occur in the uvea and 5% from the conjunctiva or orbit. Biopsy may not be mandatory for diagnosis but should be performed if diagnosis is uncertain or for prognostic analysis and risk stratification. Less than 3% of cases present with metastatic disease with 5 year risk of metastasis ranging from 3% to 5% in Stage I to 44% or higher in Stage III. The most common site of metastatic disease is the liver (80%) but may also spread to the lungs, bone, skin/soft tissue and lymph nodes. Surveillance of the affected eye is with clinical examination only with advanced imaging supported based on individual risk factors. Initial staging includes MRI orbits/face/neck to determine extraocular extension that impacts treatment planning (radiation therapy versus enucleation). While the risk of baseline metastases may be low, the NCCN favors baseline staging before treatment to include CT Chest/Abdomen/Pelvis in addition to aforementioned MRI. MRI Brain is medically necessary with any neurologic signs or symptoms. Restaging/recurrence with same imaging as initial staging as well as including MRI Brain. Surveillance: Local recurrence is rare (<10%) and the development of metastatic disease is much more common (up to 70% up to 20 years after initial diagnosis) hence the following recommendations for surveillance that does not include local imaging unless clinically indicated. For low risk disease, CT Chest with CT or MRI of the abdomen annually for 10 years. For medium risk disease, same as low risk but every 6 months for a total of 10 years. For high-risk disease, every 3 months for 5 years, then annually for a total of 10 years. The NCCN recognized the optimal surveillance strategy is an issue of debate due to overall low yield of testing and the risk of cumulative radiation exposure.[2, 25]


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

# References (ONC-5)

**v2.0.2026**

1. Swetter SM, Johnson, D, Albertini MR, et al. National Comprehensive Cancer Network (NCCN) Guidelines Version 2.2025 – January 28, 2025 Melanoma: Cutaneous, available at: https://www.nccn.org/professionals/physician_gls/pdf/cutaneous_melanoma.pdf Referenced with permission from the NCCN Clinical Practice Guidelines in Oncology (NCCN Guidelines™) for Melanoma: Cutaneous V2.2025 – January 28, 2025 ©2025 National Comprehensive Cancer Network, Inc. All rights reserved. The NCCN Guidelines™ and illustrations herein may not be reproduced in any form for any purpose without the express written permission of the NCCN. To view the most recent and complete version of the NCCN Guidelines™, go online to NCCN.org.
2. Swetter S, Johnson D, Albertini MR, et al. National Comprehensive Cancer Network (NCCN) Guidelines Version 2.2025 – November 6, 2025 Melanoma: Uveal, available at: https://www.nccn.org/professionals/physician_gls/pdf/uveal.pdf Referenced with permission from the NCCN Clinical Practice Guidelines in Oncology (NCCN Guidelines™) for Melanoma: Uveal V2.2025 – November 6, 2025 ©2025 National Comprehensive Cancer Network, Inc. All rights reserved. The NCCN Guidelines™ and illustrations herein may not be reproduced in any form for any purpose without the express written permission of the NCCN. To view the most recent and complete version of the NCCN Guidelines™, go online to NCCN.org.
3. Bordeaux J, Blitzblau R, Aasi SZ, et al. National Comprehensive Cancer Network (NCCN) Guidelines Version 2.2026 – October 24, 2025 Merkel Cell Carcinoma, available at: https://www.nccn.org/professionals/physician_gls/pdf/mcc.pdf Referenced with permission from the NCCN Clinical Practice Guidelines in Oncology (NCCN Guidelines™) for Merkel Cell Carcinoma V2.2026 – October 24, 2025 ©2025 National Comprehensive Cancer Network, Inc. All rights reserved. The NCCN Guidelines™ and illustrations herein may not be reproduced in any form for any purpose without the express written permission of the NCCN. To view the most recent and complete version of the NCCN Guidelines™, go online to NCCN.org.
4. Bordeaux J, Aasi SZ, Alam M, et al. National Comprehensive Cancer Network (NCCN) Guidelines Version 1.2026 – September 2, 2025 Basal Cell Skin Cancer, available at: https://www.nccn.org/professionals/physician_gls/pdf/nmsc.pdf Referenced with permission from the NCCN Clinical Practice Guidelines in Oncology (NCCN Guidelines™) for Basal Cell Skin Cancer V1.2026 – September 2, 2025 ©2025 National Comprehensive Cancer Network, Inc. All rights reserved. The NCCN Guidelines™ and illustrations herein may not be reproduced in any form for any purpose without the express written permission of the NCCN. To view the most recent and complete version of the NCCN Guidelines™, go online to NCCN.org
5. Bordeaux J, Aasi SZ, Alam M, et al, National Comprehensive Cancer Network (NCCN) Guidelines Version 1.2026 – September 2, 2025 Squamous Cell Skin Cancer, available at: https://www.nccn.org/professionals/physician_gls/pdf/squamous.pdf Referenced with permission from the NCCN Clinical Practice Guidelines in Oncology (NCCN Guidelines™) for Squamous Cell Skin Cancer V1.2026 – September 2, 2025 ©2025 National Comprehensive Cancer Network, Inc. All rights reserved. The NCCN Guidelines™ and illustrations herein may not be reproduced in any form for any purpose without the express written permission of the NCCN. To view the most recent and complete version of the NCCN Guidelines™, go online to NCCN.org.
6. Abu-Rustum NR, Campos SM, Arend R. et al. National Comprehensive Cancer Network (NCCN) Guidelines Version 2.2026 – January 6, 2026. Vulvar Cancer (Squamous Cell Carcinoma), available at: htt ps://www.nccn.org/professionals/physician_gls/pdf/vulvar.pdf. Referenced with permission from the NCCN Clinical Practice Guidelines in Oncology (NCCN Guidelines™) for Vulvar Cancer (Squamous Cell Carcinoma) V2.2026 – January 6, 2026. ©2026 National Comprehensive Cancer Network, Inc. All rights reserved. The NCCN Guidelines™ and illustrations herein may not be reproduced in any form for any purpose without the express written permission of the NCCN. To view the most recent and complete version of the NCCN Guidelines™, go online to NCCN.org.
7. Schröer-Günther MA, Wolff RF, Westwood ME, et al. F-18-fluoro-2-deoxyglucose positron emission tomography (PET) and PET/computed tomography imaging in primary staging of patients with malignant melanoma: a systematic review. *Syst Rev*. 2012;1:62. doi:10.1186/2046-4053-1-62.
8. Howard MD. Melanoma Radiological Surveillance: A Review of Current Evidence and Clinical Challenges. *Yale J Biol Med.* 2020;93(1):207-213. Published 2020 Mar 27.


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

9. Groen LC, Lazarenko SV, Schreurs HW, Richir MC. Evaluation of PET/CT in patients with stage III malignant cutaneous melanoma. *Am J Nucl Med Mol Imaging*. 2019;9(2):168-175. Published 2019 Apr 15.
10. Carter TJ, Broadfoot J, Coupland SE, et al. Uveal Melanoma UK national guidelines: 2023 update. *Eur J Cancer*. 2025;228:115687. doi:10.1016/j.ejca.2025.115687
11. Moncrieff M, Pywell S, Snelling A, et. al. Effectiveness of SPECT/CT imaging for sentinel node biopsy staging of primary cutaneous melanoma and patient outcomes. *Ann Surg Oncol*. 2022;29(2):767-775. doi:10.1245/s10434-021-10911-4.
12. McGregor A, Kim S, Norwich-Cavanaugh A, et al. Clinical Value of Single-photon Emission Computed Tomography Combined With Computed Tomography for Sentinel Lymph Node Identification in Melanoma. *Ann Plast Surg*. 2019;82(4S Suppl 3):S192-S194. doi:10.1097/SAP.0000000000001895
13. Quartuccio N, Garau LM, Arnone A, et. al. Comparsion of 99mTc-labeled colloid SPECT/CT and planar lymphoscintigraphy in sentinel lymph node detection in patients with melanoma: a meta-analysis. *J Clin Med*. 2020;9(6):1680. doi:10.3390/jcm9061680.
14. Echanique KA, Ghazizadeh S, Moon A, et al. Head and neck melanomas: a 22-year experience of recurrence following sentinel lymph node biopsy. *Laryngoscope Investigative Otolaryngology*. 2021;6:738-746. doi:10.1002/lio2.605.
15. Licata G, Scharf, Ronchi A, et al. Diagnosis and management of melanoma of the scalp: a review of the literature. *Clinical, Cosmetic and Investigative Dermatology*. 2021;14:1435-1447. doi:10.2147/CCID.S293115.
16. Shreve C, Shropshire C, Cotter D. Metastatic Squamous cell carcinoma: a cautionary tale. *Cureus*, 2020;12(10): e10879.
17. Kappelin J, Green AC, Ingvar Å, Ahnlide I, Nielsen K. Incidence and trends of basal cell carcinoma in Sweden: a population-based registry study. *Br J Dermatol*. 2022;186(6):963-969. doi:10.1111/bjd.20964
18. Siegel RL, Kratzer TB, Giaquinto AN, Sung H, Jemal A. Cancer statistics, 2025. *CA Cancer J Clin*. 2025;75(1):10-45. doi:10.3322/caac.21871
19. Melanoma Survival Rates - Melanoma Research Alliance (curemelanoma.org)
20. Haydu L, Lo S, et al. Cumulative Incidence and predictors of CNS metastasis for patient with AJCC 8th edition stage III melanoma. *Journal of Clinical Oncology*. 2020;38.
21. van Opijnen MP, Dirven L, Coremans IEM, Taphoorn MJB, Kapiteijn EHW. The impact of current treatment modalities on the outcomes of patients with melanoma brain metastases: A systematic review. *Int J Cancer*. 2020;146(6):1479-1489. doi:10.1002/ijc.32696
22. Garbe C, Paul A, Kohler-Spath H, et al. Prospective evaluation of a follow-up schedule in cutaneous melanoma patients: recommendations for an effective follow-up strategy. *J Clin Oncol*. 2003;21:520-529.
23. Baker JJ, Meyers MO, Frank J, et al. Routine restaging PET/CT and detection of initial recurrence in sentinel lymph node positive stage III melanoma. *Am J Surg*. 2014;207:549-554.
24. Rajagopal S, Yao X, Abadir W, et al. Surveillance evaluations in patients with stage I, II, III, or resectable IV melanoma who were treated with curative intent: a systematic review. *Surgical Oncology*. 2024;54:102077. doi:10.1016/j.suronc.2024.102077.
25. Dennis LK, Brown HE, Arrington AK. Comparison of Prognostic Factors for Merkel Cell Carcinoma, Mucosal Melanoma and Cutaneous Malignant Melanoma: Insights into Their Etiologies. *Curr Oncol*. 2023;30(4):3974-3988. Published 2023 Mar 31. doi:10.3390/curroncol30040301
26. Alyea G, Mruthyunjaya P. Ocular melanoma. NORD Rare Diseases. Accessible from the NORD Rare Disease Database. https://rarediseases.org
27. Leitao M. M., Jr (2014). Management of vulvar and vaginal melanomas: current and future strategies. American Society of Clinical Oncology educational book. American Society of Clinical Oncology. Annual Meeting, e277–e281. https://doi.org/10.14694/EdBook_AM.2014.34.e277


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

Click Anywhere in the Header to Return to the Main Table of Contents



# Thyroid Cancer (ONC-6)

## Guideline

Thyroid Cancer – General Considerations (ONC-6.0)
Thyroid Cancer – Suspected/Diagnosis (ONC-6.1)
Thyroid Cancer – Initial Work-up/Staging (ONC-6.2)
Thyroid Cancer – Restaging/Recurrence (ONC-6.3)
Thyroid Cancer – Surveillance/Follow-up (ONC-6.4)
References (ONC-6)


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

# Thyroid Cancer – General Considerations (ONC-6.0)

**ON.TC.0006.0.A**

**v2.0.2026**

- Individuals of all ages with thyroid cancer are imaged according to this guideline.
- Whole-Body Thyroid Nuclear scan (also known as whole-body radioiodine scan) is coded with CPT® 78018. If CPT® 78018 is obtained and found to be positive, CPT® 78020 is medically necessary as an add-on test to evaluate the degree of iodine uptake.
- Single photon emission computed tomography (SPECT) imaging – Radiopharmaceutical Localization of Tumor SPECT (CPT® 78803 or CPT® 78831) or SPECT/CT Hybrid study (CPT® 78830 or CPT® 78832) may complement planar and pinhole imaging and can be approved as an add-on wherever radioiodine (RAI) scans are indicated.
- Whole-Body Thyroid Nuclear scan (also known as whole-body RAI scan) is the imaging modality of choice for differentiated thyroid cancers, as these are usually not well visualized on FDG-PET/CT scans. Individuals who have RAI-diagnostic scan negative and PET-positive disease will generally not respond to RAI treatment, whereas individuals who have PET-negative and RAI-diagnostic scan negative disease may still be candidates for empiric RAI treatment.
- Radioiodine (RAI) refractory disease is defined as: (i) the malignant/metastatic tissue does not ever concentrate RAI (no uptake outside the thyroid bed at the first therapeutic WBS), (ii)the tumor tissue loses the ability to concentrate RAI after previous evidence of RAI-avid disease (in the absence of stable iodine contamination), (iii) RAI is concentrated in some lesions but not in others, and (iv) metastatic disease progresses despite significant concentration of RAI.


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

# Thyroid Cancer – Suspected/Diagnosis (ONC-6.1)

**ON.TC.0006.1.A**

**v2.0.2026**

- See: **Thyroid Nodule (NECK-8.1)** in the Neck Imaging Guidelines for suspected thyroid malignancies.


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

Click Anywhere in the Header to Return to the Main Table of Contents



# Thyroid Cancer – Initial Work-up/Staging (ONC-6.2)

**ON.TC.0006.2.A**
**v2.0.2026**

| Follicular, Papillary, and Hürthle Cell (Oncocytic) Carcinomas | Medically Necessary Imaging Study |
|---|---|
| ONE of the following:<br>• Locally advanced disease or fixation suggested by clinical exam and/or ultrasound<br>• Substernal or bulky disease<br>• Disease precluding full ultrasound examination<br>• Vocal cord paresis | ONE of the following:<br>• MRI Neck without contrast (CPT® 70540)<br>• MRI Neck without and with contrast (CPT® 70543)<br>• CT Neck with contrast (CPT® 70491) if contrast study is necessary for complete pre-operative assessment and use of IV contrast will not delay post-operative use of RAI therapy. |
| • Extent of thyroid remnant cannot be accurately ascertained from the surgical report, neck ultrasound, or cross-sectional imaging<br>• Unresectable residual disease<br>• To assess for iodine-avid metastatic disease<br>• When the results may alter the decision to treat<br>• Prior to administration of RAI therapy | • Whole-Body Thyroid Nuclear scan (CPT® 78018)<br>◦ CPT® 78020 as an add-on test to evaluate the degree of iodine uptake<br>AND/OR<br>• SPECT (CPT® 78803, or CPT® 78831), OR SPECT/CT Hybrid study (CPT® 78830, or CPT® 78832) |


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

| Follicular, Papillary, and Hürthle Cell (Oncocytic) Carcinomas | Medically Necessary Imaging Study |
|---|---|
| Skeletal pain | • Bone scan (CPT® 78306)<br>See also: **Nuclear Medicine (NM) Imaging in Oncology (ONC-1.3)** for additional bone scan codes<br>• Whole-Body Thyroid Nuclear scan (CPT® 78018)<br>◦ CPT® 78020 as an add-on test to evaluate the degree of iodine uptake<br>AND/OR<br>• SPECT (CPT® 78803 or CPT® 78831), OR SPECT/CT Hybrid study (CPT® 78830, or CPT® 78832) |
| Suspicious findings on chest x-ray, US, or substernal extension of mass | • CT Chest without contrast (CPT® 71250) |
| All other individuals | • Routine preoperative advanced imaging is not medically necessary |

| Medullary Thyroid Carcinomas | Medically Necessary Imaging Study |
|---|---|
| ANY of the following:<br>• Elevated CEA levels<br>• Calcitonin level >300pg/mL<br>• Positive lymph nodes | ANY or ALL of the following:<br>• CT Neck with contrast (CPT® 70491)<br>• CT Chest with contrast (CPT® 71260)<br>• CT Abdomen with contrast (CPT® 74160) **or** CT Abdomen without and with contrast (CPT® 74170)<br>• MRI Abdomen without and with contrast (CPT® 74183)<br>• Bone scan (CPT® 78306) see also: **Nuclear Medicine (NM) Imaging in Oncology (ONC-1.3)** for additional bone scan codes |


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

| Medullary Thyroid Carcinomas | Medically Necessary Imaging Study |
|---|---|
| Skeletal pain | • Bone scan (CPT® 78306) see also: **Nuclear Medicine (NM) Imaging in Oncology (ONC-1.3)** for additional bone scan codes |
| Inconclusive findings on conventional imaging | • $^{68}$Gallium-labeled PET/CT (CPT® 78815) |

| Anaplastic/Poorly Differentiated Thyroid Carcinomas | Medically Necessary Imaging Study |
|---|---|
| All | ANY or ALL of the following:<br>• CT Neck with contrast (CPT® 70491) or MRI Orbit, Face, Neck without and with contrast (CPT® 70543)<br>• CT Chest with contrast (CPT® 71260)<br>• CT Abdomen and Pelvis with contrast (CPT® 74177)<br>• FDG PET/CT (CPT® 78815)<br>• CT Head with contrast (CPT® 70460) |
| Skeletal pain | • Bone scan (CPT® 78306) see also: **Nuclear Medicine (NM) Imaging in Oncology (ONC-1.3)** for additional bone scan codes |

**Evidence Discussion**

For follicular, papillary and Hurthle cell carcinomas, focused imaging of the neck using contrast enhanced CT or MRI is medically necessary to assess extent of local disease and guide pre-surgical planning. CT Chest with contrast may be medically necessary based on these results to include substernal extension of the thyroid mass. There are no established guidelines regarding the minimum gap between contrast enhanced CT with iodinated contrast agents and iodine-131/123 for whole body scintigraphy (WBS) in the treatment of residual disease and distant metastases, with majority recommendation of a gap of 4 weeks and 2 months. In the post-thyroidectomy setting, WBS is medically necessary to assess for either extent of thyroid remnant, when results may alter the decision to treat and prior to administration of radioactive iodine (RAI) therapy. In the presence of skeletal pain, whole body bone scan or WBS is medically necessary to assess for osseous metastases. Medullary thyroid carcinoma is frequently aggressive


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

with 48% of individuals having localized disease, 35% with tumors extending beyond the thyroid into surrounding tissues or regional nodes and 13% with distant metastases typically to the lung, liver or bones. Due to these concerns, more extensive staging is medically necessary that includes contrast enhanced CT of neck, chest and abdomen as well as bone scan if there are elevated CEA levels, calcitonin level >300 pg/nL or positive lymph nodes. Skeletal pain can be imaged with bone scan. Gallium-68 labelled dotatate PET/CT or if not available Indium-111-pentetreotide (Octreoscan) is useful due to high expression of somatostatin receptors in MTC and is medically necessary if conventional imaging is inconclusive due to its high sensitivity compared to other imaging modalities especially if calcitonin levels are >500. Anaplastic thyroid carcinoma is the most aggressive variant of thyroid cancer with distant metastases in over 50% of cases at presentation most commonly involving the lung, bone and brain with 5 year survival <10%. Complete staging with CT Neck, Chest, Abdomen and Pelvis is medically necessary in conjunction with FDG PET/CT as the diagnostic contrasted CTs may better elucidate vascular and airway involvement. MRI of the brain is also medically necessary.[4,6,9,10,13]


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

# Thyroid Cancer – Restaging/Recurrence (ONC-6.3)

**ON.TC.0006.3.A**
**v2.0.2026**

| Follicular, Papillary, and Hürthle Cell (Oncocytic) Carcinomas | Medically Necessary Imaging Study |
|---|---|
| Post-thyroidectomy, if gross residual disease | ONE of the following:<br>• MRI Neck without contrast (CPT® 70540)<br>• MRI Neck without and with contrast (CPT® 70543)<br>• CT Neck with contrast (CPT® 70491) |
| Within 2 weeks (ideally 7 to 10 days) following the administration of Radioactive Iodine therapy | • Whole-body thyroid nuclear scan (CPT® 78018)<br>• The following may be approved as an add-on test:<br>◦ CPT® 78020 to evaluate the degree of iodine uptake<br>◦ SPECT (CPT® 78803, or CPT® 78831), or SPECT/CT Hybrid study (CPT® 78830, or CPT® 78832) |
| ANY of the following:<br>• Recurrence documented by biopsy<br>• Increasing thyroglobulin level without Thyrogen® stimulation<br>• Thyroglobulin level >2 ng/mL or higher than previous after Thyrogen® stimulation<br>• Anti-thyroglobulin antibody present<br>• Evidence of residual thyroid tissue on ultrasound or physical exam after thyroidectomy or ablation | ALL of the following:<br>• CT Neck with contrast (CPT® 70491) or MRI Neck without and with contrast (CPT® 70543)<br>• CT Chest with contrast (CPT® 71260)<br>• CT with contrast of any symptomatic body area<br>• Whole-body Thyroid Nuclear Scan (CPT® 78018)<br>◦ As an add-on test:<br>▪ CPT® 78020 to evaluate the degree of iodine uptake<br>▪ SPECT (CPT® 78803 or CPT® 78831), or SPECT/CT Hybrid study (CPT® 78830, or CPT® 78832) |


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

| Follicular, Papillary, and Hürthle Cell (Oncocytic) Carcinomas | Medically Necessary Imaging Study |
|---|---|
| ANY of the following:<br>• Rising thyroglobulin level with negative CT scans AND radioiodine scan<br>• Inconclusive findings on conventional imaging (CT scans and radioiodine scan)<br>• Known radioiodine-refractory disease and CT scans are negative or inconclusive | • FDG PET/CT (CPT® 78815) |
| Measurable metastatic disease on systemic therapy (no more often than every 2 cycles) | • CT Chest with contrast (CPT® 71260)<br>• CT with contrast of affected or symptomatic body area |

| Medullary Thyroid Carcinoma | Medically Necessary Imaging Study |
|---|---|
| ANY of the following:<br>• Elevated CEA levels<br>• Calcitonin level ≥150 pg/mL<br>• Signs or symptoms of recurrence | ANY or ALL of the following:<br>• CT Neck with contrast (CPT® 70491) or MRI Neck without and with contrast (CPT® 70543)<br>• CT Chest with contrast (CPT® 71260)<br>• CT Abdomen either with (CPT® 74160) or without and with contrast (CPT® 74170)<br>• Bone scan (CPT® 78306)<br>See also: **Nuclear Medicine (NM) Imaging (ONC-1.3)** in Oncology |
| Inconclusive conventional imaging with calcitonin ≥150 pg per mL | • $^{68}$Gallium-labeled DOTATATE PET/CT (CPT® 78815) |
| Calcitonin level >500 | ONE of the following:<br>• MRI Abdomen without and with contrast (CPT® 74183)<br>• Whole-body MRI (CPT® 76498) |


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

| Anaplastic/Poorly Differentiated Thyroid Carcinoma | Medically Necessary Imaging Study |
|---|---|
| Measurable metastatic disease on systemic treatment | Any of the following every 2 cycles (usually every 6-8 weeks):<br>• CT Neck with contrast (CPT® 70491)<br>• CT Chest with contrast (CPT® 71260)<br>• CT Abdomen and Pelvis with contrast (CPT® 74177)<br>• CT of any other involved/symptomatic sites |
| Signs or symptoms of recurrence | ONE of the following combinations, not both:<br>• CT Neck with contrast (CPT® 70491), CT Chest with contrast (CPT® 71260), CT Abdomen and Pelvis with contrast (CPT® 74177) **OR**<br>• FDG PET/CT (CPT® 78815)<br>In addition to one of the above studies:<br>• MRI Brain without and with contrast (CPT® 70553) |

**Evidence Discussion**

For Follicular, Papillary and Hurthle Cell carcinomas, CT or MRI neck can be performed if gross residual disease is found in the neck post-thyroidectomy. RAI therapy is administered after thyroidectomy for several reasons to include remnant ablation, treat presumed foci of neoplastic cells and/or treat persistent or recurrent disease. Within 2 weeks of treatment, WBS is medically necessary to stage the disease and document the I-131 avidity of any structural lesion. Follow-up is usually a combination of exam, laboratories (thyroglobulin and anti-thyroglobulin antibody levels) and ultrasound. If there is concern for recurrence, CT of the neck/chest as well as any symptomatic body area along with WBS should be performed to complete restaging. In the setting of rising thyroglobulin level with negative conventional imaging, inconclusive conventional imaging or known RAI-refractory disease with negative/inconclusive CT scans, FDG PET/CT can be performed due to its high sensitivity (94%) and specificity (80% to 84%) compared to conventional imaging. FDG uptake is associated with a worse prognosis and refractoriness to RAI therapy. Initial imaging for MTC recurrence based on elevated CEA levels, calcitonin level >150 pg/mL or signs/symptoms of recurrence should


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

undergo CT or MRI Neck, CT Chest and Abdomen, and bone scan. If this imaging is inconclusive and calcitonin is >150, Gallium-68 labeled dotatate PET/CT or if not available Indium-111-pentetreotide (Octreoscan) is medically necessary as outlined in the initial work-up/staging section. In individuals with very high calcitonin levels, whole-body MRI or MRI liver are useful for imaging evaluation to evaluate for metastases.[1] Initial imaging for ATC recurrence includes either CT Neck, Chest, Abdomen and Pelvis or FDG PET/CT as well as MRI Brain due to its aggressive and widespread behavior. For individuals on systemic therapy, CT of neck/chest/abdomen/pelvis with any additional involved/symptomatic sites can be done every 2 cycles.[11]


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

Click Anywhere in the Header to Return to the Main Table of Contents



# Thyroid Cancer – Surveillance/Follow-up (ONC-6.4)

**ON.TC.0006.4.A**
**v2.0.2026**

| Follicular, Papillary, and Hürthle Cell (Oncocytic) Carcinomas | Medically Necessary Imaging Study |
|---|---|
| Individuals being monitored on active surveillance | • Neck ultrasound (CPT® 76536) every 6 months for 2 years, and then annually thereafter |
| All other individuals post-treatment | • Neck ultrasound (CPT® 76536) once at 6-12 months post-treatment, and then annually thereafter |
| For individuals with ANY of the following:<br>• Node positive disease<br>• RAI-avid metastases | • Whole-body Thyroid Nuclear Scan annually (CPT® 78018)<br>◦ CPT® 78020 as an add-on test to evaluate the degree of iodine uptake<br>AND/OR<br>• SPECT (CPT® 78803, or CPT® 78831), OR SPECT/CT Hybrid study (CPT® 78830, or CPT® 78832) |

| Medullary Carcinomas | Medically Necessary Imaging Study |
|---|---|
| All individuals | • CEA and calcitonin are required for monitoring medullary carcinomas<br>• Routine surveillance imaging is not medically necessary |


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

| Anaplastic/Poorly Differentiated Thyroid Carcinomas | Medically Necessary Imaging Study |
|---|---|
| All individuals | Every 3 months for 2 years:<br>• CT Neck with contrast (CPT® 70491)<br>• CT Chest with contrast (CPT® 71260)<br>• CT Abdomen and Pelvis with contrast (CPT® 74177)<br>• MRI Brain without and with contrast (CPT® 70553) |

**Evidence Discussion**

For follicular, papillary and Hurthle cell carcinomas, all individuals are monitored with ultrasound either every 6 months for 2 years then annually (active surveillance) or once at 6-12 months then annually (post-treatment). For node positive disease or RAI-avid metastases, WBS annually. MTC is monitored with CEA and calcitonin levels with no routine imaging medically necessary. ATC requires close monitoring with CT Neck/ Chest/Abdomen/Pelvis and MRI Brain every 3 months for 2 years as the vast majority of relapses occur within this timeframe.[1,9]


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

# References (ONC-6)

**v2.0.2026**

1. Haddad RH, Bischoff L, Salgado SA, et al. National Comprehensive Cancer Network (NCCN) Guidelines Version 1.2025 – March 27, 2025 Thyroid carcinoma, available at: https://www.nccn.org/professionals/physician_gls/pdf/thyroid.pdf Referenced with permission from the NCCN Clinical Practice Guidelines in Oncology (NCCN Guidelines™) for Thyroid carcinoma V1.2025 – March 27, 2025 ©2025 National Comprehensive Cancer Network, Inc. All rights reserved. The NCCN Guidelines™ and illustrations herein may not be reproduced in any form for any purpose without the express written permission of the NCCN. To view the most recent and complete version of the NCCN Guidelines™, go online to NCCN.org.
2. Slough CM, Randolph GW. Workup of well-differentiated thyroid carcinoma. *Cancer Control*. 2006;13(2):99-105. doi:10.1177/107327480601300203.
3. Bible KC, Kebebew E, Brierley J, et al. 2021 American Thyroid Association Guidelines for Management of Patients with Anaplastic Thyroid Cancer. *Thyroid*. 2021;31(3):337-386. doi:10.1089/thy.2020.0944
4. Wells SA Jr, Asa SL, Dralle H, et al. American Thyroid Association guidelines for the management of medullary thyroid carcinoma. *Thyroid.* 2015;25(6):567-610. doi:10.1089/thy.2014.0335.
5. Yeh MW, Bauer AJ, Bernet VA, et al. American Thyroid Association statement on preoperative imaging for thyroid cancer surgery. *Thyroid.* 2015;25:3-14. doi:10.1089/thy.2014.0096.
6. Haugen BR, Alexander EK, Bible KB, et al. 2015 American Thyroid Association management guidelines for adult patients with thyroid nodules and differentiated thyroid cancer: the American Thyroid Association guidelines task force on thyroid nodules and differentiated thyroid cancer. *Thyroid*. 2016;26(1):1-133. doi:10.1089/thy.2015.0020.
7. Silberstein EB, Alavi A, Balon HR, et al. The SNMMI Practice Guideline for therapy of thyroid disease with $^{131}$I3.0.*J Nucl Med*. 2012;53(10):1633-1651. doi:10.2967/jnumed.112.105148.
8. Avram AM, Fig LM, Frey KA, Gross MD, Wong KK. Preablation 131-I scans with SPECT/CT in postoperative thyroid cancer patients: what is the impact on staging? *J Clin Endocrinol Metab*. February 21, 2013 [Epub ahead of print].
9. Chakrabarty N, Mahajan A, Basu S, D'Cruz AK. Comprehensive review of the imaging recommendations for diagnosis, staging, and management of thyroid carcinoma. *J Clin Med*. 2024;13(10):2904. doi:10.3390/jcm13102904.
10. Kushchayev SV, Kushchayeva YS, Tella SH, Glushko T, Pacak K, Teytelboym OM. Medullary thyroid carcinoma: An update on imaging. *J Thyroid Res*. 2019;2019:1893047. doi:10.1155/2019/1893047.
11. Filetti S, Durante C, Hartle D, et al. Thyroid cancer: ESMO clinical practice guidelines for diagnosis, treatment and follow-up. *Ann Oncol*. 2019;30(12):1856-1883. doi:10.1093/annonc/mdz400.
12. Traylor KS. Computed Tomography and MR Imaging of Thyroid Disease. *Radiol Clin North Am*. 2020;58(6):1059-1070. doi:10.1016/j.rcl.2020.07.004
13. Pajak C, Cadili L, Nabata K, Wiseman SM. 68Ga-DOTATATE-PET shows promise for diagnosis of recurrent or persistent medullary thyroid cancer: A systematic review. *Am J Surg*. 2022;224(2):670-675. doi:10.1016/j.amjsurg.2022.03.046


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

# Small Cell Lung Cancer (ONC-7)

Guideline

Small Cell Lung Cancer – General Considerations (ONC-7.0)
Small Cell Lung Cancer – Suspected/Diagnosis (ONC-7.1)
Small Cell Lung Cancer – Initial Work-up/Staging (ONC-7.2)
Small Cell Lung Cancer – Restaging/Recurrence (ONC-7.3)
Small Cell Lung Cancer – Surveillance/Follow-up (ONC-7.4)
References (ONC-7)


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

# Small Cell Lung Cancer – General Considerations (ONC-7.0)

ON.SL.0007.0.A

**v2.0.2026**

- Combined histologies of small and non-small cell are considered small cell lung cancer. Use this guideline for imaging recommendations for small and large cell high-grade (poorly differentiated) neuroendocrine tumors of the lung.
- Imaging is presently guided by traditional staging of limited or extensive disease.
  - Extensive stage is either metastatic disease or an extent which cannot be encompassed by a single radiotherapy portal.
  - Limited staging is confined to one side of the chest.
- Individuals treated curatively for SCLC are at increased risk for developing a second lung cancer. If new lung nodule is seen on imaging without any evidence of other systemic disease, follow **Lung Metastases (ONC-31.1)** for work-up of nodule.
- For carcinoid (low-grade neuroendocrine tumors) of the lung, see: **Neuroendocrine Cancers and Adrenal Tumors (ONC-15)**.

### Health Equity Considerations

The National Cancer Institute (NCI) has estimated 226,650 new cases of lung cancer and 124,730 estimated deaths from lung cancer (Non-Small Cell Lung Cancer and Small Cell Lung Cancer combined) in the United States in 2025. Lung cancer is the leading cause of cancer-related mortality in the United States. These poor survival factors are related to tobacco use, late-stage diagnosis, and underutilization of new and effective treatments. While smoking is the most important risk factor, other risk factors include secondhand smoke, occupational exposure, such as to asbestos, radiation exposure, such as from radiation therapy or radon exposure, air pollution, family history, and HIV infection.[12]

The U.S. Preventive Services Task Force (USPSTF) recommends annual screening for lung cancer with low-dose computed tomography (LDCT) in adults aged 55 to 80 years who have a 30 pack-year smoking history and currently smoke or who have quit within the past 15 years.[13] According to the American Lung Association, individuals of color are less likely to be diagnosed early, less likely to receive surgical treatment, and more likely to receive no treatment.[14] Populations with a low socioeconomic status also have barriers to lung cancer screening due to lack of or poor insurance and under-resourced clinics. In addition, after diagnosis, they have lower odds of receiving treatments, including surgery, chemotherapy, and immunotherapy, leading to poorer survival.[15] Multiple strategies are needed to address disparities, including enhancing


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

access to care and implementing tools such as real-time tracking, individual navigation, and mobile screening units.[16]


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

# Small Cell Lung Cancer – Suspected/ Diagnosis (ONC-7.1)

**ON.SL.0007.1.A**
**v2.0.2026**

| Indication | Medically Necessary Imaging Study |
|---|---|
| • Abnormal chest x-ray or clinical suspicion remains high despite a normal chest x-ray in symptomatic individual | • CT Chest without contrast (CPT® 71250)<br>**or**<br>• CT Chest with contrast (CPT® 71260) |
| • Pulmonary nodule <8mm in size noted on CT Chest | • See: **Incidental Pulmonary Nodules Detected on CT Images (CH-16.2)** in the Chest Imaging Guidelines |
| • Pulmonary nodule 8mm (0.8cm) to 30mm (3cm) seen on CT Chest or MRI Chest | • PET/CT (CPT® 78815)<br>• PET is Positive: Qualifies as initial staging PET/CT |
| • Pulmonary mass 31mm (3.1cm) or greater seen on CT or MRI | • PET/CT (CPT® 78815) prior to biopsy if ONE or MORE of the following applies:<br>◦ Definitive treatment with resection or radiation will be utilized instead of biopsy if PET confirms limited disease<br>◦ Multiple possible biopsy options are present within the chest and PET findings will be used to determine the most favorable biopsy site<br>• Biopsy is indicated prior to PET imaging for all other indications in pulmonary masses ≥31mm (3.1cm) in size |
| • Mediastinal/Hilar Mass | See: **Lymphadenopathy (CH-2)** in the Chest Imaging Guidelines |
| • Paraneoplastic syndrome suspected | See: **Paraneoplastic Syndromes (ONC-30.3)** |


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

## Evidence Discussion

For individuals with suspected lung cancer and an abnormal chest x-ray or a high suspicion for lung cancer with symptoms of lung cancer, a CT Chest is medically necessary, with or without contrast. If a PET/CT is performed in the workup of a pulmonary nodule and is positive, it qualifies as the initial staging PET. The radiotracer supported for PET/CT for lung cancer is 18-FDG.[6,9] While some small cell lung cancer (SCLC) has a neuroendocrine component, the sensitivity, specificity and predictive value of dotatate PET/CT are uncertain at this time and dotatate PET is not supported.[6,9] Lesions 31mm or greater are considered masses rather than nodules, and should be biopsied rather than re-imaged with PET/CT.[5]


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

# Small Cell Lung Cancer – Initial Work-up/ Staging (ONC-7.2)

**ON.SL.0007.2.A**
**v2.0.2026**

| Indication | Medically Necessary Imaging Study |
|---|---|
| Initial staging | ANY or ALL of the following:<br>• CT Chest with contrast (CPT® 71260)<br>• CT Abdomen and Pelvis with contrast (CPT® 74177)<br>• MRI Brain without and with contrast (CPT® 70553)<br>• Bone scan (CPT® 78306), if PET/CT not being done or not available (See also: **Nuclear Medicine (NM) Imaging in Oncology (ONC-1.3)** for additional bone scan codes) |
| • To confirm the extent of disease when initial CT Chest/Abdomen/Pelvis and MRI Brain indicate limited stage disease (confined to one side of the chest)<br>• To evaluate inconclusive findings on conventional imaging | • PET/CT (CPT® 78815) |
| • Inconclusive bone findings on PET/CT or bone scan | • MRI without and with contrast of the involved body site |

### Evidence Discussion

SCLC has widespread distant metastatic potential, with 2/3 of individuals having metastatic disease at diagnosis and 10% to 15% including central nervous system disease.[6,9] Diagnostic contrasted CTs of chest, abdomen and pelvis as well as MRI Brain with and without contrast are medically necessary.[1] If PET has been completed in the pulmonary nodule workup, a repeat PET/CT is generally not medically necessary. If a PET/CT was done prior to diagnosis and conventional imaging clearly shows extensive stage disease, a PET/CT does not change management. However, if a PET/CT was not done prior to diagnosis, a PET/CT is medically necessary to confirm limited stage disease prior to treatment, as FDG PET/CT changes stage versus conventional


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

imaging in up to 25% of individuals.[6,9] Bony metastatic disease is not unusual in SCLC; thus, evaluation for bony metastatic disease is medically necessary.[1,6]


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

# Small Cell Lung Cancer – Restaging/ Recurrence (ONC-7.3)

**ON.SL.0007.3.A**
**v2.0.2026**

| Indication | Medically Necessary Imaging Study |
|---|---|
| Treatment response in individuals treated with sequential chemotherapy-radiation or chemotherapy alone*<br><br>*For individuals receiving systemic therapy and concurrent radiation therapy, response assessment is recommended only after completion of initial therapy (see box below). | After every 2 cycles, ANY or ALL of the following:<br>• CT Chest with contrast (CPT® 71260)<br>• CT Abdomen and Pelvis with contrast (CPT® 74177)<br>• MRI Brain without and with contrast (CPT® 70553) for measurable brain metastases being treated with systemic therapy<br>• Bone scan (CPT® 78306) (See also: **Nuclear Medicine (NM) Imaging in Oncology (ONC-1.3)** for additional bone scan codes)<br>• PET is not medically necessary for evaluation of treatment response in SCLC but can be considered on a case-by-case basis. |
| Following completion of planned treatment:<br>• Chemoradiation<br>• Adjuvant chemotherapy<br>• Radiation | ANY or ALL of the following:<br>• CT Chest with contrast (CPT® 71260)<br>• CT Abdomen and Pelvis with contrast (CPT® 74177)<br>• MRI Brain without and with contrast (CPT® 70553) for measurable brain metastases being treated with systemic therapy<br>• Bone scan (CPT® 78306) (See also: **Nuclear Medicine (NM) Imaging in Oncology (ONC-1.3**) for additional bone scan codes) |


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

| Indication | Medically Necessary Imaging Study |
|---|---|
| Restaging (suspected recurrence) | ANY or ALL of the following:<br>• CT Chest with contrast (CPT® 71260)<br>• CT Abdomen and Pelvis with contrast (CPT® 74177)<br>• MRI Brain without and with contrast (CPT® 70553)<br>• Bone scan (CPT® 78306) (See: **Nuclear Medicine (NM) Imaging in Oncology (ONC-1.3)** for additional bone scan codes)<br>• PET is not medically necessary for evaluation of recurrent SCLC but can be considered on a case-by-case basis. |
| For response assessment following primary treatment | • MRI Brain without and with contrast (CPT® 70553) |

**Evidence Discussion**

Conventional imaging with contrasted CT Chest, Abdomen and Pelvis is medically necessary every 2 cycles of chemotherapy and at the end of chemoradiation. MRI Brain with and without contrast is medically necessary when there is measurable CNS disease being treated with systemic therapy. If prophylactic cranial irradiation (PCI) is planned, an MRI brain is medically necessary at end of initial treatment as some individuals will harbor asymptomatic brain metastases and will require different management, and PCI would expose the individual to radiation doses and neurotoxicity without benefit.[1,7] CT Chest, Abdomen and Pelvis as well as MRI Brain and bone scan are medically necessary if recurrence is suspected. Further literature is emerging to determine the role of FDG PET-CT for treatment response and suspected recurrence; these guidelines do not routinely support PET/CT for treatment response or suspected recurrence of SCLC, but provide flexibility on a case by case basis, particularly for individuals with bony metastatic disease.[1,8,9]


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

# Small Cell Lung Cancer – Surveillance/ Follow-up (ONC-7.4)

**ON.PC.0007.4.A**
**v2.0.2026**

| Indication | Medically Necessary Imaging Study |
|---|---|
| Limited stage SCLC | Every 3 months for two years, every 6 months during year three, and then annually:<br>• CT Chest without (CPT® 71250) or CT Chest with (CPT® 71260) contrast<br>• CT Abdomen and Pelvis with contrast (CPT® 74177) |
| Extensive stage SCLC | Every 2 months for one year, every 3 months for two years, every 6 months for two years, and then annually:<br>• CT Chest without (CPT® 71250) or CT Chest with (CPT® 71260) contrast<br>• CT Abdomen and Pelvis with contrast (CPT® 74177) |
| Screening for brain metastases, regardless of PCI status | • MRI Brain without and with contrast (CPT® 70553) every 3 months for 1 year and then every 6 months thereafter |
| Surveillance of known and/or treated brain metastases | • See: **Brain Metastases (ONC-31.3)** |
| New lung nodule(s) | • See: **Lung Metastases (ONC-31.1)** |

### Evidence Discussion

Surveillance with CT contrasted chest, abdomen and pelvis is medically necessary. MRI Chest is less sensitive than CT Chest and usually not medically necessary as a substitution for lung cancer. Follow up is supported more frequently in the first two years post-treatment, as that is when recurrence is most common.[1,6,9] The surveillance timeframe is determined by the initial extent of disease. For those with limited stage disease, these guidelines support the above CT imaging every 3 months for 2 years, every 6 months during year 3, and then annually. For those with extensive stage disease, imaging with above CTs is supported every 2 months for 1 year, every 3 months for two years, every 6 months for 2 years, then annually. This is in alignment with the follow up visit timeframe recommended by NCCN. Up to 30% of


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

individuals develop metastatic disease to the brain. Screening for brain metastases is medically necessary to allow early treatment of brain metastases prior to potentially impairing neurologic symptoms. MRI is preferred over CT for its increased sensitivity and specificity, at an interval of every 3 months for 1 year then every 6 months indefinitely.[1,7,9] PET/CT is not medically necessary for surveillance due to excessive radiation exposure, false positive incidental findings, and financial toxicity.


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

# References (ONC-7)

**v2.0.2026**

1. Ganti AKP, Loo Jr. BW, Badiyan S, et al. National Comprehensive Cancer Network (NCCN) Guidelines Version 2.2026 – September 16, 2025 Small Cell Lung Cancer, available at: https://www.nccn.org/professionals/physician_gls/pdf/sclc.pdf Referenced with permission from the NCCN Clinical Practice Guidelines in Oncology (NCCN Guidelines™) for Small Cell Lung Cancer V2.2026 – September 16, 2025 ©2025 National Comprehensive Cancer Network, Inc. All rights reserved. The NCCN Guidelines™ and illustrations herein may not be reproduced in any form for any purpose without the express written permission of the NCCN. To view the most recent and complete version of the NCCN Guidelines™, go online to NCCN.org.
2. Martucci F, Pascale M, Valli MC, et al. Impact of 18F-FDG PET/CT in Staging Patients With Small Cell Lung Cancer: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis. *Front Med (Lausanne)*. 2020;6:336. Published 2020 Jan 29. doi:10.3389/fmed.2019.00336
3. Archer JM, Truong MT, Shroff GS, Godoy MCB, Marom EM. Imaging of Lung Cancer Staging. *Semin Respir Crit Care Med.* 2022;43(6):862-873. doi:10.1055/s-0042-1753476
4. MacMahon H, Naidich DP, Goo JM, et al. Guidelines for management of incidental pulmonary nodules detected on CT images: From the Fleischner Society 2017. *Radiology*. 2017;284(1):228-243. doi:10.1148/radiol.2017161659.
5. Megyesfalvi Z, Gay CM, Popper H, et al. Clinical insights into small cell lung cancer: Tumor heterogeneity, diagnosis, therapy, and future directions. *CA Cancer J Clin*. 2023;73(6):620-652. doi:10.3322/caac.21785.
6. Gaebe K, Erickson AW, Li AY, et al. Re-examining prophylactic cranial irradiation in small cell lung cancer: a systematic review and meta-analysis. *EClinicalMedicine*. 2024;67:102396. doi:10.1016/j.eclinm.2023.102396.
7. Quartuccio N, Evangelista L, Alongi P, et al. Prognostic and diagnostic value of [18F]FDG-PET/CT in restaging patients with small cell lung carcinoma: an Italian multicenter study. *Nucl Med Commun*. 2019;40(8):808-814. doi:10.1097/MNM.0000000000001038.
8. PDQ® Adult Treatment Editorial Board. PDQ Small Cell Lung Cancer Treatment. Bethesda, MD: National Cancer Institute. Available at: https://www.cancer.gov/types/lung/hp/small-cell-lung-treatment-pdq.
9. Non-small cell lung cancer treatment (PDQ®). National Cancer Institute. https://www.cancer.gov/types/lung/hp/non-small-cell-lung-treatment-pdq#_4.
10. US Preventive Services Task Force; Krist AH, Davidson KW, Mangione CM, Barry MJ, Cabana M, Caughey AB, Davis EM, Donahue KE, Doubeni CA, Kubik M, Landefeld CS, Li L, Ogedegbe G, Owens DK, Pbert L, Silverstein M, Stevermer J, Tseng CW, Wong JB. Screening for Lung Cancer: US Preventive Services Task Force Recommendation Statement. *JAMA*. 2021 Mar 9;325(10):962-970. doi: 10.1001/jama.2021.1117.
11. Racial and ethnic disparities. American Lung Association. https://www.lung.org/research/state-of-lung-cancer/racial-and-ethnic-disparities
12. Monestime S, Rigney M, Phipps N, Carlson C, Alongi T, Redding M, King JC. Health inequities across the lung cancer care continuum in ten marginalized populations: a narrative review. *J Thorac Dis*. 2023 Nov 30;15(11):6345-6361. doi: 10.21037/jtd-23-727
13. Shehata DG, Pan JM, Pan Z, Vigneswaran J, Contreras N, Rodriguez E, Sakowitz S, Magarinos J, Pereira S, Wilder FG, Watkins AA. Equity and Opportunities in Lung Cancer Care-Addressing Disparities, Challenges, and Pathways Forward. *Cancers (Basel)*. 2025 Apr 17;17(8):1347. doi: 10.3390/cancers17081347


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

Click Anywhere in the Header to Return to the Main Table of Contents



# Non-Small Cell Lung Cancer (ONC-8)

Guideline

Non-Small Cell Lung Cancer – General Considerations (ONC-8.0)
Non-Small Cell Lung Cancer – Asymptomatic Screening (ONC-8.1)
Non-Small Cell Lung Cancer – Suspected/Diagnosis (ONC-8.2)
Non-Small Cell Lung Cancer – Initial Work-up/Staging (ONC-8.3)
Non-Small Cell Lung Cancer – Restaging/Recurrence (ONC-8.4)
Non-Small Cell Lung Cancer – Surveillance/Follow-up (ONC-8.5)
References (ONC-8)


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

# Non-Small Cell Lung Cancer – General Considerations (ONC-8.0)

ON.NL.0008.0.A

**v2.0.2026**

- Non-small cell lung cancer includes adenocarcinoma, squamous cell carcinoma, adenosquamous and large cell tumors.
- See: **Bronchopulmonary or Thymic Carcinoid – Initial Staging (ONC-15.6)** for evaluation of low-grade neuroendocrine tumors (carcinoid) of the lung.
- See: **Small Cell Lung Cancer (ONC-7)** for evaluation of high-grade small cell and large cell neuroendocrine tumors of the lung.
- PET/CT is medically necessary to confirm solitary focus of extra-pulmonary metastatic disease (i.e., brain or adrenal) if the individual is being considered for an aggressive treatment for oligometastatic disease.

### Health Equity Considerations

The National Cancer Institute (NCI) has estimated 226,650 new cases of lung cancer and 124,730 estimated deaths from lung cancer (Non-Small Cell Lung Cancer and Small Cell Lung Cancer combined) in the United States in 2025. Lung cancer is the leading cause of cancer-related mortality in the United States. These poor survival factors are related to tobacco use, late-stage diagnosis, and underutilization of new and effective treatments. While smoking is the most important risk factor, other risk factors include secondhand smoke, occupational exposure, such as to asbestos, radiation exposure, such as from radiation therapy or radon exposure, air pollution, family history, and HIV infection.[18]

The U.S. Preventive Services Task Force (USPSTF) recommends annual screening for lung cancer with low-dose computed tomography (LDCT) in adults aged 55 to 80 years who have a 30 pack-year smoking history and currently smoke or who have quit within the past 15 years.[17] According to the American Lung Association, individuals of color are less likely to be diagnosed early, less likely to receive surgical treatment, and more likely to receive no treatment.[19] Populations with a low socioeconomic status also have barriers to lung cancer screening due to lack of or poor insurance and under-resourced clinics. In addition, after diagnosis, they have lower odds of receiving treatments, including surgery, chemotherapy, and immunotherapy, leading to poorer survival.[20] Multiple strategies are needed to address disparities, including enhancing access to care and implementing tools such as real-time tracking, individual navigation, and mobile screening units.[21]


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

# Non-Small Cell Lung Cancer – Asymptomatic Screening (ONC-8.1)

**ON.NL.0008.1.A**

**v2.0.2026**

- See: **Lung Cancer Screening (CH-33)** in the Chest Imaging Guidelines for criteria for Low-dose CT Chest for lung cancer screening.


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

# Non-Small Cell Lung Cancer – Suspected/Diagnosis (ONC-8.2)

**ON.NL.0008.2.A**
**v2.0.2026**

| Indication | Medically Necessary Imaging Study |
|---|---|
| Abnormal chest x-ray or clinical suspicion remains high despite a normal chest x-ray in symptomatic individual | • CT Chest without contrast (CPT® 71250)<br>**or**<br>• CT Chest with contrast (CPT® 71260) |
| Pulmonary nodule <8mm in size noted on CT Chest | • See: **Incidental Pulmonary Nodules Detected on CT Images (CH-16.2)** in the Chest Imaging Guidelines |
| Pulmonary nodule 8mm (0.8cm) to 30mm (3cm) seen on CT Chest or MRI Chest | • PET/CT (CPT® 78815)<br>• If PET is Positive: Qualifies as initial staging PET/CT |
| Pulmonary mass 31mm (3.1cm) or greater seen on CT or MRI | • PET/CT (CPT® 78815) prior to biopsy if ONE or MORE of the following applies:<br>◦ Definitive treatment with resection or radiation will be utilized instead of biopsy if PET confirms limited disease<br>◦ Multiple possible biopsy options are present within the chest and PET findings will be used to determine the most favorable biopsy site<br>• Biopsy is indicated prior to PET imaging for all other indications in pulmonary masses ≥31mm (3.1cm) in size |
| Mediastinal/Hilar Lymphadenopathy | See: **Mediastinal Lymphadenopathy (CH-2.3)** in the Chest Imaging Guidelines |
| Mediastinal/Hilar Mass | See: **Mediastinal Mass (CH-20)** in the Chest Imaging Guidelines |
| Paraneoplastic syndrome suspected | See: **Paraneoplastic Syndromes (ONC-30.3)** |


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

## Evidence Discussion

For individuals with suspected lung cancer and an abnormal chest x-ray or a high suspicion for lung cancer with symptoms of lung cancer, a CT Chest is medically necessary, with or without contrast. If a PET/CT is performed in the workup of a pulmonary nodule and is positive, it qualifies as the initial staging PET. The radiotracer supported for PET/CT for lung cancer is 18-FDG.[3,14] Lesions 31mm or greater are considered masses rather than nodules.[3] There is no clear evidence for PET/CT over biopsy in this case. Generally, masses should be biopsied rather than re-imaged. PET/CT is medically necessary if definitive treatment with resection or radiation will be utilized instead of biopsy (if PET confirms limited disease), or if multiple biopsy sites are present within the chest and PET findings will be used to determine the most favorable biopsy site. This maximizes safety when making decisions regarding invasive procedures.


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

Click Anywhere in the Header to Return to the Main Table of Contents



# Non-Small Cell Lung Cancer – Initial Work-up/Staging (ONC-8.3)

**ON.NL.0008.3.A**
**v2.0.2026**

| Indication | Medically Necessary Imaging Study |
|---|---|
| All individuals | ANY or ALL of the following:<br>• CT Chest with contrast (CPT® 71260)<br>• CT Abdomen with contrast (CPT® 74160)<br>◦ CT Abdomen can be omitted if CT Chest report clearly documents upper abdomen through level of adrenals<br>• PET/CT (CPT® 78815) (if not already completed prior to histological diagnosis)<br>• Bone scan (CPT® 78306, if PET/CT not being done)<br>See also: **Nuclear Medicine (NM) Imaging in Oncology (ONC-1.3)** for additional bone scan codes |
| Stage IB-IV disease | • MRI Brain without and with contrast (CPT® 70553)<br>◦ If MRI Brain is contraindicated or not available, CT Head with contrast (CPT® 70460) or CT Head without and with contrast (CPT® 70470) |
| Superior sulcus (Pancoast) tumor suspected | ANY or ALL of the following:<br>• MRI Chest without and with contrast (CPT® 71552)<br>• MRI Cervical Spine without and with contrast (CPT® 72156)<br>• MRI Thoracic Spine without and with contrast (CPT® 72157) |


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

## Evidence Discussion

CT Chest and upper abdomen to the level of the adrenals is medically necessary for initial staging, as liver and adrenal metastatic disease are common in NSCLC. Pelvic disease is rare and imaging of the pelvis without pelvic symptoms is not recommended by NCCN.[1] FDG PET-CT is supported by NCCN in all individuals.[1]

Over 10% of individuals with stage III or IV disease present with metastatic disease to the brain, and 4% to 5% of individuals with stage II disease. MRI Brain with and without contrast has a higher detection rate for metastatic disease to the brain than CT, and is medically necessary in all individuals with stage II-IV disease.[1] For individuals with stage IB disease, MRI Brain with and without contrast is optional in this setting but can be considered to prevent under-staging and under-treatment, since a small number of individuals with apparent stage I disease and no CNS symptoms will have occult brain lesions and will require additional therapies.[1,14]

For individuals with superior sulcus (Pancoast) tumor, MRI Chest and MRI Cervical and Thoracic Spine with and without contrast have higher specificity for chest wall invasion, neurologic involvement, and fibrosis than CT alone, and are medically necessary in addition to the imaging stated above.[1,13]


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

Click Anywhere in the Header to Return to the Main Table of Contents



# Non-Small Cell Lung Cancer – Restaging/Recurrence (ONC-8.4)

**ON.NL.0008.4.A**
**v2.0.2026**

| Indication | Medically Necessary Imaging Study |
|---|---|
| Stage I or II individuals who undergo definitive local treatment with surgery, radiation, or radiosurgery | • Restaging imaging is not medically necessary. See: **Surveillance/Follow-up (ONC-8.5)** |
| Measurable disease, undergoing active treatment | ANY or ALL of the following every 2 cycles:<br>• CT Chest with (CPT® 71260) **or** CT Chest without contrast (CPT® 71250)<br>• CT Abdomen with contrast (CPT® 74160)<br>◦ CT Abdomen and Pelvis with contrast (CPT® 74177) for known pelvic disease or pelvic symptoms<br>• MRI Brain without and with contrast (CPT® 70553) for measurable brain metastases being treated with systemic therapy |
| ANY of the following:<br>• After neoadjuvant treatment for evaluation of surgical resectability<br>• Prior to starting adjuvant therapy<br>• Inadequately resected disease | • CT Chest with (CPT® 71260) **or** CT Chest without contrast (CPT® 71250) |
| Suspected recurrence | ANY or ALL of the following:<br>• CT Chest with (CPT® 71260) **or** CT Chest without contrast (CPT® 71250)<br>• CT Abdomen with contrast (CPT® 74160)<br>◦ CT Abdomen and Pelvis with contrast (CPT® 74177) for known pelvic disease or pelvic symptoms |


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

| Indication | Medically Necessary Imaging Study |
|---|---|
| Newly identified lung nodule(s) | • See: **Lung Metastases (ONC-31.1)** for new nodule evaluation |
| ANY of the following:<br>• Suspected/biopsy proven recurrence localized to the chest cavity<br>• Inconclusive findings on conventional imaging<br>• To differentiate tumor from radiation scar/fibrosis<br>• Stage IV with oligometastatic disease on conventional imaging and individual is a candidate for aggressive surgical resection or other localized treatment of metastases with a curative intent | • PET/CT (CPT® 78815) |
| ANY of the following:<br>• Following a demonstrated adequate response to neoadjuvant therapy if intracranial disease will preclude surgery<br>• Documented recurrence/progression<br>• New or worsening neurological signs or symptoms | • MRI Brain without and with contrast (CPT® 70553) |

**Evidence Discussion**

In alignment with NCCN, CT Chest and Abdomen with contrast are medically necessary every two cycles, with pelvic imaging only for a history of pelvic disease or new pelvic symptoms. These are also medically necessary at any time for clinically suspected recurrence. MRI Brain with and without contrast is medically necessary every 2 cycles for individuals with known brain metastases being treated with systemic therapy, or at any time for individuals with new neurologic symptoms or documented systemic progression.[1] An additional CT Chest is medically necessary if requested after neoadjuvant therapy to evaluate for resectability, in the interest of safe resection. CT is also medically necessary post-operatively to assess baseline prior to starting adjuvant therapy, in alignment with NCCN.[1]


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

# Non-Small Cell Lung Cancer – Surveillance/Follow-up (ONC-8.5)

**ON.NL.0008.5.A**
**v2.0.2026**

| Indication | Medically Necessary Imaging Study |
|---|---|
| Stage I-II (treatment including surgery and/ or chemotherapy, but no radiation) | • CT Chest with contrast (CPT® 71260) or CT Chest without contrast (CPT® 71250) every 6 months for 3 years and then annually |
| Stage I-II treated with radiation therapy<br>Stage III-IV (metastatic sites treated with definitive intent) | • CT Chest with contrast (CPT® 71260) **or** CT Chest without contrast (CPT® 71250) every 3-6 months for 3 years, every 6 months for 2 years and then annually |
| New lung nodule | • See: **Lung Metastases (ONC-31.1)** |

### Evidence Discussion

CT Chest with or without contrast is recommended by national guidelines every 6 months for 3 years and then annually for individuals with stage I or II disease. To prevent under-treatment, individuals treated with radiation who have residual abnormalities on imaging may undergo more frequent imaging every 3-6 months for the first year then every 6 months for 2 years, then annually thereafter. Individuals with stage II disease or definitively treated metastatic disease are at higher risk for relapse particularly in the first 2 years, and NCCN recommended CT Chest every 3-6 months for 3 years, every 6 months for 2 years, then annually. Asymptomatic abdominal and pelvic imaging exposes to radiation with low-yield for metastatic disease detection and is not medically necessary. FDG-PET is not medically necessary for surveillance due to excessive false positive rates, radiation exposure, and increased risk of unnecessary procedures for incidental false positive findings. MRI Brain for asymptomatic surveillance is low yield in asymptomatic NSCLC surveillance and is not routinely recommended.[1,2]


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

# References (ONC-8)

**v2.0.2026**

1. Riely GJ, Wood DE, Aisner DL, et al, National Comprehensive Cancer Network (NCCN) Guidelines Version 3.2026 – December 24, 2025. Non-small cell lung cancer, available at: https://www.nccn.org/professionals/physician_gls/pdf/nscl.pdf Referenced with permission from the NCCN Clinical Practice Guidelines in Oncology (NCCN Guidelines™) for Non-small cell lung cancer V3.2026 – December 24, 2025. ©2025 National Comprehensive Cancer Network, Inc. All rights reserved. The NCCN Guidelines™ and illustrations herein may not be reproduced in any form for any purpose without the express written permission of the NCCN. To view the most recent and complete version of the NCCN Guidelines™, go online to NCCN.org.
2. Scheider BJ, Ismaila N, Aerts J, et al. Lung cancer surveillance after definitive curative-intent therapy: ASCO guideline. *J Clin Oncol*. 2020;38(7):753-766. doi:10.1200/JCO.19.02748.
3. MacMahon H, Naidich DP, Goo JM, et al. Guidelines for management of incidental pulmonary nodules detected on CT images: from the Fleischner Society 2017. *Radiology*. 2017;284(1):228-243. doi:10.1148/radiol.2017161659.
4. Calman L, Beaver K, Hind D, Lorigan P, Roberts C, Lloyd-Jones M. Survival benefits from follow-up of patients with lung cancer: a systematic review and meta-analysis. *J Thorac Oncol*. 2011;6(12):1993-2004. doi:10.1097/JTO.0b013e31822b01a1.
5. Lou F, Huang J, Sima CS et al. Patterns of recurrence and second primary lung cancer in early-stage lung cancer survivors followed with routine computed tomography surveillance. *J Thorac Cardiovasc Surg*. 2013;145:75-81.
6. Colt HG, Murgu SD, Korst RJ, et al. Follow-up and surveillance of the patient with lung cancer after curative-intent therapy: diagnosis and management of lung cancer, 3rd ed: American College of Chest Physicians evidence-based clinical practice guidelines. *Chest*. 2013;143:e437S-454S.
7. Toba H, Kawakita N, Takashima M, et al. Diagnosis of recurrence and follow-up using FDG-PET/CT for postoperative non-small-cell lung cancer patients. *Gen Thorac Cardiovasc Surg*. 2021;69(2):311-317. doi:10.1007/s11748-020-01477-1
8. Hua J, Li L, Liu L, Liu Q, Liu Y, Chen X. The diagnostic value of metabolic, morphological and heterogeneous parameters of 18F-FDG PET/CT in mediastinal lymph node metastasis of non-small cell lung cancer. *Nucl Med Commun*. 2021;42(11):1247-1253. doi:10.1097/MNM.0000000000001456
9. Li J, Xu W, Kong F, et al. Meta-analysis: accuracy of 18FDG PET-CT for distant metastasis in lung cancer patients. *Surg Oncol*. 2013;22(3):151-155. https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/23664848 .
10. Ravenel JG. Evidence-based imaging in lung cancer: a systematic review. *J Thorac Imaging*. 2012;27(5):315-324.
11. Al-Ibraheem A, Hirmas N, Fanti S, et al. Impact of 18F-FDG PET/CT, CT and EBUS/TBNA on preoperative mediastinal nodal staging of NSCLC. *BMC Med Imaging*. 2021;21(1):49. Published 2021 Mar 17. doi:10.1186/s12880-021-00580-w
12. Ünal S, Heineman DJ, van Dorp M, et al. Chest wall resections for sulcus superior tumors. *J Thorac Dis*. 2024;16(2):1715-1723. doi:10.21037/jtd-23-828.
13. PDQ® Adult Treatment Editorial Board. PDQ Non-Small Cell Lung Cancer Treatment. Bethesda, MD: National Cancer Institute. Available at Non-Small Cell Lung Cancer Treatment (PDQ®) - NCI.
14. US Preventive Services Task Force; Krist AH, Davidson KW, Mangione CM, Barry MJ, Cabana M, Caughey AB, Davis EM, Donahue KE, Doubeni CA, Kubik M, Landefeld CS, Li L, Ogedegbe G, Owens DK, Pbert L, Silverstein M, Stevermer J, Tseng CW, Wong JB. Screening for Lung Cancer: US Preventive Services Task Force Recommendation Statement. *JAMA*. 2021 Mar 9;325(10):962-970. doi: 10.1001/jama.2021.1117
15. Racial and ethnic disparities. American Lung Association. https://www.lung.org/research/state-of-lung-cancer/racial-and-ethnic-disparities
16. Monestime S, Rigney M, Phipps N, Carlson C, Alongi T, Redding M, King JC. Health inequities across the lung cancer care continuum in ten marginalized populations: a narrative review. *J Thorac Dis*. 2023 Nov 30;15(11):6345-6361. doi: 10.21037/jtd-23-727


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

17. Shehata DG, Pan JM, Pan Z, Vigneswaran J, Contreras N, Rodriguez E, Sakowitz S, Magarinos J, Pereira S, Wilder FG, Watkins AA. Equity and Opportunities in Lung Cancer Care-Addressing Disparities, Challenges, and Pathways Forward. *Cancers (Basel)*. 2025 Apr 17;17(8):1347. doi: 10.3390/cancers17081347


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

# Esophageal and GE Junction Cancer (ONC-9)

Guideline

Esophageal and GE Junction Cancer – General Considerations (ONC-9.0)
Esophageal and GE Junction Cancer – Suspected/Diagnosis (ONC-9.1)
Esophageal and GE Junction Cancer – Initial Work-up/Staging (ONC-9.2)
Esophageal and GE Junction Cancer – Restaging/Recurrence (ONC-9.3)
Esophageal and GE Junction Cancer – Surveillance/Follow-up (ONC-9.4)
References (ONC-9)


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

# Esophageal and GE Junction Cancer – General Considerations (ONC-9.0)

**ON.EJ.0009.0.A**

**v2.0.2026**

- Imaging for esophageal cancer is determined by cell type and in which third of the esophagus it occurs.
- Cancers of the upper and middle third are usually squamous cell and are highly associated with tobacco and alcohol abuse.
- Cancers of the gastroesophageal (GE) junction are treated as lower third cancers. Lower third cancers are usually adenocarcinomas; 62% of these arise in the setting of Barrett's esophagus, a condition associated with high body mass index (BMI).


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

# Esophageal and GE Junction Cancer – Suspected/Diagnosis (ONC-9.1)

**ON.EJ.0009.1.A**

**v2.0.2026**

- See: **Dysphagia and Upper Digestive Tract Disorders (NECK-3.1)** in the Neck Imaging Guidelines for evaluation of suspected esophageal malignancy.


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

# Esophageal and GE Junction Cancer – Initial Work-up/Staging (ONC-9.2)

**ON.EJ.0009.2.A**
**v2.0.2026**

| Indication | Medically Necessary Imaging Study |
|---|---|
| Biopsy proven | • CT Chest (CPT® 71260) and CT Abdomen (CPT® 74160) with contrast<br>◦ CT Abdomen and Pelvis with contrast (CPT® 74177) instead of CT Abdomen if there are pelvic signs or symptoms |
| In addition to the above, for any of the following:<br>• Upper 1/3 of esophagus<br>• Neck mass | • CT Neck with contrast (CPT® 70491) |
| If no evidence of metastatic disease on conventional imaging | • PET/CT (CPT® 78815) |

### Evidence Discussion

- Upon initial diagnosis of cancer, CT Chest/Abdomen is medically necessary with the addition of pelvis if there are signs/symptoms of disease. NCCN stated that "CT can be used to determine the location of the primary tumor and its proximity to other structures".[1]
- Cancers diagnosed in the upper 1/3 of the esophagus should also obtain CT of the neck due to concern for nodal spread.
- If CT imaging does not show evidence of metastatic disease, PET/CT is medically necessary to assess for occult metastases to help finalize treatment options (curative versus palliative). PET/CT is not sensitive for locoregional nodal assessment as often these nodes are obscured by metabolic activity in the primary tumor but is more sensitive than CT for detecting distant metastases.
- NCCN also stated that PET/CT has "limited ability to ability to differentiate between cT1, cT2, and cT3 tumors. Therefore, CT should be performed as part of initial workup (as well as pelvic CT scan with contrast if clinically indicated) while FDG-PET/CT should be reserved for individuals with no evidence of M1 disease".[1]


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

# Esophageal and GE Junction Cancer – Restaging/Recurrence (ONC-9.3)

**ON.EJ.0009.3.A**
**v2.0.2026**

| Indication | Medically Necessary Imaging Study |
|---|---|
| • After completion of primary therapy (to include chemotherapy and/or chemoradiotherapy), prior to surgery<br>• After completion of chemoradiation therapy with definitive intent (i.e., no metastatic disease and no anticipated resection surgery) | Any ONE of the following, not both:<br>• PET/CT (CPT® 78815) no sooner than 5 weeks post completion of radiation therapy OR<br>• CT Chest (CPT® 71260) and CT Abdomen (CPT® 74160) with contrast<br>◦ CT Abdomen and Pelvis with contrast (CPT® 74177) instead of CT Abdomen if there are pelvic signs or symptoms or known pelvic disease |
| Post-surgical resection | • See: **Surveillance/Follow-up (ONC-9.4)** |
| Monitoring response to chemotherapy for stage IV/ metastatic disease | Every 2 cycles of treatment (~every 6-8 weeks):<br>• CT Abdomen with contrast (CPT® 74160)<br>• CT Chest with contrast (CPT® 71260) |
| • If conventional imaging is inconclusive **or**<br>• Salvage surgical candidate with recurrence and no metastatic disease documented by conventional imaging | • PET/CT (CPT® 78815) |
| For ANY of the following:<br>• Signs or symptoms of recurrence<br>• Biopsy proven on follow-up endoscopy<br>• Recurrence suggested by other imaging (i.e., chest x-ray or barium swallow) | • CT Chest (CPT® 71260) and CT Abdomen (CPT® 74160) with contrast |


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

| Indication | Medically Necessary Imaging Study |
|---|---|
| If previously involved or new signs or symptoms | • CT Pelvis with contrast (CPT® 72193) and/or CT Neck with contrast (CPT® 70491) |

**Evidence Discussion**

- Primary treatment typically involves chemoradiotherapy alone, surgery alone, or both.
- After primary chemoradiation has been completed and prior to surgery, one of the following is medically necessary: CT Chest/Abdomen or PET/CT, with the latter ideally no sooner than 5 weeks after completion of radiation to minimize risk of false positives.
- Post-surgical resection is handled as disease surveillance.
- For Stage IV disease on chemotherapy, CT Chest/Abdomen is medically necessary every 2 cycles.
- If conventional imaging is inconclusive or the member is a candidate for salvage surgery upon recurrence with no evidence of metastatic disease, PET/CT is medically necessary.
- CT Chest/Abdomen is medically necessary for signs/symptoms of recurrence, biopsy proven recurrence on follow-up endoscopy, and recurrence suggested by other imaging.
- CT imaging of any appropriate area (e.g., neck, pelvis) is medically necessary if new signs/symptoms or known previous involvement.[1]


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

# Esophageal and GE Junction Cancer – Surveillance/Follow-up (ONC-9.4)

**ON.EJ.0009.4.A**
**v2.0.2026**

| Indication | Medically Necessary Imaging Study |
|---|---|
| Stage 0-IA (Tis, T1a) disease | • No routine advanced imaging |
| Stage IB (T1b)-III disease | • CT Chest (CPT® 71260) and CT Abdomen (CPT® 74160) with contrast every 6 months for 2 years and then annually for 3 more years |
| Stage IV disease | • See: **General Guidelines (ONC-1.0)** |

**Evidence Discussion**

- Stage 0-IA (Tis, T1a): No routine advanced imaging is medically necessary. Fully treated Tis and T1aN0 disease have prognoses that approximate a non-cancer cohort.[1]
- Stage IB (T1b)-III: CT Chest/Abdomen with contrast every 6 months for 2 years and then annually for 3 more years. T1b does not perform as well as fully treated Tis and T1aN0 disease, thus supporting current recommendations.[1]
- Stage IV: CT Chest/Abdomen (additional sites as clinically indicated) every 3 months while on maintenance therapy or every 3 months up to 5 years if being monitored off therapy.[1]


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

# References (ONC-9)

**v2.0.2026**

1. Ajani JA, D'Amico TA, Barzi A, et al. National Comprehensive Cancer Network (NCCN) Guidelines Version 1.2026 – December 10, 2025. Esophageal and esophagogastric junction cancers, available at: https://www.nccn.org/professionals/physician_gls/pdf/esophageal.pdf Referenced with permission from the NCCN Clinical Practice Guidelines in Oncology (NCCN Guidelines™) for Esophageal and esophagogastric junction cancers V1.2026 – December 10, 2025. ©2025 National Comprehensive Cancer Network, Inc. All rights reserved. The NCCN Guidelines™ and illustrations herein may not be reproduced in any form for any purpose without the express written permission of the NCCN. To view the most recent and complete version of the NCCN Guidelines™, go online to NCCN.org.
2. Klaeser B, Nitzsche E, Schuller JC, et al. Limited predictive value of FDG-PET for response assessment in the preoperative treatment of esophageal cancer: results of a prospective multi-center trial (SAKK 75/02). *Onkologie*. 2009;32(12):724-730. doi:10.1159/000251842.
3. Malik V, Lucey JA, Duffy GJ, et al. Early repeated 18F-FDG PET scans during neoadjuvant chemoradiation fail to predict histopathologic response or survival benefit in adenocarcinoma of the esophagus. *J Nucl Med*. 2010;51(12):1863-1869. doi:10.2967/jnumed.110.079566.
4. Han S, Kim YI, Woo S, Kim TH, Ryu JS. Prognostic and predictive values of interim 18F-FDG PET during neoadjuvant chemoradiotherapy for esophageal cancer: a systematic review and meta-analysis. *Ann Nucl Med*. 2021;35(4):447-457. doi:10.1007/s12149-021-01583-x
5. Kroese TE, Ruurda JP, Bakker AS, et al. Detecting Interval Distant Metastases With 18F-FDG PET/CT After Neoadjuvant Chemoradiotherapy for Locally Advanced Esophageal Cancer. *Clin Nucl Med*. 2022;47(6):496-502. doi:10.1097/RLU.0000000000004191
6. Sudo K, Xiao L, Wadhwa R, et al. Importance of surveillance and success of salvage strategies after definitive chemoradiation in patients with esophageal cancer. *J Clin Oncol*. 2014;32(30):3400-3405. doi:10.1200/JCO.2014.56.7156.
7. Lou F, Sima CS, Adusumilli PS, et al. Esophageal cancer recurrence patterns and implications for surveillance. *J Thorac Oncol.* 2013;8(12):1558–1562. doi:10.1097/01.JTO.0000437420.38972.fb.
8. Goense L, van Rossum PS, Reitsma JB, et al. Diagnostic performance of 18F-FDG PET and PET/CT for the detection of recurrent esophageal cancer after treatment with curative intent: a systematic review and meta-analysis. *J Nucl Med*. 2015;56(7):995-1002. doi:10.2967/jnumed.115.155580.
9. van Westreenen HL, Westerterp M, Bossuyt PMM, et al. Systematic review of the staging performance of 18F-fluorodeoxyglucose positron emission tomography in esophageal cancer. *J Clin Oncol*. 2004;22:3805- 3812.
10. van Westreenen HL, Heeren PA, van Dullemen HM, et al. Positron emission tomography with F-18-fluorodeoxyglucose in a combined staging strategy of esophageal cancer prevents unnecessary surgical explorations. *J Gastrointest Surg*. 2005;9:54-61.
11. Nilsson K, Klevebro F, Sunde B, et al. Oncologic outcomes of standard versus prolonged time to surgery after neoadjuvant chemoradiotherapy for oesophageal cancer in the multicenter, randomized, controlled NeoRes II trial. *Annals of Oncology*. 2023;34:1015-1024.


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

Click Anywhere in the Header to Return to the Main Table of Contents



# Other Thoracic Tumors (ONC-10)

## Guideline

Malignant Pleural Mesothelioma – Suspected/Diagnosis (ONC-10.1)
Malignant Pleural Mesothelioma – Initial Work-up/Staging (ONC-10.2)
Malignant Pleural Mesothelioma – Restaging (ONC-10.3)
Malignant Pleural Mesothelioma – Surveillance (ONC-10.4)
Thymoma and Thymic Carcinoma – Suspected/Diagnosis (ONC-10.5)
Thymoma and Thymic Carcinoma – Initial Work-up/Staging (ONC-10.6)
Thymoma and Thymic Carcinoma – Restaging (ONC-10.7)
Thymoma and Thymic Carcinoma – Surveillance (ONC-10.8)
References (ONC-10)


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

# Malignant Pleural Mesothelioma – Suspected/Diagnosis (ONC-10.1)

**ON.OT.0010.1.A**

**v2.0.2026**

- See: **Asbestos Exposure (CH-9.1)** in the Chest Imaging Guidelines for evaluation of suspected mesothelioma.


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

# Malignant Pleural Mesothelioma – Initial Work-up/Staging (ONC-10.2)

**ON.OT.0010.2.A**
**v2.0.2026**

| Indication | Medically Necessary Imaging Study |
|---|---|
| Cytologically or pathologically proven | • CT Chest (CPT® 71260) **and** CT Abdomen (CPT® 74160) with contrast<br>◦ CT Abdomen and Pelvis with contrast (CPT® 74177)instead of CT Abdomen if there are pelvic signs or symptoms or prior pelvic involvement |
| For EITHER of the following:<br>• No evidence of distant metastatic disease on CT imaging<br>• Inconclusive conventional imaging | • PET/CT (CPT® 78815) |
| Suspicion of possible chest wall, spinal, diaphragmatic, or vascular involvement based on CT imaging | • MRI Chest without and with contrast (CPT® 71552) |

**Evidence Discussion**

Contrasted CT Chest and CT Abdomen are medically necessary for initial staging once mesothelioma is proven with lung fluid cytology or tissue biopsy. Contrast allows better evaluation of nodal disease in addition to parenchymal disease and offers improved characterization of direct extrapulmonary tumor invasion. MRI is inferior for parenchymal lung imaging; thus, CT is essential. Anatomic soft tissue detail, differentiation from progressive benign fibrosis, and brachiocephalic vascular involvement may be better demonstrated on MRI without and with contrast, so this study is medically necessary for suspected chest wall, spine, diaphragm, or vascular involvement. The most common site of metastatic disease outside the chest is the liver, so CT Abdomen is an important


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

part of the initial workup. However, pelvic disease is rare and pelvic CT exposes to additional radiation and is low yield in individuals without pelvic signs and symptoms. Pelvis may be added to contrasted CT in individuals with signs and symptoms of pelvic involvement, including direct abdominoperitoneal invasion. National Cancer Database review of over 40,000 individuals treated between 2004 and 2020 reveals that 50% of individuals are metastatic upon presentation.[17] Signs and symptoms of metastatic disease in body areas not addressed in ONC-10 may be imaged according to their respective sections in ONC-31, for which separate evidence summaries are provided.

PET/CT is not first line imaging for mesothelioma as it is inadequate for differentiating benign vs malignant changes in exposure-related progressive massive pulmonary fibrosis, but of which take up FDG in unpredictable fashions. Understaging of the primary site is common with PET/CT alone. Conventional imaging is essential. However, PET/CT is medically necessary to confirm the absence of metastatic disease on conventional imaging (negative or inconclusive) prior to resection, as up to 29% of individuals initially identified as operable may be reclassified as inoperable due to identification of distant metastatic disease on PET/CT during pre-operative evaluation.[1]


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

# Malignant Pleural Mesothelioma – Restaging (ONC-10.3)

**ON.OT.0010.3.A**
**v2.0.2026**

| Indication | Medically Necessary Imaging Study |
|---|---|
| Signs or symptoms of recurrence | • CT Chest (CPT® 71260) **and** CT Abdomen (CPT® 74160) with contrast<br>◦ CT Abdomen and Pelvis with contrast (CPT® 74177) instead of CT Abdomen if there are pelvic signs or symptoms or prior pelvic involvement |
| Treatment with chemotherapy | Every 2 cycles:<br>• CT Chest (CPT® 71260) **and** CT Abdomen (CPT® 74160) with contrast<br>◦ CT Abdomen and Pelvis with contrast (CPT® 74177) instead of CT Abdomen if there are pelvic signs or symptoms or prior pelvic involvement |
| Following induction chemotherapy prior to surgical resection | • CT Chest (CPT® 71260) **and** CT Abdomen (CPT® 74160) with contrast<br>◦ CT Abdomen and Pelvis with contrast (CPT® 74177) instead of CT Abdomen if there are pelvic signs or symptoms or prior pelvic involvement<br>• PET/CT (CPT® 78815) if no evidence of distant metastatic disease |
| Inconclusive CT Chest | • MRI Chest without and with contrast (CPT® 71552) |

### Evidence Discussion

For individuals on chemotherapy, contrasted CT of chest and abdomen are medically necessary every 2 cycles. Pelvic imaging may be added for signs and symptoms of peritoneal/pelvic disease or known pelvic/peritoneal disease as noted in the initial staging section. The same logic applies to any individuals with signs and symptoms of recurrence. For individuals receiving induction chemotherapy, CT Chest and Abdomen (with pelvis if previously reviewed indications are present) are medically necessary at end of induction. Response is categorized by validated mRECIST criteria on CT. If there


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

is no metastatic disease, this may again be confirmed with PET/CT prior to attempted resection, ensuring the individual is not subjected to futile invasive surgery when RT or further systemic therapy may be more appropriate. If CT Chest is inconclusive, MRI Chest without and with contrast is medically necessary. MRI Chest may differentiate between treatment-related changes (fibrosis) and persistent mesothelioma, which is not well-differentiated on PET/CT as both may have unpredictable FDG uptake.[1,10-13,17]


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

# Malignant Pleural Mesothelioma – Surveillance (ONC-10.4)

**ON.OT.0010.4.A**
**v2.0.2026**

| Indication | Medically Necessary Imaging Study |
|---|---|
| All | • CT Chest with contrast (CPT® 71260) and previously involved regions every 3 months for 2 years, then annually thereafter |

### Evidence Discussion

There is no clear consensus for surveillance imaging for malignant pleural mesothelioma, and NCCN offered no guidance on this topic. The European Society of Medical Oncology (ESMO) advised CT for surveillance without a specific timeframe.[13] Given the known value of CT in assessing primary mesothelioma and abdomino/peritoneal metastatic disease, these guidelines support CT for surveillance. The timeframe is based on National Cancer Database survival statistics for malignant pleural mesothelioma.[2] In review of 40,000+ individuals treated between 2004 and 2020, individuals undergoing surgery had a median survival time for 19.8 months, compared with 7.9 months in those who had not undergone surgery. The 2-year survival for those who underwent surgery was 44%, with 18% 2-year survival in unresectable disease. 5-year survival is 5% in unresected disease, and 16% in those who underwent surgery. These guidelines support CT Chest and Abdomen with contrast every 3 months for the first 2 years, then annually. As noted in the restaging section, CT imaging is always medically necessary for new signs and symptoms.[1]


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

# Thymoma and Thymic Carcinoma – Suspected/Diagnosis (ONC-10.5)

**ON.OT.0010.5.A**

**v2.0.2026**

- The proceeding guidelines are intended to be used for imaging of malignant mediastinal masses.
- See: **Mediastinal Mass (CH-20.1)** in the Chest Imaging Guidelines for evaluation of mediastinal mass without confirmation of malignancy.
- See: **Bronchopulmonary or Thymic Carcinoid – Initial Staging (ONC-15.6)** for imaging guidelines for thymic carcinoid.


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

# Thymoma and Thymic Carcinoma – Initial Work-up/Staging (ONC-10.6)

**ON.OT.0010.6.A**
**v2.0.2026**

| Indication | Medically Necessary Imaging Study |
|---|---|
| Encapsulated or invasive limited disease | • CT Chest with contrast (CPT® 71260) |
| Extensive mediastinal involvement on CT Chest | • CT Abdomen with contrast (CPT® 74160)<br>• CT Neck with contrast (CPT® 70491) |
| Inconclusive finding on CT | ONE of the following:<br>• PET/CT (CPT® 78815)<br>• MRI Chest without and with contrast (CPT® 71552) |
| Preoperative planning | • MRI Chest without and with contrast (CPT® 71552) |
| Thymic Carcinomas | • Image according to **Non-Small Cell Lung Cancer - Initial Work-up/Staging (ONC-8.3)** |

### Evidence Discussion

Thymomas and thymic carcinomas originate in the thymus and are epithelial tumors. Thymomas are rare tumors (though most common primary tumor of anterior mediastinum) that typically spread locally with 5-year survival rates of 90% while thymic carcinomas are very rare, more invasive, and often present with metastases with 5-year survival rates of 55%.[3] Initial imaging for thymoma includes CT Chest with contrast that usually shows a well-defined rounded or oval mass without adenopathy. If there is extensive mediastinal involvement, CT Neck/Abdomen with contrast can be performed. If CT imaging is inconclusive, PET/CT or MRI Chest with and without contrast is medically necessary, with MRI preferred in thymic carcinoma.[14,15] For preoperative planning, MRI Chest is also medically necessary.


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

# Thymoma and Thymic Carcinoma – Restaging (ONC-10.7)

**ON.OT.0010.7.A**
**v2.0.2026**

| Indication | Medically Necessary Imaging Study |
|---|---|
| Adjuvant therapy following surgical resection | • Follow surveillance imaging |
| Following induction chemotherapy prior to surgical resection, if no evidence of metastatic disease | ONE of the following:<br>• PET/CT (CPT® 78815)<br>• CT Chest with contrast (CPT® 71260)<br>• MRI Chest without and with contrast (CPT® 71552) |
| For suspected recurrence | • CT Chest with contrast (CPT® 71260) |
| Recurrence with extensive mediastinal involvement on CT Chest | • CT Abdomen with contrast (CPT® 74160)<br>• CT Neck with contrast (CPT® 70491) |
| Inconclusive finding on CT | ONE of the following:<br>• PET/CT (CPT® 78815)<br>• MRI Chest without and with contrast (CPT® 71552) |
| Metastatic disease on chemotherapy | • CT Neck (CPT® 70491), CT Chest (CPT® 71260), and CT Abdomen (CPT® 74160) with contrast, every 2 cycles of therapy |
| Thymic carcinomas | • See: **Non-Small Cell Lung Cancer Restaging/ Recurrence (ONC-8.4)** |

### Evidence Discussion

If induction chemotherapy is given, PET/CT can be obtained prior to surgical resection as studies have shown a correlation of radiographic response to pathologic response to help guide resectability.[16] Chest imaging with CT or MRI are also accepted imaging choices for this purpose. For recurrence, CT Chest with CT Neck/Abdomen is medically


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

necessary. PET/CT or MRI Chest is medically necessary if CT Chest is inconclusive. For individuals on chemotherapy for metastatic disease, CT Neck/Chest/Abdomen with contrast can be given every 2 cycles.[3]


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

# Thymoma and Thymic Carcinoma – Surveillance (ONC-10.8)

**ON.OT.0010.8.A**
**v2.0.2026**

| Indication | Medically Necessary Imaging Study |
|---|---|
| Thymoma, R0 resection | • CT Chest with contrast (CPT® 71260) and previously involved regions every 6 months for 2 years, then annually until year 10 |
| Thymoma, R1 or R2 resection | • CT Chest with contrast (CPT® 71260) and previously involved regions every 6 months for 2 years, then annually until year 10 |
| Thymic carcinoma, R0 resection | • CT Chest with contrast (CPT® 71260) every 6 months for 2 years and then annually until year 5 |
| Thymic carcinoma, R1 or R2 resection | • CT Chest with contrast (CPT® 71260) and previously involved regions every 3 months for 2 years, then annually until year 5 |

### Evidence Discussion

Thymoma surveillance is stratified into resection categories by NCCN. Thymoma surveillance should be with CT Chest with contrast and any previously involved areas for 10 years due to the risk of late recurrence.[3] For thymic carcinoma, like thymoma, management depends on the extent of resection. NCCN stated "patients who have an R0 resection have a 5-year survival of approximately 60%".[3] Thymic carcinoma surveillance recommendations from NCCN are based on consensus as there is a paucity of published studies specifically addressing surveillance imaging of thymic carcinoma. The recommendation includes imaging for 5 years.[3]


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

# References (ONC-10)

**v2.0.2026**

1. Riely GJ, Wood DE, Stevenson J, et al. National Comprehensive Cancer Network (NCCN) Guidelines Version 2.2026 – October 3, 2025. Mesothelioma: Pleural, available at: https://www.nccn.org/professionals/physician_gls/pdf/meso_pleural.pdf. Referenced with permission from the NCCN Clinical Practice Guidelines in Oncology (NCCN Guidelines™) for Mesothelioma: Pleural V2.2026 – October 3, 2025. ©2025 National Comprehensive Cancer Network, Inc. All rights reserved. The NCCN Guidelines™ and illustrations herein may not be reproduced in any form for any purpose without the express written permission of the NCCN. To view the most recent and complete version of the NCCN Guidelines™, go online to NCCN.org.
2. Riely GJ, Wood DE, Stevenson J, et al. National Comprehensive Cancer Network (NCCN) Guidelines Version 2.2026 – October 3, 2025. Mesothelioma: Peritoneal, available at: https://www.nccn.org/professionals/physician_gls/pdf/meso_peritoneal.pdf. Referenced with permission from the NCCN Clinical Practice Guidelines in Oncology (NCCN Guidelines™) for Mesothelioma: Peritoneal V2.2026 – October 3, 2025. ©2025 National Comprehensive Cancer Network, Inc. All rights reserved. The NCCN Guidelines™ and illustrations herein may not be reproduced in any form for any purpose without the express written permission of the NCCN. To view the most recent and complete version of the NCCN Guidelines™, go online to NCCN.org.
3. Riely GJ, Wood DE, Aisner DL, et al. National Comprehensive Cancer Network (NCCN) Guidelines Version 1.2026-October 3, 2025. Thymomas and Thymic Carcinomas, available at: https://www.nccn.org/professionals/physician_gls/pdf/thymic.pdf. Referenced with permission from the NCCN Clinical Practice Guidelines in Oncology (NCCN Guidelines™) for Thymomas and Thymic Carcinomas, V1.2026 – October 3, 2025. ©2025 National Comprehensive Cancer Network, Inc. All rights reserved. The NCCN Guidelines™ and illustrations herein may not be reproduced in any form for any purpose without the express written permission of the NCCN. To view the most recent and complete version of the NCCN Guidelines™, go online to NCCN.org.
4. Sørensen JB, Ravn J, Loft A, Brenøe J, Berthelsen AK, Nordic Mesothelioma Group. Preoperative staging of mesothelioma by 18F-fluoro-2-deoxy-D-glucose positron emission tomography/computer tomography fused imaging and mediastinoscopy compared to pathological findings after extrapleural pneumonectomy. *Eur J Cardiothorac Surg*. 2008;34:1090-1096. doi:10.1016/j.ejcts.2008.07.050.
5. Strange CD, Marom EM, Ahuja J, et al. Imaging of Malignant Pleural, Pericardial, and Peritoneal Mesothelioma. *Adv Anat Pathol*. 2023;30(4):280-291. doi:10.1097/PAP.0000000000000386
6. Strange CD, Truong MT, Ahuja J, Strange TA, Patel S, Marom EM. Imaging evaluation of thymic tumors. *Mediastinum*. 2023;7:28. Published 2023 Jun 6. doi:10.21037/med-22-58
7. Araujo-Filho JAB, Mayoral M, Zheng J, et al. CT Radiomic Features for Predicting Resectability and TNM Staging in Thymic Epithelial Tumors. *Ann Thorac Surg*. 2022;113(3):957-965. doi:10.1016/j.athoracsur.2021.03.084
8. Cimen F, Agackiran Y, Düzgün S, Aloglu M, Senturk A, Atikcan S. Factors affecting the life expectancy in malignant pleural mesothelioma: Our 10 years of studies and experience. *Medicine (Baltimore)*. 2022;101(39):e30711. doi:10.1097/MD.0000000000030711
9. Cox CW, Chung JH, Ackman JB, et al. ACR Appropriateness Criteria® Occupational Lung Diseases. *J Am Coll Radiol*. 2020;17(5S):S188-S197. doi:10.1016/j.jacr.2020.01.022.
10. Tsao AS, Pass HI, Rimner A, Mansfield AS. New era for malignant pleural mesothelioma: updates on therapeutic options. *J Clin Oncol*. 2022;40(6):681692. doi:10.1200/JCO.21.01567.
11. Sugarbaker PH. Intra-abdominal manifestations of pleural mesothelioma. *Ann Transl Med*. 2017;5(11):231. doi:10.21037/atm.2016.11.44.
12. Popat S, Baas P, Faivre-Finn C, et al. ESMO Guidelines Committee.Malignant pleural mesothelioma: ESMO Clinical Practice Guidelines for diagnosis, treatment and follow-up. *Ann Oncol*. 2022;33(2):129-142. doi:10.1016/j.annonc.2021.11.005.
13. Koyasu S. Imaging of thymic epithelial tumors-a clinical practice review. Mediastinum. 2024;8:41. Published 2024 Jun 7. doi:10.21037/med-23-66
14. Ito T, Suzuki H, Sakairi Y, Wada H, Nakajima T, Yoshino I. 18F-FDG-PET/CT predicts grade of malignancy and invasive potential of thymic epithelial tumors. Gen Thorac Cardiovasc Surg. 2021;69(2):274-281. doi:10.1007/s11748-020-01439-7


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

15. Lococo F, Chiapetta M, Triumbari E. et al. Current roles of PET/CT in thymic epithelial tumors: which evidences and which prospects? A pictorial review. *Cancers*. 2021;13(23).
16. Bou-Samra P, Chang A, Azari F,et al. Epidemiological, therapeutic, and survival trends in malignant pleural mesothelioma: A review of the National Cancer Database. *Cancer Med*. 2023;12(11):12208-12220. doi:10.1002/cam4.5915.


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

Click Anywhere in the Header to Return to the Main Table of Contents



# Breast Cancer (ONC-11)

Guideline

Breast Cancer – General Considerations (ONC-11.0)
Breast Cancer – Suspected/Diagnosis (ONC-11.1)
Breast Cancer – Initial Work-up/Staging (ONC-11.2)
Breast Cancer – Restaging/Recurrence (ONC-11.3)
Breast Cancer – Surveillance/Follow-up (ONC-11.4)
References (ONC-11)


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

# Breast Cancer – General Considerations (ONC-11.0)

**ON.BC.0011.0.A**

**v2.0.2026**

- This guideline applies to invasive carcinoma and ductal carcinoma in situ histologies of breast cancer.
- Advanced imaging to evaluate for distant metastases is not medically necessary for asymptomatic individuals with invasive carcinoma or ductal carcinoma in situ (DCIS).
- High-risk lesions, such as LCIS, ADH, and ALH are discussed in **Breast MRI Indications (BR-5.1)**.
- Bone scan has a high concordance rate with PET for detecting bone metastases.
- Scintimammography and Breast Specific Gamma Imaging (BSGI) are considered experimental, investigational, or unproven.
- For malignant phyllodes tumors of the breast, see **Sarcomas - Bone, Soft Tissue, and GIST (ONC-12)**

### Health Equity Considerations

Breast cancer is the second most deadly form of cancer among women in the United States and the most common form of cancer apart from skin cancer.[37] In the United States, the lifetime risk of dying from breast cancer is 1 in 39.[38] While the mortality rate from breast cancer has decreased in some populations, the overall rates of cancer among Black and Hispanic populations has continued to grow. Breast cancer rates are higher in White women, yet Black women are more likely to die from breast cancer. Medical advances have improved early detection, diagnosis, and screening, yet Black women still face significant barriers to receiving adequate treatment. In recent years, the 5-year survival rate has been 81% for Black women compared to 92% for White women, highlighting a persistent disparity in outcomes.[37]

Breast cancer rates, survival, mortality rates, and risk factors vary not only by race and ethnicity, by also by socioeconomic status. Women with low incomes are significantly less likely to undergo breast cancer screening, more likely to be diagnosed at a later stage, and often receive inadequate or inequitable treatment, which are factors that contribute to higher mortality rates.[37] In studies of individuals on Surveillance, Epidemiology, and End Results (SEER) Medicare, those who were non-White, located in rural areas, were of older age, and had comorbidities were all less likely to receive appropriate radiation after a breast cancer diagnosis.[39]


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

To eliminate breast cancer health disparities, the lack of sufficient and diverse data will need to be addressed, as well as building a better understanding of cancer etiology and appropriate treatments for different populations.[40]


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

Click Anywhere in the Header to Return to the Main Table of Contents



# Breast Cancer – Suspected/Diagnosis (ONC-11.1)

**ON.BC.0011.1.A**
**v2.0.2026**

- See: **Breast MRI Indications (BR-5.1)** in the Breast Imaging Guidelines for evaluation of suspected breast cancer.


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

# Breast Cancer – Initial Work-up/Staging (ONC-11.2)

**ON.BC.0011.2.A**
**v2.0.2026**

| Indication | Medically Necessary Imaging Study |
|---|---|
| Newly diagnosed breast cancer or ductal carcinoma in situ | • Diagnostic bilateral mammogram and/or Ultrasound Breast (CPT® 76641 or CPT® 76642) are imaging modalities of choice<br>• MRI Breast bilateral without and with contrast (CPT® 77049) |
| ANY of the following:<br>• Atypical ductal hyperplasia (ADH)<br>• Atypical lobular hyperplasia (ALH)<br>• Lobular carcinoma in situ (LCIS) | See: **Breast MRI Indications (BR-5.1)** |
| ANY of the following:<br>• Ductal carcinoma in situ<br>• Stage I-III | • For sentinel lymph node evaluation: Lymph system imaging (lymphoscintigraphy, CPT® 78195)<br>◦ SPECT/CT (CPT® 78830) if requested |
| Stages I, II, and operable stage III (N1 disease) | • Routine systemic imaging is not medically necessary for initial staging of non-metastatic breast cancer in the absence of signs or symptoms |


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

| Indication | Medically Necessary Imaging Study |
|---|---|
| ANY of the following:<br>• Diagnosis of breast cancer with suspected or proven metastatic disease or biopsy-proven distant metastases/ Stage IV disease (not locally advanced disease with three or less positive axillary nodes)<br>• Signs or symptoms of systemic disease<br>• Elevated liver function tests or tumor markers<br>• Inflammatory breast cancer (stage T4d)<br>• 4 or more axillary lymph nodes positive for cancer involvement (i.e., N2 disease, including Stage III N2) | ANY or ALL of the following:<br>• CT Chest (CPT® 71260) **and** CT Abdomen and Pelvis (CPT® 74177) with contrast<br>• Bone scan (CPT® 78306) (if PET/CT is not being performed)<br>See: **Nuclear Medicine (NM) Imaging in Oncology (ONC-1.3)** for additional bone scan codes |
| ANY of the following:<br>• Stage III N2 disease or higher<br>• T4 disease<br>• Inflammatory breast cancer (stage T4d)<br>• Inconclusive CT and/or bone scan | In addition to the above:<br>• FDG PET/CT (CPT® 78815) |
| Bone pain | • Bone scan (CPT® 78306) (see: **Nuclear Medicine (NM) Imaging in Oncology (ONC-1.3)**) for additional bone scan codes<br>• PET/CT (CPT® 78815) with Sodium Fluoride radiotracer if CT, MRI, Bone scan and FDG PET/ CT scan are inconclusive for bone metastases<br>• See: **Bone (Non-Vertebral) Metastases (ONC-31.5)**<br>• See: **Spinal/Vertebral Metastases (ONC-31.6)** |


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

## Evidence Discussion

Evaluation of disease in the breast/axilla with breast MRI:

National Comprehensive Cancer Network (NCCN) guidelines stated that breast MRI "may be used for staging evaluation to define extent of cancer or presence of multifocal or multicentric cancer in the ipsilateral breast, or to screen the contralateral breast at the time of initial diagnosis".[1] Disagreement continues to exist as to whether the benefit of breast MRI in initial staging outweighs the drawbacks. Detractors cite evidence of increased time-to-surgery, high false-positive rates among the reasons to avoid universal usage of breast MRI in initial staging.[12,32] The American Society of Breast Surgeons Consensus (ASBrS) statement recommended against the use of routine MRI in the preoperative workup of individuals with breast cancer.[11] MRI may be helpful in elucidating whether disease exists in the intervening breast tissue thereby aiding in tumor size estimation and the decision to opt for mastectomy vs. lumpectomy. NCCN cautioned that "surgical decisions should not be based solely on MRI findings".[1] Breast MRI has been shown to find occult primary cancers in roughly two thirds of individuals who present with positive axillary lymph nodes, allowing for definitive surgical management.[31] NCCN stated that breast MRI "may be helpful for evaluation before and after preoperative systemic therapy to define extent of disease, response to treatment, and potential for breast-conservation therapy".[1] Breast MRI has also been shown to more accurately predict tumor size in individuals with invasive lobular carcinoma than conventional imaging.[36] While data are limited on the use of breast MRI in the setting of Paget's disease of the breast, one study found that for individuals with a histologic diagnosis of Paget's disease and a negative mammogram, MRI was able to detect occult cancer in 4/8 (50%) individuals.[34] NCCN guidelines noted that there is considerable controversy in the use of MRI based on breast density.[1] They noted that MRI advocates argue that it has a high sensitivity to find occult disease in "dense breasts where mammographically occult disease is more likely to elude preoperative detection"; however, MRI detractors note the high percentage of false- positive findings, resulting in further workup, overestimation of extent of disease, and increased frequency of mastectomy. Given the recommendation by NCCN that breast MRI may be useful for specific circumstances in initial staging, these guidelines allow for the approval of breast MRI in initial staging to empower individuals and providers to discuss the risks and benefits of this modality and move forward with the most advantageous choice for the individual's specific circumstances.

Lymphatic mapping with lymphoscintigraphy and/or SPECT/CT:

Sentinel node biopsy is important in the staging of individuals with breast cancer. However, lymphoscintigraphy has limited utility in this setting.[21] In individuals with recurrent disease who have had previous axillary surgery, lymphoscintigraphy with SPECT/CT may be helpful in delineating alternate drainage pathways.[20] In individuals who have had a positive axillary node prior to neoadjuvant chemotherapy, some authors


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

have also found the technique to be helpful in identifying the previously positive clipped node, which may not be subsequently identified as a sentinel node.[23]

Systemic staging with CT Chest, Abdomen, Pelvis, and bone scan vs. PET/CT:

The NCCN guidelines stated to "consider additional imaging studies only in the presence of signs and symptoms of metastatic disease and for patients who are clinically high risk".[1] This is in keeping with the ACR Appropriateness Criteria which stated that systemic staging is "usually not appropriate" for all newly diagnosed clinical Stage I-IIA (early stage) breast cancer.[37] Over a third of individuals with inflammatory breast cancer will have distant metastatic disease at presentation and NCCN recommended staging studies in these individuals.[1,33]

NCCN guidelines recommended CT scan for the work up for distant metastatic disease.[1] NCCN also stated that the "routine use of FDG PET/CT is not recommended in the staging of clinical stage I, II, or operable III (T3,N1) breast cancer.[1] However, NCCN indicated that PET/CT may be performed at the same time as diagnostic CT and can be helpful as a problem-solving tool when conventional imaging is suspicious or inconclusive. It is also noted to be "helpful in identifying unsuspected regional nodal disease and/or distant metastases when used in addition to standard staging studies".[1] Bone imaging is not recommended if FDG PET/CT is already going to be performed.[1] Given the above, these guidelines allow for the selected use of concomitant PET/CT for initial staging in specific clinical circumstances.


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

# Breast Cancer – Restaging/Recurrence (ONC-11.3)

**ON.BC.0011.3.A**

**v2.0.2026**

- For imaging related to breast reconstruction, see: **Breast Reconstruction (BR-3.1)** in the Breast Imaging Guidelines

| Indication | Medically Necessary Imaging Study |
|---|---|
| ANY of the following:<br>• End of planned neoadjuvant chemotherapy to determine resectability<br>• Biopsy proven local recurrence<br>• Suspicion of recurrence with inconclusive mammogram and/or ultrasound (BIRADS 0)<br>• Mammogram and/or ultrasound conflicts with physical exam | • MRI Breast Bilateral without and with contrast (CPT® 77049) |
| After neoadjuvant chemotherapy, if sentinel lymph node evaluation is planned | • Lymph system imaging (lymphoscintigraphy, CPT® 78195)<br>◦ SPECT/CT (CPT® 78830) if requested |
| ANY of the following:<br>• Assessing for residual disease after surgery<br>• Assessing response to neoadjuvant chemotherapy<br>• After lumpectomy or mastectomy, prior to adjuvant therapy | • Neither PET nor CT are medically necessary for systemic restaging after neoadjuvant chemotherapy or after surgery<br>• If surgery upstages individual to Stage III N2 disease or higher and has not had prior staging, refer to **Breast Cancer - Initial Work-up/Staging (ONC-11.2)** |


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

| Indication | Medically Necessary Imaging Study |
|---|---|
| • Treatment response in individuals with metastatic disease and measurable disease on imaging<br>◦ For individuals receiving chemotherapy, imaging is medically necessary after every 2 cycles<br>◦ For individuals receiving hormonal or endocrine therapy, imaging is medically necessary every 3 months | • CT Chest with contrast (CPT® 71260); and CT Abdomen and Pelvis with contrast (CPT® 74177)<br>• Bone scan (CPT® 78306) (see also: **Nuclear Medicine (NM) Imaging in Oncology (ONC-1.3)** for additional bone scan codes)<br>In addition to the above options, for individuals receiving systemic treatment for brain metastases:<br>• MRI Brain without and with contrast (CPT® 70553) |
| ANY of the following:<br>• Elevated LFTs<br>• Elevated tumor markers<br>• Signs or symptoms of recurrence<br>• Biopsy proven recurrence | Any or all of the following:<br>• CT Chest (CPT® 71260) and CT Abdomen and Pelvis (CPT® 74177) with contrast<br>• Bone scan (CPT® 78306) (See also: **Nuclear Medicine (NM) Imaging in Oncology) (ONC-1.3)** for additional bone scan codes)<br>For individuals with prior history of brain metastases or current signs or symptoms of brain metastases:<br>• MRI Brain without and with contrast (CPT® 70553) |
| • Inconclusive CT, MRI, and/or bone scan<br>• Treatment response assessment for bone-only metastases (excluding brain metastases) and a prior bone scan has not been performed for serial comparison | • $^{18}$F-FDG PET/CT (CPT® 78815) |


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

| Indication | Medically Necessary Imaging Study |
|---|---|
| Individuals with known or suspected bone metastases AND inconclusive bone findings on ALL of the following:<br>• CT, MRI, bone scan, and FDG PET/CT scan | • $^{18}$F Sodium Fluoride PET/CT (CPT® 78815) |
| To determine the ER-status of suspected/ known metastatic recurrence noted on CT/ bone scan **and** any one of the following:<br>• Biopsy of metastatic site is non-diagnostic/inconclusive<br>• Biopsy of metastatic site is risky & cannot be performed (metastatic sites in the brain, spine or near vascular structures) | • $^{18}$F-FES (fluoroestradiol) PET/CT scan (CPT® 78815 or CPT® 78816) |

**Evidence Discussion**

Breast MRI has been shown to predict extent of pathological tumor response in the breast and lymph nodes after neoadjuvant systemic therapy better than conventional imaging, although may over- or under-estimate residual tumor size.[35]

While some authors have found the use of MRI to be helpful in terms of estimating size of ipsilateral breast tumor recurrences and finding multifocal or multicentric disease[27], others have found that the addition of MRI in this context did not significantly change management and increased time to definitive therapy.[26] However, as previously noted, MRI may be a useful adjunct in situations where conventional imaging is inconclusive.

As individuals with symptoms for distant metastatic disease would have had systemic staging prior to neoadjuvant chemotherapy and/or surgery, there is no indication to repeat these until treatment is completed. However, for individuals with metastatic disease, NCCN guidelines recommended CT Chest, Abdomen, and Pelvis with contrast every 2-4 cycles of chemotherapy or every 2-6 months of endocrine therapy and bone scan is recommended every 4-6 cycles of chemotherapy or every 2-6 months of endocrine therapy. Restaging using these modalities is also advised if there is concern for progression of disease. They noted that PET/CT is not routinely medically necessary for restaging "because of the absence of a reproducible, validated, and widely accepted set of standards for disease activity assessment". PET is instead preferred to be reserved as a problem-solving tool when conventional imaging is inconclusive. Additionally, NCCN noted sodium fluoride PET/CT may be helpful to detect bone metastases where other imaging is inconclusive.[1]


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

# Breast Cancer – Surveillance/Follow-up (ONC-11.4)

**ON.BC.0011.4.U**
**v2.0.2026**

| Indication | Medically Necessary Imaging Study |
|---|---|
| Measurable metastatic disease on maintenance therapy or being monitored off therapy | ANY or ALL of the following, every 3 months for up to 5 years after completion of active treatment:<br>• CT Chest (CPT® 71260) and CT Abdomen and Pelvis (CPT® 74177) with contrast<br>• Bone scan (CPT® 78306) (see also: **Nuclear Medicine (NM) Imaging in Oncology (ONC-1.3)** for additional bone scan codes) |
| • Asymptomatic non-metastatic disease<br>• Individuals receiving post-operative adjuvant therapy | • No advanced imaging |
| Individuals with a personal history of breast cancer (not treated with bilateral mastectomy) | • Annual MRI Breast Bilateral without and with contrast (CPT® 77049) |

**Evidence Discussion**

NCCN guidelines suggested that "the utility of MRI in follow-up screening of most patients with prior breast cancer is undefined", but recommend annual MRI in individuals with a personal history of breast cancer who were either younger than age 50 or who have dense breasts.[1] ACR also addressed the use of MRI breast in individuals with dense breast tissue. They did not differentiate between heterogeneously and extremely dense breasts in the recommendation. ACR considered dense breasts to be heterogeneously dense (Category C) and extremely dense (Category D).[29] As individuals with breast cancer may have residual breast tissue in the ipsilateral or contralateral breast for which certain genetic mutations may increase the risk of subsequent cancers, breast MRI would also be medically necessary in such individuals.[1] Individuals with a clinical lifetime risk estimated to be ≥20% lifetime risk prior to their diagnosis of breast cancer and/or who had a history of ADH or lobular neoplasia would have been candidates for breast cancer screening with


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

breast MRI regardless (see BR 5.1) and therefore, would equally be eligible for this screening modality after breast cancer treatment, as long as they had not had bilateral mastectomies. Individuals who have had bilateral mastectomies have little residual tissue, and therefore, surveillance with breast imaging would be of little value. A meta-analysis found that the rate of occult cancer in individuals with mastectomy and the rate at which MRI detected cancer in individuals after mastectomy was well below the current BIRADS benchmark for women with genetic predispositions to cancer.[25]

The NCCN guidelines stated "In the absence of clinical signs and symptoms suggestive of recurrent disease, there is no indication for laboratory or imaging studies for metastases screening".[1] This is in keeping with ASCO's Choosing Wisely guideline which similarly recommended against surveillance testing with biomarkers or imaging for asymptomatic breast cancer in individuals who have been treated with curative intent.[28] Several studies have shown no benefit from routine imaging which can result in unnecessary radiation exposure and biopsies, and lead to misdiagnosis and treatment related complications.[24] A study also found that more intensive screening for metastasis did not result in improved survival.[22]


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

# References (ONC-11)

**v2.0.2026**

1. Gradishar WJ, Moran MS, Abraham J, et al. National Comprehensive Cancer Network (NCCN) Guidelines Version 5.2025 – October 16, 2025. Breast cancer, available at: https://www.nccn.org/professionals/physician_gls/pdf/breast.pdf Referenced with permission from the NCCN Clinical Practice Guidelines in Oncology (NCCN Guidelines™) for Breast Cancer V5.2025 – October 16, 2025. ©2025 National Comprehensive Cancer Network, Inc. All rights reserved. The NCCN Guidelines™ and illustrations herein may not be reproduced in any form for any purpose without the express written permission of the NCCN. To view the most recent and complete version of the NCCN Guidelines™, go online to NCCN.org.
2. Cardoso F, Costa A, Senkus E, et al. 3rd ESO-ESMO international consensus guidelines for Advanced Breast Cancer (ABC 3). *Breast*. 2017;31:244-259. doi:10.1016/j.breast.2016.10.001
3. Khatcheressian JL, Hurley P, Bantug E, et al. Breast cancer follow-up and management after primary treatment: American Society of Clinical Oncology clinical practice guideline update. *J Clin Oncol.* 2013;31:961-965. doi:10.1200/JCO.2012.45.9859.
4. Puglisi F, Follador A, Minisini AM, et al. Baseline staging tests after a new diagnosis of breast cancer: further evidence of their limited indications. *Ann Oncol*. 2005;16(2):263-266. doi:10.1093/annonc/mdi063.
5. Gerke O, Naghavi-Behzad M, Nygaard ST, et al. Diagnosing Bone Metastases in Breast Cancer: A Systematic Review and Network Meta-Analysis on Diagnostic Test Accuracy Studies of 2-[18F]FDG-PET/CT, 18F-NaF-PET/CT, MRI, Contrast-Enhanced CT, and Bone Scintigraphy. *Semin Nucl Med*. 2025;55(1):137-151. doi:10.1053/j.semnuclmed.2024.10.008
6. Hong S, Li J, Wang S. 18FDG PET-CT for diagnosis of distant metastases in breast cancer patients. A meta-analysis. *Surg Oncol*. 2013;22(2):139-143. doi:10.1016/j.suronc.2013.03.001.
7. Cheng X, Li Y, Liu B, Xu Z, Bao L, Wang J. 18F-FDG PET/CT and PET for evaluation of pathological response to neoadjuvant chemotherapy in breast cancer: a meta-analysis. *Acta Radiol*. 2012;53(6):615-627. doi:10.1258/ar.2012.110603.
8. Simos D, Catley C, van Walraven C, et al. Imaging for distant metastases in women with early-stage breast cancer: a population-based cohort study. *CMAJ*. 2015;187(12):E387-E397. doi:10.1503/cmaj.150003.
9. Baltz AP, Siegel ER, Kamal AH, et al. Clinical Impact of ASCO Choosing Wisely Guidelines on Staging Imaging for Early-Stage Breast Cancers: A Time Series Analysis Using SEER-Medicare Data. JCO Oncol Pract. 2023;19(2):e274-e285. doi:10.1200/OP.22.00500
10. Expert Panel on Breast Imaging, Heller SL, Lourenco AP, et al. ACR Appropriateness Criteria® Imaging After Mastectomy and Breast Reconstruction. J Am Coll Radiol. 2020;17(11S):S403-S414. doi:10.1016/j.jacr.2020.09.009
11. Chagpar AB, Howard-McNatt M, Chiba A, et. al. Factors affecting time to surgery in breast cancer patients. *Am Surg*. 2022;88(4):648-652. doi:10.1177/00031348211054714.
12. Peters NHGM, van Esser S, van den Bosch MAAJ, et. al. Preoperative MRI and surgical management in patients with nonpalpable breast cancer: the MONET – randomized controlled trial. *Eur J Cancer*. 2011;47(6):879-886. doi:10.1016/j.ejca.2010.11.035
13. Turnbull L, Brown S, Harvey I, et. al. Comparative effectiveness of MRI in breast cancer (COMICE) trial: a randomized controlled trial. *Lancet*. 2010;375(9714):563-571. doi:10.1016/S0140-6736(09)62070-5.
14. Daly MB, Pal T, AlHilli Z, et. al. National Comprehensive Cancer Network (NCCN) Guidelines Version 2.2026 – October 10, 2025. Genetic/Familial High-Risk Assessment: Breast, Ovarian, Pancreatic, and Prostate, available at: https://www.nccn.org/professionals/physician_gls/pdf/genetics_bopp.pdf Referenced with permission from the NCCN Clinical Practice Guidelines in Oncology (NCCN Guidelines™) for Genetic/Familial High-Risk Assessment: Breast, Ovarian, Pancreatic, and Prostate V2.2026 – October 10, 2025. ©2025 National Comprehensive Cancer Network, Inc. All rights reserved. The NCCN Guidelines™ and illustrations herein may not be reproduced in any form for any purpose without the express written permission of the NCCN. To view the most recent and complete version of the NCCN Guidelines™, go online to NCCN.org.
15. Moncrieff M, Pywell S, Snelling A, et. al. Effectiveness of SPECT/CT imaging for sentinel node biopsy staging of primary cutaneous melanoma and patient outcomes. *Ann Surg Oncol*. 2022;29(2):767-775. doi:10.1245/s10434-021-10911-4.


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

16. Quartuccio N, Garau LM, Arnone A, et. al. Comparsion of 99mTc-labeled colloid SPECT/CT and planar lymphoscintigraphy in sentinel lymph node detection in patients with melanoma: a meta-analysis. *J Clin Med*. 2020;9(6):1680. doi:10.3390/jcm9061680.
17. Bennie G, Vorster M, Buscombe J, Sathekge M. The added value of a single-photon emission computed tomography-computed in sentinel lymph node mapping in patients with breast cancer and malignant melanoma. *World J Nucl Med.* 2015;14(01):41-46. doi:10.4103/1450-1147.150543
18. Ulaner GA, Mankoff DA, Clark AS, et al. Appropriate use criteria for estrogen receptor-targeted pet imaging with 16α-18f-fluoro-17β-fluoroestradiol. *J Nucl Med.* 2023;64(3):351-354. doi:10.2967/jnumed.123.265420.
19. Borrelli P, Donswijk ML, Stokkel MP, et al. Contribution of SPECT/CT for sentinel node localization in patients with ipsilateral breast cancer relapse. *Eur J Nucl Med Mol Imaging*. 2017;44(4): 630-637. doi:10.1007/s00259-0163545-8.
20. Chagpar, AB, Kehdy F, Scoggins CR, et al. Effect of lymphoscintigraphy drainage patterns on sentinel lymph node biopsy in patients with breast cancer. *Am J Surg*. 2005;190(4):557-562. doi:10.1016/j.amjsurg.2005.06.010.
21. Cheun JH, Jung J, Lee ES, et al. Intensity of metastasis screening and survival outcomes in patients with breast cancer. *Sci Rep*. 2021;11(1):2851. doi:10.1038/s41598-021-82485-w.
22. Christin OL, Kuten J, Even-Sapir E, Klausner J, Menes TS. Node positive breast cancer: Concordance between baseline PET/CT and sentinel node assessment after neoadjuvant therapy. *Surg Oncol*. 2021;30:1-5. doi:10.1016/j.suronc.2019.05.006.
23. Jochelson MHD, Ganz PA. Surveillance and monitoring in breast cancer survivors: maximizing benefit and minimizing harm. *ASCO Educational Book*. 2013;33(33). doi:https://doi.org/10.14694/EdBook_AM.2013.33.e13.
24. Smith D, Sepehr S, Karakatsanis A, Strand F, Valachis A. Yield of surveillance imaging after mastectomy with or without reconstruction for patients with prior breast cancer: a systematic review and meta-analysis. *JAMA Network Open*. 2021;5(12):e2244212-e2244212. doi:10.1001/jamanetworkopen.2022.44212.
25. Sutherland A, Huppe A, Wagner JL. The clinical impact of MRI on surgical planning for patients with in-breast tumor recurrence. *Breast Cancer Res Treat*. 2022;193(2):515-522. doi:10.1007/s10549-022-06589-1.
26. Walstra C, Schipper RJ, Winter-Warnars GA, et al. Local staging of ipsilateral breast tumor recurrence: mammography, ultrasound, or MRI? *Breast Cancer Res Treat*. 2020;184(2), 385-395. doi:10.1007/s10549-020-05850-9.
27. American Society of Clinical Oncology (ASCO). Choosing Wisely: ASCO's Top Five List in Oncology. American Society of Clinical Oncology website. https://www.asco.org/. Published 2021.
28. Monticciolo DL, Newell MS, Moy L, Lee CS, Destounis SV. Breast Cancer Screening for Women at Higher-Than-Average Risk: Updated Recommendations From the ACR. *J Am Coll Radiol*. 2023;20(9):902-914. doi:10.1016/j.jacr.2023.04.002
29. Bevers TB, Niell BL, Aminololama-Shakeri S, et al. National Comprehensive Cancer Network (NCCN) Guidelines Version 2.2025 – March 28, 2025. Breast Cancer Screening and Diagnosis, available at: https://www.nccn.org/professionals/physician_gls/pdf/breast-screening.pdf Referenced with permission from the NCCN Clinical Practice Guidelines in Oncology (NCCN Guidelines™) for Breast Cancer Screening and Diagnosis V2.2025 – March 28, 2025. ©2025 National Comprehensive Cancer Network, Inc. All rights reserved. The NCCN Guidelines™ and illustrations herein may not be reproduced in any form for any purpose without the express written permission of the NCCN. To view the most recent and complete version of the NCCN Guidelines™, go online to NCCN.org.
30. de Bresser J, de Vos B, van der Ent F, Hulsewé K. Breast MRI in clinically and mammographically occult breast cancer presenting with an axillary metastasis: a systematic review. *ESJO*. 2010;36:114-119.
31. Cozzi A, Schiaffino S. Preoperative breast MRI in women with dense breasts: can we keep up with a rapidly changing scenario? *European Radiology*. 2023;33:8077-8079. doi:10.1007/s00330-023-10075-7.
32. Kleer CG, van Golen KL, Merajver SD. Molecular biology of breast cancer metastasis. Inflammatory breast cancer: clinical syndrome and molecular determinants. *Breast Cancer Res*. 2000;2:423-429.
33. Morrogh M, Morris EA, Liberman L, Van Zee K, Cody III HS, King TA. MRI identifies otherwise occult disease in select patients with Paget disease of the nipple. *Am Coll Surg*. 2008;206(2):316-321. doi:10.1016/j.jamcollsurg.2007.07.046.
34. Yeh E, Slanetz P, Kopans DB, et al. Prospective comparison of mammography, sonography, and MRI in patients undergoing neoadjuvant chemotherapy for palpable breast cancer. *AJR*. 2005;184:868-877.


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

35. Hovis KK, Lee JM, Hippe DS, et al. Accuracy of preoperative breast MRI versus conventional imaging in measuring pathologic extent of invasive lobular carcinoma. *Journal of Breast Imaging*. 2021;288-298. doi:10.1093/jbi/wbab015.
36. Expert Panel on Breast Imaging, McDonald ES, Scheel JR, et al. ACR Appropriateness Criteria® Imaging of Invasive Breast Cancer. *J Am Coll Radiol*. 2024;21(6):S186-S202. doi:10.1016/j.jacr.2024.02.021
37. Yedjou CG, Sims JN, Miele L, et al. Health and Racial Disparity in Breast Cancer. *Adv Exp Med Biol*. 2019;1152:31-49. doi:10.1007/978-3-030-20301-6_3
38. Houghton SC, Hankinson SE. Cancer Progress and Priorities: Breast Cancer. *Cancer Epidemiol Biomarkers Prev.* 2021;30(5):822-844. doi:10.1158/1055-9965.EPI-20-1193
39. Reeder-Hayes KE, Wheeler SB, Mayer DK. Health disparities across the breast cancer continuum. *Semin Oncol Nurs.* 2015;31(2):170-177. doi:10.1016/j.soncn.2015.02.005
40. Zavala VA, Bracci PM, Carethers JM, et al. Cancer health disparities in racial/ethnic minorities in the United States. *Br J Cancer*. 2021;124(2):315-332. doi:10.1038/s41416-020-01038-6


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

# Sarcomas – Bone, Soft Tissue, and GIST (ONC-12)

## Guideline

Bone and Soft Tissue Sarcomas – General Considerations (ONC-12.1)
Soft Tissue Sarcomas – Initial Work-up/Staging (ONC-12.2)
Soft Tissue Sarcomas – Restaging/Recurrence (ONC-12.3)
Soft Tissue Sarcomas - Surveillance/Follow-up (ONC-12.4)
Gastrointestinal Stromal Tumor (GIST) (ONC-12.5)
Bone Sarcomas – Initial Work-up/Staging (ONC-12.6)
Bone Sarcomas – Restaging/Recurrence (ONC-12.7)
Bone Sarcomas – Surveillance/Follow-up (ONC-12.8)
Benign Bone Tumors – General Considerations (ONC-12.9)
Benign Bone Tumors – Initial Work-up/Staging (ONC-12.10)
Benign Bone Tumors – Restaging/Recurrence (ONC-12.11)
Benign Bone Tumors – Surveillance/Follow-up (ONC-12.12)
References (ONC-12)


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

# Bone and Soft Tissue Sarcomas – General Considerations (ONC-12.1)

**ON.SS.0012.1.A**

**v2.0.2026**

- Sarcomas are tumors of mesenchymal origin, classified as high-, intermediate-, and low-grade (G) tumors (sometimes described as “spindle cell” cancers). They can arise in any bony, cartilaginous, smooth muscle, skeletal muscle, or cardiac muscle tissue.
- Malignant nerve sheath tumor cell types should be imaged as high-grade sarcoma.
- Sarcomas occur in both adult and pediatric individuals, but some are more common in one age group than the other. Unless specified below, individuals age ≥18 years old should be imaged according to this guideline section.
- Exceptions include:
  - Rhabdomyosarcoma in individuals of all ages should be imaged according to guidelines in **Rhabdomyosarcoma (RMS) (PEDONC-8.2)** in the Pediatric and Special Populations Oncology Imaging Guidelines.
  - Osteogenic sarcoma (Osteosarcoma) in individuals of all ages should be imaged according to guidelines in **Osteogenic Sarcoma (OS) (PEDONC-9.3)** in the Pediatric and Special Populations Oncology Imaging Guidelines.
  - Ewing sarcoma and Primitive Neuroectodermal Tumor in individuals of all ages should be imaged according to guidelines in **Ewing Sarcoma and Primitive Neuroectodermal Tumors (ESFT) (PEDONC-9.4)** in the Pediatric and Special Populations Oncology Imaging Guidelines.
  - Kaposi’s sarcoma in individuals of all ages should be imaged according to guidelines in **Kaposi’s Sarcoma (ONC-31.10)**.
  - See: **Uterine Cancer (ONC-22)** for imaging recommendations for uterine sarcoma.
  - Desmoplastic small round cell tumor in individuals of all ages should be imaged according to guidelines in **Non-Rhabdomyosarcoma Soft Tissue Sarcomas (NRSTS) (PEDONC-8.3)** in the Pediatric and Special Populations Oncology Imaging Guidelines.

### Evidence Discussion

The choice of imaging modality is driven by the primary tumor site. Cross sectional imaging of the primary site with MRI with and without contrast or CT with contrast is recommended for best illustration of anatomic detail and vascular and nodal involvement and provides flexibility for clinician discretion for choice of modality for all sites for maximum tumor definition with consideration of minimizing radiation exposure.[1,2]
CT is superior for evaluation for metastatic disease of the lung, which is medically necessary for all individuals with a newly diagnosed malignant sarcoma. Imaging both


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

with and without contrast for evaluation of metastatic disease to the lung is not medically necessary as this exposes individuals to higher radiation doses without significant clinical benefit.


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

# Soft Tissue Sarcomas – Initial Work-up/ Staging (ONC-12.2)

**ON.SS.0012.2.A**
**v2.0.2026**

| Indication | Medically Necessary Imaging Study |
|---|---|
| All individuals with biopsy-proven soft tissue sarcoma, regardless of histology | • CT Chest with (CPT® 71260) or CT Chest without (CPT® 71250) contrast<br>• MRI without and with contrast of involved area<br>◦ CT of involved area if contraindication to MRI |
| ANY of the following:<br>• Angiosarcoma<br>• Alveolar soft part sarcoma<br>• Clear cell sarcoma<br>• Epithelioid sarcoma<br>• Hemangiopericytoma<br>• Leiomyosarcoma<br>• Liposarcoma<br>• Retroperitoneal or intra-abdominal primary site (including pelvic primary site)<br>• Other histologies documented to have propensity for lymphatic spread and deep-seated tumors | In addition to the above, one of the following combinations:<br>• CT Abdomen and Pelvis with contrast (CPT® 74177)<br>• MRI Abdomen (CPT® 74183) and MRI Pelvis (CPT® 72197) without and with contrast<br>• MRI Abdomen (CPT® 74183) with and without contrast and CT Pelvis (CPT® 72193) with contrast<br>• CT Abdomen (CPT® 74160) with contrast and MRI Pelvis (CPT® 72197) without and with contrast |
| ANY of the following:<br>• Myxoid round cell liposarcoma<br>• Angiosarcoma<br>• Alveolar soft part sarcoma<br>• Cardiac sarcoma<br>• Neurologic signs or symptoms raising suspicion of CNS metastases | In addition to the above:<br>• MRI Brain without and with contrast (CPT® 70553)<br>• MRI Cervical/Thoracic/Lumbar Spine without and with contrast (CPT® 72156, CPT® 72157, and CPT® 72158) |


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

| Indication | Medically Necessary Imaging Study |
|---|---|
| Leiomyosarcoma | In addition to the above:<br>• Bone scan (CPT® 78306) (see also: **Nuclear Medicine (NM) Imaging in Oncology [ONC-1.3]** for additional bone scan codes) |
| ANY of the following:<br>• Grade of tumor in doubt following biopsy<br>• Conventional imaging suggests solitary metastasis amenable to surgical resection<br>• Inconclusive conventional imaging<br>• Prior to planned neoadjuvant therapy | • PET/CT (CPT® 78815 or CPT® 78816) |
| Desmoid Tumors | ONE of the following:<br>• CT without contrast or with contrast of the affected body part<br>• MRI without contrast or without and with contrast of the affected body part<br>• Imaging of lung, lymph node, and metastatic site for these tumors is not medically necessary |
| Myxoid/round cell liposarcoma | In addition to the above studies, whole-body MRI (CPT® 76498) is medically necessary for a baseline assessment |
| Dermatofibrosarcoma Protuberans (DFSP) | ONE of the following:<br>• CT without contrast or with contrast of the affected body part<br>• MRI without contrast or without and with contrast of the affected body part<br>• CT Chest with (CPT® 71260) or without (CPT® 71250) contrast for:<br>◦ Pulmonary symptoms<br>◦ Abnormal chest x-ray<br>◦ Sarcomatous differentiation |


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

| Indication | Medically Necessary Imaging Study |
|---|---|
| Malignant phyllodes tumor of the breast (not benign or borderline) | ANY or ALL of the following:<br>• CT Chest with contrast (CPT® 71260)<br>• CT Abdomen and Pelvis with contrast (CPT® 74177)<br>• MRI Breast bilateral without and with contrast (CPT® 77049) |

**Evidence Discussion**

- PET/CT is medically necessary where the grade of tumor is in doubt following biopsy or to confirm oligometastatic disease amenable to local treatment, to support treatment decision making. NCCN also supported the use of PET/CT for initial staging prior to planned neoadjuvant therapy. It is also a useful tool to follow inconclusive conventional imaging.[1]
- Different subtypes of soft tissue sarcomas have different patterns of spread; thus, a histologic diagnosis is essential to determine imaging strategy.
- Abdominal and pelvic imaging is not medically necessary for extremity, trunk, or head and neck primary sites, unless documented histologies with propensity for lymphatic spread.[14] Due to the propensity of myxoid and round cell liposarcomas for leptomeningeal spread, initial evaluation of the spine with MRI is medically necessary. MRI of the brain is medically necessary for those with CNS signs and symptoms, and for all individuals with angiosaroma, alveolar soft part sarcomas, and cardiac sarcoma.[1]
- For desmoid tumors, disease biology and patterns of recurrence do not support metastatic disease workup, CT Chest, or body areas outside of the primary site, as they subject individuals to additional radiation and incidental finding risk.[7]
- For dermatofibrosarcoma protuberans (DFSP), CT Chest is medically necessary for sarcomatous differentiation as noted for other sarcoma histologies above, or for pulmonary symptoms. In the absence of these features, CT exposes to risk with no statistically significant clinical benefit.[10,15]


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

# Soft Tissue Sarcomas – Restaging/ Recurrence (ONC-12.3)

**ON.SS.0012.3.A**
**v2.0.2026**

| Indication | Medically Necessary Imaging Study |
|---|---|
| ANY of the following:<br>• After preoperative radiotherapy<br>• After surgical resection | • MRI without and with contrast or CT with contrast of affected body area<br>• CT Chest with contrast (CPT® 71260) OR without contrast (CPT® 71250) (if the primary site is the chest, MRI Chest without and with contrast (CPT® 71552) or MRI Chest with contrast CPT® 71550)) |
| Baseline end of therapy evaluation, including completion of adjuvant radiotherapy | • Same studies as initial work-up (See **Soft Tissue Sarcomas - Initial Work-up/Staging (ONC-12.2)**) |
| ANY of the following:<br>• Differentiate tumor from radiation or surgical fibrosis<br>• Determine response to neoadjuvant therapy<br>• Confirm oligometastatic disease prior to curative intent surgical resection | • PET/CT (CPT® 78815 or CPT® 78816)<br>◦ If treated with radiation therapy, PET/CT no sooner than 12 weeks (3 months) post completion of radiation therapy |
| EITHER of the following:<br>• Chemotherapy response for individuals with measurable disease<br>• Individuals on neoadjuvant treatment without known lung involvement | • CT with contrast or MRI without and with contrast of affected body area every 2 cycles |


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

| Indication | Medically Necessary Imaging Study |
|---|---|
| Unresectable or metastatic disease on chemotherapy | Every 2 cycles:<br>• CT with contrast or MRI without and with contrast of affected body area<br>AND<br>• CT Chest with contrast (CPT® 71260) or CT Chest without contrast (CPT® 71250) |
| Recurrence suspected | • Repeat all imaging for initial workup of specific histology and/or primary site and other symptomatic areas (See **Soft Tissue Sarcomas - Initial Work-up/ Staging (ONC-12.2)**) |
| Preoperative planning prior to resection | ANY or ALL of the following:<br>• MRI without contrast or without and with contrast of involved area<br>• CT (contrast as requested) of involved area |
| Dermatofibrosarcoma Protuberans (DFSP) | • CT without contrast or with contrast of the affected body part or MRI without contrast or without and with contrast of the affected body part<br>• CT Chest with contrast (CPT® 71260) or CT Chest without (CPT® 71250) contrast for:<br>◦ Known prior thoracic disease<br>◦ New or worsening pulmonary symptoms<br>◦ New or worsening chest x-ray<br>◦ Sarcomatous differentiation |
| Malignant phyllodes tumor of the breast (not benign or borderline) after resection or radiotherapy | See **Soft Tissue Sarcomas - Surveillance/Follow-up (ONC-12.4)** |

### Evidence Discussion

- Local therapy is a cornerstone of treatment for sarcomas. Cross-sectional imaging of primary site, with modality used at diagnosis specific to tumor site, is medically necessary after pre-operative radiotherapy, and after resection of adjuvant radiotherapy to determine response, as well as for pre-operative planning prior to resection and every two cycles of treatment during active therapy. NCCN


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

supported imaging for a baseline at the end of therapy. In the absence of known lung involvement or pulmonary symptoms, restaging of lung on active treatment does not provide benefit in most histologies and exposes individuals to additional radiation and risk of incidental findings.[1]

- NCCN indicated that PET/CT may be useful for therapy response. Individuals with baseline tumor SUVmax ≥6 and <40% decrease in FDG avidity after neoadjuvant therapy are at high risk for disease recurrence. Pretreatment tumor SUVmax and change in SUVmax after neoadjuvant therapy has been shown to identify individuals at high risk of tumor recurrence and may be used to identify individuals most likely to benefit from additional chemotherapy.[13] PET/CT is medically necessary to assess neoadjuvant therapy response, to differentiate scarring from disease, or to confirm oligometastatic disease prior to resection.[c1,13]


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

# Soft Tissue Sarcomas - Surveillance/ Follow-up (ONC-12.4)

**ON.SS.0012.4.A**
**v2.0.2026**

| Indication | Medically Necessary Imaging Study |
|---|---|
| For any of the following:<br>• Retroperitoneal/intra-abdominal primary site (including pelvic primary site)<br>• Angiosarcoma<br>• Epithelioid sarcoma | ANY or ALL of the following every 3 months for 3 years, then every 6 months for 2 more years, then annually:<br>• CT Chest with (CPT® 71260) or without (CPT® 71250) contrast<br>• CT Abdomen and Pelvis with contrast (CPT® 74177)<br>• CT with contrast or MRI without and with contrast of any other involved body areas |
| Myxoid/round cell liposarcoma | ANY or ALL of the following every 3 months for 2 years, then every 6 months for 2 more years, then annually:<br>• CT Chest with (CPT® 71260) or without (CPT® 71250) contrast<br>• CT Abdomen and Pelvis with contrast (CPT® 74177)<br>• CT with contrast or MRI without and with contrast of any other involved body areas<br>• MRI Cervical/Thoracic/Lumbar Spine without and with contrast (CPT® 72156, CPT® 72157, and CPT® 72158) |
| Low-grade/Stage I extremity or trunk, primary site | ANY or ALL of the following every 6 months for 2 years, then annually thereafter:<br>• CT Chest with contrast (CPT® 71260) or CT Chest without contrast (CPT® 71250)<br>• CT with contrast, MRI without contrast, or MRI without and with contrast of primary site |


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

| Indication | Medically Necessary Imaging Study |
|---|---|
| Any soft tissue sarcoma not addressed elsewhere in these surveillance guidelines | ANY or ALL of the following every 3 months for 2 years, then every 6 months for 2 more years, then annually:<br>• CT with contrast, MRI without contrast, or MRI without and with contrast of primary site<br>• CT Chest with (CPT® 71260) or without (CPT® 71250) contrast<br>• CT with contrast or MRI without and with contrast of any other involved body areas |
| ANY of the following:<br>• Angiosarcoma<br>• Alveolar soft part sarcoma<br>• Cardiac sarcoma | In addition to the above studies:<br>• MRI Brain without and with contrast (CPT® 70553) annually<br><br>For surveillance of individuals with known brain metastases, see: **Brain Metastases (ONC-31.3)** |
| Desmoid tumors | ONE of the following every 3 months for 3 years, then every 6-12 months:<br>• CT without contrast or with contrast of the affected body part<br>• MRI without contrast or without and with contrast of the affected body part |
| Dermatofibrosarcoma Protuberans | • No routine imaging unless clinical signs/symptoms of recurrence |
| Malignant phyllodes tumor of the breast (not borderline or benign) | ANY or ALL of the following every 3-6 months for 3 years, then every 6 months for 2 years, and then annually<br>• CT Chest with contrast (CPT® 71260)<br>• CT Abdomen and Pelvis with contrast (CPT® 74177)<br>• MRI Breast bilateral without and with contrast (CPT® 77049) |

### Evidence Discussion

Time frames, modality, and body site for surveillance by histology are based on tumor recurrence patterns specific to primary site and tumor biology. PET/CT is not medically


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

necessary for asymptomatic surveillance, as this can lead to unnecessary radiation exposure and invasive procedures or excess treatment.[1,7,10]


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

# Gastrointestinal Stromal Tumor (GIST) (ONC-12.5)

**ON.SS.0012.5.A**
**v2.0.2026**

**General Considerations**

- GISTs are mesenchymal neoplasms of the gastrointestinal (GI) tract, mostly found in the stomach and upper small bowel, commonly metastasizing to the liver and abdominal cavity and primarily treated with surgery.
- Recurrence risk of GIST is estimated by prognostic model based on location, size of primary tumor, and mitotic rate per high power field (HPF).
- High-risk category includes any tumor >5cm with >5 mitoses/50 HPF and any tumors >10cm in size regardless of mitotic rate.

| Indication | Medically Necessary Imaging Study |
|---|---|
| Suspected/Diagnosis | • CT Abdomen and Pelvis with contrast (CPT® 74177) |
| Initial Work-up/Staging | • CT Chest (CPT® 71260) with contrast or CT Chest without contrast (71250) and<br>• CT Abdomen and Pelvis (CPT® 74177) with contrast, if not already performed |
| In addition to the above imaging for initial staging of either of the following:<br>• Liver lesions noted on initial CT<br>• Preoperative assessment of liver | • MRI Abdomen without and with contrast (CPT® 74183) |
| Monitoring response to treatment (every 8 to 12 weeks) in any of the following:<br>• Unresectable primary disease<br>• Metastatic disease<br>• Resectable disease with significant morbidity | EITHER of the following:<br>• CT Abdomen and Pelvis with contrast (CPT® 74177)<br>• MRI Abdomen without and with contrast (CPT® 74183) and MRI Pelvis without and with contrast (CPT® 72197) |


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

| Indication | Medically Necessary Imaging Study |
|---|---|
| Additional treatment response, in addition to the above imaging, for known or suspected chest involvement | • CT Chest with contrast (CPT® 71260) or CT Chest without contrast (CPT® 71250) |
| Evaluation of inconclusive findings on conventional imaging | • PET/CT (CPT® 78815) |
| Surveillance for any of the following:<br>• Incompletely resected<br>• Metastatic disease<br>• High-risk disease | Every 3 months for 5 years, then annually:<br>• CT Abdomen and Pelvis with contrast (CPT® 74177) |
| Surveillance for completely resected, low-risk disease | Every 6 months for 5 years, then annually:<br>• CT Abdomen and Pelvis with contrast (CPT® 74177) |
| Known or suspected recurrence | ANY or ALL of the following:<br>• CT Abdomen and Pelvis with contrast (CPT® 74177)<br>• MRI Abdomen without and with contrast (CPT® 74183) and MRI Pelvis without and with contrast (CPT® 72197) for known or suspected liver involvement<br>• CT Chest with contrast (CPT® 71260) or CT Chest without contrast (CPT® 71250) for known or suspected chest involvement |

**Evidence Discussion**

Suspected/Diagnosis and Initial Staging

CT Abdomen and Pelvis are recommended by NCCN for suspected GIST.[3]

NCCN stated that CT is the "imaging modality of choice to characterize an abdominal mass, as well as to evaluate its extent and the presence or absence of metastasis at the initial staging workup".[3] While CT Chest is medically necessary to rule out metastatic disease in biopsy-proven GIST, advanced imaging prior to confirmation of diagnosis may expose individuals to unnecessary radiation and increased irrelevant incidental findings. MRI is an adjunct to CT to provide anatomical definition of liver metastases.[3] NCCN noted that PET/CT is not a substitute for diagnostic CT, which has superior sensitivity


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

for this tumor site, but PET/CT is supported for inconclusive CT findings as it can "help differentiate tumor from necrotic or inactive scar tissue, malignant from benign tissue, and recurrent tumor from nondescript benign changes".[3].

Restaging

Abdominal/pelvic imaging every 8-12 weeks to assess response to TKI is medically necessary given the typical response timeframe for this treatment.[17] NCCN stated "since there is a 95% correlation between the information from regular contrast-enhanced CT and PET/CT, CT with IV contrast is the preferred routine imaging modality for patients with GIST on TKI therapy".[3] More frequent imaging may lead to premature or incorrect treatment decisions. Chest imaging in the absence of prior chest findings or signs and symptoms of chest involvement is low-yield and not recommended by NCCN, as it poses potential for risk of increased incidental findings and increased radiation exposure.[3]

Surveillance

Surveillance guidance from NCCN stated that imaging should be performed every three to six months for five years. More frequent surveillance imaging is recommended by NCCN for high-risk tumors. Less frequent imaging is acceptable for low-risk tumors.[3]


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

# Bone Sarcomas – Initial Work-up/Staging (ONC-12.6)

**ON.SS.0012.6.A**

**v2.0.2026**

- Osteogenic sarcoma (Osteosarcoma) in individuals of all ages should be imaged according to guidelines in **Osteogenic Sarcoma (OS) (PEDONC-9.3)** in the Pediatric and Special Populations Oncology Imaging Guidelines.
- Ewing sarcoma and Primitive Neuroectodermal Tumor in individuals of all ages should be imaged according to guidelines in **Ewing Sarcoma and Primitive Neuroectodermal Tumors (ESFT) (PEDONC-9.4)** in the Pediatric and Special Populations Oncology Imaging Guidelines.
- Extraskeletal myxoid chondrosarcoma in individuals of all ages should be imaged according to Soft Tissue Sarcomas (**ONC-12.2**, **ONC-12.3**, and **ONC-12.4**).

| Indication | Medically Necessary Imaging Study |
|---|---|
| Chondrosarcoma<br>• Low-grade intra-compartmental<br>• High-grade (grade II or grade III)<br>• Clear cell<br>• Extra-compartmental | ANY or ALL of the following:<br>• MRI without contrast or without and with contrast of involved area<br>• CT (contrast as requested) of involved area<br>• CT Chest with (CPT® 71260) or without (CPT® 71250) contrast |
| Dedifferentiated chondrosarcoma | See: **Osteogenic Sarcoma (OS) (PEDONC-9.3)** for imaging |
| Mesenchymal chondrosarcoma | See: **Ewing's Sarcoma Family of Tumors (PEDONC-9.4)** for imaging |


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

| Indication | Medically Necessary Imaging Study |
|---|---|
| Chordoma | ANY or ALL of the following:<br>• MRI without contrast or without and with contrast of involved area<br>• CT (contrast as requested) of involved area<br>• CT Chest with (CPT® 71260) or without (CPT® 71250) contrast<br>• CT Abdomen and Pelvis with contrast (CPT® 74177)<br>• MRI Cervical (CPT® 72156), Thoracic (CPT® 72157), and Lumbar (CPT® 72158) Spine without and with contrast<br>• Bone scan (CPT® 78306) (see also: **Nuclear Medicine (NM) Imaging in Oncology (ONC-1.3)** for additional bone scan codes) |
| Chordoma with inconclusive findings on conventional imaging | PET/CT (CPT® 78815 or CPT® 78816) |

**Evidence Discussion**

The choice of imaging modality is driven by the primary tumor site. Cross-sectional imaging of the primary site with MRI with and without contrast or CT with contrast is recommended for best illustration of anatomic detail and vascular and nodal involvement. Our guideline provides flexibility for provider discretion for choice of modality for all sites. Providers should choose modality expected to offer maximum primary tumor definition with consideration of minimizing radiation exposure.[2] CT is more sensitive and specific than MRI for evaluation for metastatic disease of the lung and is medically necessary for all individuals with a newly diagnosed malignant sarcoma. Imaging both with and without contrast for evaluation of metastatic disease to the lung is not medically necessary as this exposes individuals to higher radiation doses without significant clinical benefit. CT either with or without contrast should be selected at discretion of the provider.

Chordomas have a propensity for the distant disease at presentation including spine, so unlike other bone sarcomas, imaging of the abdomen and pelvis with contrasted CT as well as bone scan and MRI of the spine are medically necessary. FDG PET/CT is medically necessary only for inconclusive conventional imaging. PET is not generally medically necessary for initial staging of other histologies discussed in this section due to low sensitivity and specificity.[2]


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

# Bone Sarcomas – Restaging/Recurrence (ONC-12.7)

**ON.SS.0012.7.A**
**v2.0.2026**

| Indication | Medically Necessary Imaging Study |
|---|---|
| Chondrosarcoma<br>• Low-grade intra-compartmental<br>• High-grade (grade II or grade III)<br>• Clear cell<br>• Extra-compartmental | ANY or ALL of the following, after completion of radiotherapy or every 2 cycles of chemotherapy:<br>• MRI without contrast or without and with contrast of involved area<br>• CT (contrast as requested) of involved area<br>• CT Chest with (CPT® 71260) or without (CPT® 71250) contrast |
| Suspected recurrence of atypical cartilaginous tumor (low-grade intra-compartmental appendicular tumor) | ANY or ALL of the following:<br>• MRI without contrast or without and with contrast of involved area or CT (contrast as requested) of involved area<br>• CT Chest with (CPT® 71260) or without (CPT® 71250) contrast<br>• Bone scan (CPT® 78306) (see also: **Nuclear Medicine (NM) Imaging in Oncology [ONC-1.3]** for additional bone scan codes) |
| Dedifferentiated chondrosarcoma | See: **Osteogenic Sarcoma (OS) (PEDONC-9.3)** for imaging recommendations |
| Mesenchymal chondrosarcoma | See: **Ewing's Sarcoma Family of Tumors (PEDONC-9.4)** for imaging recommendations |


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

| Indication | Medically Necessary Imaging Study |
|---|---|
| Chordoma | ANY or ALL of the following, after completion of radiotherapy or every 2 cycles of chemotherapy:<br>• MRI without contrast or without and with contrast of involved area<br>• CT (contrast as requested) of involved area<br>• Bone scan (CPT® 78306) (see also: **Nuclear Medicine (NM) Imaging in Oncology [ONC-1.3]** for additional bone scan codes) |
| Chordoma with inconclusive findings on conventional imaging | PET/CT (CPT® 78815 or CPT® 78816) |
| Suspected recurrence of all other pathologies | May repeat all conventional imaging listed in initial workup (not PET) |

**Evidence Discussion**

CT Chest is medically necessary for restaging for all bone sarcomas, as well as MRI of primary site. CT of other body areas is driven by clinical symptoms and patterns of spread at primary site and not routine across all cell types .[2] PET/CT for restaging is not routinely medically necessary but may be used for inconclusive conventional imaging.[2]


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

# Bone Sarcomas – Surveillance/Follow-up (ONC-12.8)

**ON.SS.0012.8.A**
**v2.0.2026**

| Indication | Medically Necessary Imaging Study |
|---|---|
| • Intra-compartmental Chondrosarcoma | ANY or ALL of the following every 6-12 months for 2 years, then annually for 10 years:<br>• Plain x-ray of primary site<br>◦ MRI without and with contrast for new findings on plain x-ray or new/worsening clinical symptoms<br>• Chest x-ray<br>◦ CT Chest with (CPT® 71260) or without (CPT® 71250) contrast for new findings on chest x-ray, or new/worsening signs/symptoms |
| • Grade I, II, or III Chondrosarcoma<br>• Clear Cell Chondrosarcoma<br>• Extra-compartmental Chondrosarcoma<br>• Low-grade extra-compartmental appendicular tumors | ANY or ALL of the following every 6 months for 5 years, then annually for 10 years:<br>• Plain x-ray of primary site<br>◦ MRI without and with contrast for new findings on plain x-ray or new/worsening clinical symptoms<br>• CT Chest with (CPT® 71260) **or** CT Chest without (CPT® 71250) contrast |
| Dedifferentiated chondrosarcoma | See: **Osteogenic Sarcoma (OS) (PEDONC-9.3)** for imaging recommendations |
| Mesenchymal chondrosarcoma | See: **Ewing's Sarcoma Family of Tumors (PEDONC-9.4)** for imaging recommendations |


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

| Indication | Medically Necessary Imaging Study |
|---|---|
| Chordoma | • Plain x-ray of primary site every 6 months for 5 years and then annually until year 10<br>◦ MRI without and with contrast for new findings on plain x-ray or new/worsening clinical symptoms.<br>• Chest x-ray every 6 months for 5 years and then annually until year 10<br>◦ CT Chest with (CPT® 71260) or without (CPT® 71250) contrast annually or for evaluation of any new findings on chest x-ray or new/worsening signs/symptoms |

**Evidence Discussion**

Data did not show an overall survival benefit with advanced imaging surveillance of sarcomas. Less than 20% of local recurrences are detected based on advanced imaging surveillance in asymptomatic individuals. Sensitivity and specificity of chest imaging are higher in grade two or higher disease.[18]

For grades I-III disease, plain x-ray is medically necessary as the primary tool for primary site surveillance, with cross sectional advanced imaging for signs and symptoms of progression or changes on x-ray. Chest imaging is medically necessary with either plain imaging or CT. Recurrence beyond 10 years is rare; asymptomatic surveillance imaging beyond 10 years is low yield and is not generally medically necessary.[2]


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

# Benign Bone Tumors – General Considerations (ONC-12.9)

**ON.SS.0012.9.A**

**v2.0.2026**

- Variety of diagnoses, including osteoid osteochondroma, chondroblastoma, desmoplastic fibroma, Paget's disease, osteoid osteoma, and others.
- Plain x-ray appearance is diagnostic for many benign bone tumors and advanced imaging is generally not medically necessary except for preoperative planning.
- MRI without and with contrast is the primary modality for advanced imaging of bone tumors and is medically necessary to help narrow differential diagnoses and determine whether biopsy is indicated.
- Some benign bone tumor types carry a risk of malignant degeneration over time, but routine advanced imaging surveillance has not been shown to improve outcomes for these individuals.
- MRI without and with contrast is medically necessary to evaluate new findings on plain x-ray new/worsening clinical symptoms not explained by a recent plain x-ray.
- There are no data to support the use of PET/CT in the evaluation of benign bone tumors, and PET requests are not medically necessary without biopsy confirmation of a malignancy.
- Other benign bone tumors should be imaged according to guidelines in **Bone Lesion (MS-10.2)** in the General Musculoskeletal Imaging Guidelines or **Mass Involving Bone (including Lytic and Blastic Metastatic Disease) (PEDMS-3.4)** in the Pediatric Musculoskeletal Imaging Guidelines.

### Evidence Discussion

Many benign bone tumors have characteristic appearance on plain x-ray, particularly in conjunction with history, individual age, and size and growth characteristics. Lesions without aggressive appearing characteristics on x-ray generally do not require further evaluation. Advanced imaging modalities are medically necessary when x-ray is indeterminate for malignancy to determine management strategy. Thus, the advanced imaging guidelines in this section pertain to enchondromas, which often appear indeterminate on plain x-ray, and giant cell tumor of bone (GCTB), which have potential for malignant degeneration and metastasis.[2,19]


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

# Benign Bone Tumors – Initial Work-up/ Staging (ONC-12.10)

**ON.SS.0012.10.A**
**v2.0.2026**

| Indication | Medically Necessary Imaging Study |
|---|---|
| Giant Cell Tumor of Bone (GCTB) | ANY or ALL of the following:<br>• MRI without contrast or without and with contrast of involved area<br>• CT (contrast as requested) of involved area<br>• CT Chest with (CPT® 71260) or without (CPT® 71250) contrast<br>• Bone scan (CPT® 78306) (see also: **Nuclear Medicine (NM) in Oncology [ONC-1.3]** for additional bone scan codes) |
| Enchondroma | • MRI without contrast or without and with contrast of primary site |

**Evidence Discussion**

- Giant Cell Tumor of Bone
  - MRI can help distinguish malignant transformation, while complex bony anatomy maybe better visualized on CT. To establish management strategy, our guidelines support using both modalities for involved areas in alignment with NCCN and ACR.[2,16]
  - CT Chest and whole-body bone scan are medically necessary at time of initial staging given the malignant and metastatic potential of GCTB. CT Abdomen and Pelvis are not medically necessary without symptoms in these areas as this would not be a typical pattern of metastasis in the setting of malignant degeneration of GCTB. CT of abdomen and pelvis increases radiation exposure with low yield.[2]
- Enchondroma
  - MRI can help distinguish suspected enchondroma on plain film from other more malignant entities and is medically necessary for initial staging to confirm characteristic appearance.[19]


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

# Benign Bone Tumors – Restaging/ Recurrence (ONC-12.11)

**ON.ss.0012.11.A**
**v2.0.2026**

| Indication | Medically Necessary Imaging Study |
|---|---|
| Giant Cell Tumor of Bone (GCTB) | ANY or ALL of the following, after completion of radiotherapy or every 2 cycles of chemotherapy:<br>• MRI without contrast or without and with contrast of involved area<br>• CT (contrast as requested) of involved area<br>• Bone scan (CPT® 78306 (see also: **Nuclear Medicine (NM) Imaging in Oncology [ONC-1.3]** for additional bone scan codes) |
| Enchondroma | Plain films of primary site |

**Evidence Discussion**

- GCTB
  - For individuals requiring chemotherapy, repeat of all imaging done at initial staging may be done every two cycles to assess treatment response or need to change therapy. For individuals treated with radiotherapy, repeat imaging may be done at completion of radiotherapy to verify treatment response and establish baseline for surveillance.[2,16]
- Enchondroma
  - Once initial staging with advanced imaging has been completed, plain films should be adequate to ensure stability or for suspected recurrence, restaging after local therapy, or surveillance. Further advanced imaging is generally low yield unless there are indeterminate findings on the plain films.[19]


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

# Benign Bone Tumors – Surveillance/ Follow-up (ONC-12.12)

**ON.SS.0012.12.A**
**v2.0.2026**

| Indication | Medically Necessary Imaging Study |
|---|---|
| Giant Cell Tumor of Bone (GCTB) | ANY or ALL of the following every 6-12 months for 4 years, then annually thereafter:<br>• Plain x-ray of primary site<br>◦ MRI without and with contrast for new findings on plain x-ray, or new/worsening clinical symptoms<br>• Chest x-ray<br>◦ CT Chest with (CPT® 71260) or without (CPT® 71250) contrast for new findings on chest x-ray, or new/worsening signs/ symptoms |
| Enchondroma | Plain films of primary site |

**Evidence Discussion**

- GCTB
  - The role of advanced imaging in asymptomatic surveillance is not well established for GCTB. Though late recurrences can occur, there is not strong data to support advanced imaging over plain film in asymptomatic individuals. These guidelines allow advanced imaging if there are indeterminate findings on plain film, both for primary site and chest. Time frames for plain films are in alignment with NCCN. [2,16]
- Enchondroma
  - Once initial staging with advanced imaging has been completed, plain films should be adequate to ensure stability or further imaging for recurrence, restaging after local therapy, or surveillance . Further advanced imaging is generally low yield unless there are indeterminate findings on the plain films.[19]


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

# References (ONC-12)

**v2.0.2026**

1. Von Mehren M, Kane III JM, Armstrong SA, et al. National Comprehensive Cancer Network (NCCN) Guidelines Version 1.2026 – January 16, 2026. Soft Tissue Sarcoma, available at: https://www.nccn.org/ professionals/ physician_gls/pdf/sarcoma.pdf. Referenced with permission from the NCCN Clinical Practice Guidelines in Oncology (NCCN Guidelines™) for Soft Tissue Sarcoma V1.2026 – January 16, 2026. ©2026 National Comprehensive Cancer Network, Inc. All rights reserved. The NCCN Guidelines™ and illustrations herein may not be reproduced in any form for any purpose without the express written permission of the NCCN. To view the most recent and complete version of the NCCN Guidelines™, go online to NCCN.org.
2. Biermann JS, Hirbe A, Ahlawat S, et al. National Comprehensive Cancer Network (NCCN) Guidelines Version 2.2026 – December 19, 2025. Bone cancer, available at: https://www.nccn.org/professionals/physician_gls/ pdf/bone.pdf. Referenced with permission from the NCCN Clinical Practice Guidelines in Oncology (NCCN Guidelines™) for Bone cancer V2.2026 – December 19, 2025. ©2025 National Comprehensive Cancer Network, Inc. All rights reserved. The NCCN Guidelines™ and illustrations herein may not be reproduced in any form for any purpose without the express written permission of the NCCN. To view the most recent and complete version of the NCCN Guidelines™, go online to NCCN.org.
3. Von Mehren M, Kane III JM, Armstrong SA, et al. National Comprehensive Cancer Network (NCCN) Guidelines Version 1.2026 – January 13, 2026. Gastrointestinal Stromal Tumors, available at: https:// www.nccn.org/ professionals/physician_gls/pdf/gist.pdf. Referenced with permission from the NCCN Clinical Practice Guidelines in Oncology (NCCN Guidelines™) for Gastrointestinal Stromal Tumors V1.2026 – January 13, 2026. ©2026 National Comprehensive Cancer Network, Inc. All rights reserved. The NCCN Guidelines™ and illustrations herein may not be reproduced in any form for any purpose without the express written permission of the NCCN. To view the most recent and complete version of the NCCN™ Guidelines, go online to NCCN.org
4. Murphey MD, Minn MJ, Contreras AL, et al. Imaging of spinal chordoma and benign notochordal cell tumor (BNCT) with radiologic pathologic correlation. *Skeletal Radiol*. 2023;52(3):349-363. doi:10.1007/ s00256-022-04158-7
5. Van den Abbeele AD. The lessons of GIST-PET and PET/CT: a new paradigm for imaging. *Oncologist*. 2008;13:8-13. doi:10.1634/theoncologist.13-S2-8.
6. Peng PD, Hyder O, Mavros MN, et al. Management and recurrence patterns of desmoids tumors: a multi-institutional analysis of 211 patients. *Ann Surg Oncol*. 2012;19(13):4036-4042. doi:10.1245/s10434-012-2634-6.
7. Noebauer-Huhmann IM, Chaudhary SR, Papakonstantinou O, et al. Soft Tissue Sarcoma Follow-up Imaging: Strategies to Distinguish Post-treatment Changes from Recurrence. Semin Musculoskelet Radiol. 2020;24(6):627-644. doi:10.1055/s-0040-1721464
8. Casali PG, Blay JY, Abecassis N, et al. Gastrointestinal stromal tumours: ESMO-EURACAN-GENTURIS Clinical Practice Guidelines for diagnosis, treatment and follow-up. *Ann Oncol*. 2022;33(1):20-33. doi:10.1016/ j.annonc.2021.09.005
9. Akram J, Wooler G, Lock-Andersen J. Dermatofibrosarcoma protuberans: clinical series, national Danish incidence data and suggested guidelines. *J Plast Surg Hand Surg*. 2014;48(1):67-73. doi:10.3109/2000656X.2013.812969.
10. Puri A, Gulia A, Hawaldar R, Ranganathan P, Badwe RA. Does intensity of surveillance affect survival after surgery for sarcomas? Results of a randomized noninferiority trial. *Clin Orthop Relat Res*. 2014;472(5):1568-1575. doi:10.1007/s11999-013-3385-9.
11. Castillo-Flores S, Gonzalez MR, Bryce-Alberti M, et al. PET-CT in the Evaluation of Neoadjuvant/Adjuvant Treatment Response of Soft-tissue Sarcomas: A Comprehensive Review of the Literature. *JBJS Rev*. 2022;10(12):10.2106/JBJS.RVW.22.00131. Published 2022 Dec 12. doi:10.2106/JBJS.RVW.22.00131
12. Muehlhofer HML, Schlossmacher B, Lenze U, et al. Oncological Outcome and Prognostic Factors of Surgery for Soft Tissue Sarcoma After Neoadjuvant or Adjuvant Radiation Therapy: A Retrospective Analysis over 15 Years. *Anticancer Res*. 2021;41(1):359-368. doi:10.21873/anticanres.14784
13. Bordeaux J, Blitzblau R, Aasi SZ, et al. National Comprehensive Cancer Network (NCCN) Guidelines Version 2.2026 – October 24, 2025. Dermatofibrosarcoma protuberans, available at: https://www.nccn.org/professionals/ physician_gls/pdf/dfsp.pdf. Referenced with permission from the NCCN Clinical Practice Guidelines in Oncology


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

(NCCN Guidelines™) for Dermatofibrosarcoma protuberans V2.2026– October 25, 2025. ©2025 National Comprehensive Cancer Network, Inc. All rights reserved. The NCCN Guidelines™ and illustrations herein may not be reproduced in any form for any purpose without the express written permission of the NCCN. To view the most recent and complete version of the NCCN Guidelines™, go online to NCCN.org.

14. Montgomery C, Couch C, Emory CL, Nicholas R. Giant cell tumor of bone: review of current literature, evaluation, and treatment options. *J Knee Surg*. 2019;32(4):331336. doi:10.1055/s-0038-1675815.
15. Kelly CM, Gutierrez Sainz L, Chi P. The management of metastatic GIST: current standard and investigational therapeutics. *J Hematol Oncol.* 2021;14(1):2. doi:10.1186/s13045-02001026-6.
16. Srinivasan S, Keerthivasagam S, Kumar S, Puri A. Impact of surveillance imaging in detecting local and metastatic lung recurrences among patients with sarcomas of the extremities: a systematic review and meta-analysis. *Ann Surg Oncol*. 2024;31(1):213227. doi: 10.1245/s10434-023-14429-9.
17. Expert Panel on Musculoskeletal Imaging, Ahlawat S, Lenchik L, et al. ACR Appropriateness Criteria® Suspected Primary Bone Tumors: 2024 Update. *J Am Coll Radiol*. 2025;22(5S):S440-S454. doi:10.1016/j.jacr.2025.02.020


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

Click Anywhere in the Header to Return to the Main Table of Contents



# Pancreatic Cancer (ONC-13)

Guideline

Pancreatic Cancer – General Considerations (ONC-13.0)
Pancreatic Cancer – Screening Studies for Pancreatic Cancer (ONC-13.1)
Pancreatic Cancer – Suspected/Diagnosis (ONC-13.2)
Pancreatic Cancer – Initial Work-up/Staging (ONC-13.3)
Pancreatic Cancer – Restaging/Recurrence (ONC-13.4)
Pancreatic Cancer – Surveillance/Follow-up (ONC-13.5)
References (ONC-13)


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

# Pancreatic Cancer – General Considerations (ONC-13.0)

**ON.PC.0013.0.A**

**v2.0.2026**

- This guideline refers only to adenocarcinoma of the exocrine pancreas, which accounts for over 90% of pancreatic malignancies. This guideline may also be used for cancer of the Ampulla of Vater.
- Neuroendocrine and carcinoid tumors of the pancreas are not included in this guideline, see: **Neuroendocrine Cancers and Adrenal Tumors (ONC-15)**.


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

# Pancreatic Cancer – Screening Studies for Pancreatic Cancer (ONC-13.1)

**ON.PC.0013.1.A**

**v2.0.2026**

- Detailed history of any known inherited syndrome in the individual and detailed family history in first- and second-degree relatives, including the age and lineage, is essential to guide screening recommendations. See table below for age- and risk-specific screening recommendations.
- New onset of diabetes in individuals older than 50 has been recognized as a potential indicator of the development of pancreatic cancer. Approximately 1% of individuals in this category are diagnosed with cancer within 3 years. A prediction model has been established which identifies those individuals at greatest risk for pancreatic malignancy. The scoring system, known as ENDPAC (Enriching New-Onset Diabetes for Pancreatic Cancer) is based on 3 discriminatory factors, including change in blood glucose, change in weight, and age of onset at the time of the new diagnosis of diabetes. A score of >3 imparts an elevated risk of pancreatic cancer (3.6%), and these individuals should be screened. Screening is not medically necessary at this time for scores of 0-2.

| Indications | Medically Necessary Imaging Study |
|---|---|
| Individuals who meet **BOTH** of the following criteria:<br>• One or more first- or second-degree relative affected with pancreatic cancer **AND**<br>• Known mutation carrier of ONE of the following genes:<br>◦ Lynch Syndrome (MLH1, MSH2, or MSH6 gene mutations)<br>◦ BRCA1<br>◦ PALB2 mutation<br>◦ EPCAM<br>◦ TP53 | • MRI Abdomen without and with contrast (CPT® 74183) or MRCP with 3D rendering (CPT® 74183 and CPT® 76376 or CPT® 76377) starting at age 50 or 10 years earlier than the youngest family member affected with exocrine pancreatic cancer, repeat annually |


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

| Indications | Medically Necessary Imaging Study |
|---|---|
| Individuals with family history of pancreatic cancer but no known genetic mutation:<br>• Individuals with 2 relatives with pancreatic cancer where one is a first-degree relative<br>• Individuals with 3 or more relatives with pancreatic cancer | • MRI Abdomen without and with contrast (CPT® 74183) or MRCP with 3D rendering (CPT® 74183 and CPT® 76376 or CPT® 76377) starting at age 45 or 10 years earlier than the youngest family member affected with exocrine pancreatic cancer, repeat annually |
| Pancreatic Cancer Kindred (individuals who have at least one first-degree relative with pancreatic cancer who in turn also has a first-degree relative with pancreatic cancer) and NO known genetic germline mutations | • MRI Abdomen without and with contrast (CPT® 74183) or MRCP with 3D rendering (CPT® 74183 and CPT® 76376 or CPT® 76377) starting at age 50 or 10 years earlier than the youngest family member affected with exocrine pancreatic cancer, repeat annually |
| Hereditary Pancreatitis (PRSS1, CPA1, and CTRC gene mutations) | • MRI Abdomen without and with contrast (CPT® 74183) or MRCP with 3D rendering (CPT® 74183 and CPT® 76376 or CPT® 76377) beginning at age 40 or 20 years after the first pancreatitis attack, repeat annually |
| Peutz-Jeghers Syndrome (LKB1/STK11 gene mutation) | • MRI Abdomen without and with contrast (CPT® 74183) or MRCP with 3D rendering (CPT® 74183 and CPT® 76376 or CPT® 76377) starting at age 30 or 10 years earlier than the youngest family member affected with exocrine pancreatic cancer, repeat annually<br>◦ Family history is not required to begin imaging at age 30 |


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

| Indications | Medically Necessary Imaging Study |
|---|---|
| CDKN2A mutation<br>(also known as p16, p16INK4a, and MTS1, FAMM-Familial Atypical Multiple Melanoma and Mole Syndrome) | • MRI Abdomen without and with contrast (CPT® 74183) or MRCP with 3D rendering (CPT® 74183 and CPT® 76376 or CPT® 76377) beginning at age 40 or 10 years earlier than the youngest family member affected with exocrine pancreatic cancer, repeat annually<br>◦ Family history is not required to begin imaging at age 40 |
| • BRCA2<br>• ATM (Ataxia-Telangiectasia) | • MRI Abdomen without and with contrast (CPT® 74183) or MRCP with 3D rendering (CPT® 74183 and CPT® 76376 or CPT® 76377) starting at age 50 or 10 years earlier than the youngest family member affected with exocrine pancreatic cancer, repeat annually<br>◦ Family history is not required to begin imaging at age 50 |
| Screening MRI reveals cystic lesion of the pancreas | • Repeat MRI Abdomen without and with contrast (CPT® 74183) or MRCP with 3D rendering (CPT® 74183 and CPT® 76376 or CPT® 76377) in 6 months |
| Screening MRI reveals indeterminate solid lesion | • CT Abdomen with contrast – pancreatic protocol (CPT® 74160)<br>• Repeat MRI Abdomen without and with contrast (CPT® 74183) or MRCP with 3D rendering (CPT® 74183 and CPT® 76376 or CPT® 76377) in 3 months after the CT scan |
| Screening MRI reveals pancreatic stricture and/or dilation ≥6mm without a mass | • CT Abdomen with contrast – pancreatic protocol (CPT® 74160)<br>• Repeat MRI Abdomen without and with contrast (CPT® 74183) or MRCP with 3D rendering (CPT® 74183 and CPT® 76376 or CPT® 76377) in 3 months after the CT scan |


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

| Indications | Medically Necessary Imaging Study |
|---|---|
| New onset diabetes in adults with ENDPAC score of ≥3 | • CT Abdomen without and with contrast (CPT® 74170) or MRI Abdomen without and with contrast (CPT® 74183) or MRCP with 3D rendering (CPT® 74183 and CPT® 76376 or CPT® 76377) at baseline; if negative, repeat once after 6 months |

**Background and Supporting Information**

ENDPAC scoring:

| Blood Glucose (BG) Categories | | Change BG Category Score (NOD-1y)(A) |
|---|---|---|
| BG Range (mg/dl) | Score | Score Range |
| BG Category at -1 years | | 1-4 |
| <100 | 1 | |
| 100-109 | 2 | |
| 110-125 | 3 | |
| BG Category at Glycemically-Defined New-Onset Diabetes | | |
| 126-160 | 4 | |
| >160 | 5 | |
| Change Weight Categories | | Change Weight Score (B) |
| Change Weight (kg) | Score | Score Range |
| ≤-6.0 | +6 | -6 to +6 |
| -5.9 to -4.0 | +4 | |
| -3.9 to -2.0 | +2 | |
| -1.9 to +1.9 | 0 | |
| +2.0 to +3.9 | -2 | |
| +4.0 to +5.9 | -4 | |
| ≥+6.0 | -6 | |
| Age (years) at glycemically-defined new-onset diabetes | | Age Score (C) |


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

| Blood Glucose (BG) Categories | | Change BG Category Score (NOD-1y)(A) |
|---|---|---|
| Age Range | Score | Score Range |
| ≤59 | -1 | -1 to +1 |
| 60 to 69 | 0 | |
| ≥70 | +1 | |
| Total Score | | A + B + C |

**Evidence Discussion**

International Cancer of the Pancreas Screening Consortium (CAPS) recommended screening for those with an estimated lifetime risk of pancreatic cancer >5% to facilitate early detection, as the survival of individuals diagnosed with advanced disease at presentation is extremely poor. Individuals may be high-risk due to family history of 2-3 relatives with pancreatic adenocarcinoma with first degree relative affected, or those with known deleterious genetic mutations in conjunction with one first- or second-degree relative with pancreatic adenocarcinoma.[3,14,17] Asymptomatic screening has not been shown to improve outcomes in those without an established lifetime risk of >5%, including those with only more distant relatives affected, a single relative affected and no known high-risk mutation, or those with mutations whose risk is unknown.[3,14]

The lifetime risk and age at presentation varies with each genetic mutation. Updated CAPS recommendations generally support imaging at age 50 or ten years younger than the age of the youngest relative with pancreatic adenocarcinoma. These guidelines align with CAPS and NCCN with multiple exceptions to this to allow screening at younger ages for individuals with mutations known to be higher risk or present at younger ages.[17,13] US Preventative Services Task Force (USPSTF) did not generally recommend pancreatic cancer screening, though they did not evaluate individuals with high-risk criteria in this data. The USPSTF noted that screening has moderate risk due to unnecessary imaging and management of incidental findings.[4] These findings further support that screening for those that do not meet the clearly defined risk factors listed in the guideline is not medically necessary.

MRI without and with contrast shows up to 93% sensitivity for pancreatic lesions and better illustrates pancreatic ducts, which may indirectly identify pancreatic malignancy, and is the preferred modality for screening for most individuals in these guidelines. This is superior to both CT and endoscopic ultrasound, which may not detect smaller lesions.[15] CT pancreatic protocol is medically necessary in these guidelines if indeterminate findings on MRI in the interest of early detection.


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

A unique group is individuals with new onset diabetes and ENDPAC score >3. These individuals are at an elevated risk of developing pancreatic cancer within 6 months even in the absence of family history or known deleterious mutations. MRI or CT is medically necessary in this population at diagnosis of diabetes and again in 6 months.[16,12]


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

# Pancreatic Cancer – Suspected/ Diagnosis (ONC-13.2)

**ON.PC.0013.2.A**
**v2.0.2026**

| Indication | Medically Necessary Imaging Study |
|---|---|
| For any suspected symptoms only (e.g., epigastric pain, weight loss, pain radiating to back, etc.) | • Ultrasound (CPT® 76700 or CPT® 76705)<br>• Also see: **Epigastric Pain and Dyspepsia (AB-2.5)** |
| Symptoms suspicious for pancreatic cancer AND any one of the following:<br>• Abnormal labs (e.g., elevated CA 19-9, ALKP, bilirubin, or GGTP)<br>• Abnormal physical exam findings (e.g., abdominal mass)<br>• Abnormal or non-diagnostic ultrasound/ERCP | Any ONE of the following:<br>• CT Pancreatic Protocol (CT Abdomen with contrast with dual phase imaging, CPT® 74160)<br>• MRI Abdomen without and with contrast (CPT® 74183) or MRCP with 3D rendering (CPT® 74183 and CPT® 76376 or CPT® 76377) |
| Preoperative studies for potentially resectable tumors without confirmed histologic diagnosis | • See: **Pancreatic Cancer – Initial Work-up/ Staging (ONC-13.3)** |

### Evidence Discussion

For individuals with symptoms suspicious for pancreatic cancer with abnormal labs and physical findings or abnormal or non-diagnostic ultrasound or ERCP, CT pancreatic protocol (abdomen without and with contrast) or MRI abdomen without and with contrast are medically necessary. CT pancreatic protocol has a sensitivity and specificity of 90 and 87%, respectively.[20,19] Sensitivity and specificity of MRI are 89 and 90%, respectively.[20,19] CT has the advantage of being less costly, more accessible, and faster, but exposes the individual to more radiation. MRI may be more sensitive for visualization of pancreatic ducts and has less radiation exposure, but can be less accessible, more costly, takes longer, and can pose difficulties with claustrophobia and has more contraindications.[19] Given their similar sensitivity and specificity, these guidelines allow flexibility for individuals and providers to weigh risks and benefits for each individual for suspected disease.


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

# Pancreatic Cancer – Initial Work-up/ Staging (ONC-13.3)

**ON.PC.0013.3.A**
**v2.0.2026**

| Indication | Medically Necessary Imaging Study |
|---|---|
| All individuals | • CT Chest with contrast (CPT® 71260)<br>• CT Abdomen and Pelvis with (CPT® 74177) or CT Abdomen and Pelvis without and with contrast (CPT® 74178) |
| For any of the following:<br>• Preoperative planning<br>• CT insufficient to determine resectability | • MRI Abdomen without and with contrast (CPT® 74183) OR MRCP with 3D rendering (CPT® 74183 and CPT® 76376 or CPT® 76377) AND/ OR<br>• CTA Abdomen (CPT® 74175) and Pelvis (CPT® 72191) OR MRA Abdomen (CPT® 71485) and Pelvis (CPT® 72198) |
| Evaluation of indeterminate liver lesions | • MRI Abdomen without and with contrast (CPT® 74183) OR<br>• MRCP with 3D rendering (CPT® 74183 and CPT® 76376 or CPT® 76377) |
| No evidence of metastatic disease on CT or MRI AND any of the following:<br>• Equivocal or indeterminate conventional imaging findings<br>• Markedly elevated CA 19-9<br>• Large primary tumor(s)<br>• Enlarged regional lymph nodes<br>• Planned neoadjuvant therapy | • PET/CT (CPT® 78815) |

### Evidence Discussion

For biopsy proven pancreatic adenocarcinoma, evaluation for metastatic disease with contrasted CTs of the chest, abdomen and pelvis are medically necessary, given that approximately 80% of individuals have metastatic or locally advanced disease at


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

presentation.[20] Resectability has a dramatic impact on prognosis, and MRI abdomen with and without contrast is medically necessary in addition to CT if CT is insufficient to determine resectability, for preoperative planning, or to evaluate indeterminate liver lesions.[1] Given the high incidence of metastatic disease at presentation, if high-risk features are noted but no metastatic disease is visible on conventional imaging, a PET/CT is medically necessary to assess for occult extra-pancreatic metastatic disease, in alignment with the NCCN. This is not a substitute for a diagnostic-quality contrasted CT or MRI, which is superior for detecting pancreatic disease.[1,19] PET/MRI has a weak expert consensus without sufficient data, and as such, these guidelines do not routinely support this modality.[1,21,22,24]


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

# Pancreatic Cancer – Restaging/ Recurrence (ONC-13.4)

**ON.PC.0013.4.A**
**v2.0.2026**

| Indication | Medically Necessary Imaging Study |
|---|---|
| For ANY of the following:<br>• After neoadjuvant therapy<br>• Post-operative baseline<br>• Suspected recurrence | • CT Chest with contrast (CPT® 71260)<br>• Abdominal imaging with one of the following, using same modality as used at initial evaluation:<br>◦ CT Abdomen and Pelvis with (CPT® 74177)<br>◦ CT Abdomen and Pelvis without and with contrast (CPT® 74178)<br>◦ MRI Abdomen without and with contrast (CPT® 74183)<br>◦ MRCP with 3D rendering (CPT® 74183 and CPT® 76376 or CPT® 76377)<br>• CT with contrast of other involved or symptomatic areas |
| Unresectable disease or metastatic disease on chemotherapy | Every 2 cycles of treatment (commonly every 6 to 8 weeks):<br>• CT Chest with contrast (CPT® 71260)<br>• CT Abdomen and Pelvis with (CPT® 74177) or CT Abdomen and Pelvis without and with contrast (CPT® 74178)<br>• CT with contrast of other involved or symptomatic areas |
| Unexplained elevated liver enzymes or inconclusive recent CT abnormality | • MRI Abdomen without and with contrast (CPT® 74183) or MRCP with 3D rendering (CPT® 74183 and CPT® 76376 or CPT® 76377) |
| If complete surgical resection was initial therapy | • See: **Pancreatic Cancer – Surveillance/Follow-up for surveillance imaging (ONC-13.5)** |
| Inconclusive findings on conventional imaging | • PET/CT (CPT® 78815) |


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

## Evidence Discussion

For individuals with unresectable or metastatic disease on chemotherapy, imaging of the chest, abdomen and pelvis with contrast (or without and with contrast for the abdomen and pelvis) are medically necessary every 2 cycles of treatment, given the high rate of progression and metastases, to allow for prompt consideration of changes in treatment. CT of any involved or symptomatic area is also medically necessary. The same imaging is medically necessary after neoadjuvant chemoradiation to assess resectability and rule out metastatic disease. Resection is the mainstay of curative therapy in pancreatic cancer, but only 20% of individuals achieve this status. Individuals with unresectable or metastatic disease are unlikely to benefit from surgery, thus pre-operative evaluation for metastasis is essential to minimize unnecessary surgical risk.[20,1] As noted in the initial staging section, both CT and MRI have advantages and disadvantages. MRI is more specific for liver disease and offers better soft tissue differentiation for inconclusive findings.[1,24] The same imaging guidance applies to suspected recurrence of disease. Restaging studies are also medically necessary as a post-operative baseline, to ensure the absence of residual disease and make decisions regarding adjuvant treatment, and to ensure accurate comparison for surveillance imaging.


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

# Pancreatic Cancer – Surveillance/Follow-up (ONC-13.5)

**ON.PC.0013.5.A**
**v2.0.2026**

| Indication | Medically Necessary Imaging Study |
|---|---|
| All individuals (other than resected ampullary cancer) | Every 3 months for 2 years, then annually:<br>• CT Chest with contrast (CPT® 71260)<br>And ANY ONE of the following:<br>• CT Abdomen and Pelvis with contrast (CPT® 74177)<br>• MRI Abdomen without and with contrast (CPT® 74183) and MRI Pelvis without and with contrast (CPT® 72197) |
| Resected ampullary cancer | Every 3 months for 2 years, then every 6 months for up to 5 years:<br>• CT Chest with contrast (CPT® 71260) or CT Chest without contrast (CPT® 71250)<br>• CT Abdomen and Pelvis with contrast (CPT® 74177) or MRI Abdomen without and with contrast (CPT® 74183) and MRI Pelvis without and with contrast (CPT® 72197) |
| Measurable metastatic disease on maintenance therapy or being monitored off therapy | Every 3 months for up to 5 years after completion of definitive treatment, then annually:<br>• CT Chest with contrast (CPT® 71260)<br>• CT Abdomen and Pelvis with contrast (CPT® 74177) or MRI Abdomen without and with contrast (CPT® 74183) and MRI Pelvis without and with contrast (CPT® 72197) |

**Evidence Discussion**

Data on the role of surveillance in pancreatic cancer are limited, due to the poor prognosis and small numbers of individuals with long-term follow up. The NCCN recommendations for surveillance are based on consensus rather than data, and SEER-Medicare data shows no significant survival benefit for individuals who received regular surveillance scans/no improved outcome with earlier detection of recurrence.[1,23] The role of ongoing imaging in individuals with metastatic disease on maintenance or observation is also unclear. There is no clear data on length of time for maintenance


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

therapy in those with metastatic disease, and treatment 'holidays' are often interjected in therapy. Outside of situations where there is a clear impact on management decisions, ASCO stated that imaging should be supplanted by clinical evaluation.[24] However, the NCCN offered several second and third-line treatment options. These guidelines provide some flexibility for individual-centricity and provider preference in this setting, allowing for CT Chest, Abdomen and Pelvis every 3 months for up to 5 years and then annually after completion of definitive treatment.[1] Specifically for individuals with resected ampullary cancer, NCCN recommended surveillance after adjuvant therapy every three to six months for two years, then every six to 12 months for up to five years. Imaging studies as well as history, physical exam, and tumor marker studies are recommended components of surveillance for these individuals.[25]


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

# References (ONC-13)

**v2.0.2026**

1. Tempero MA, Malafa MP, Basturk O, et al. National Comprehensive Cancer Network (NCCN) Guidelines Version 2.2025 – February 3, 2025. Pancreatic Adenocarcinoma, available at: https://www. nccn.org/professionals/physician_gls/pdf/pancreatic.pdf Referenced with permission from the NCCN Clinical Practice Guidelines in Oncology (NCCN Guidelines™) for Pancreatic Adenocarcinoma V2.2025 – February 3, 2025 ©2025 National Comprehensive Cancer Network, Inc. All rights reserved. The NCCN Guidelines™ and illustrations herein may not be reproduced in any form for any purpose without the express written permission of the NCCN. To view the most recent and complete version of the NCCN Guidelines™, go online to NCCN.org.
2. Syngal S, Brand RE, Church JM, et al. ACG clinical guideline: genetic testing and management of hereditary gastrointestinal cancer syndromes. *Am. J. Gastroenterol*. 2015;110(2):223-262. doi:10.1038/ajg.2014.435.
3. US Preventive Services Task Force, Owens DK, Davidson KW, et al. Screening for Pancreatic Cancer: US Preventive Services Task Force Reaffirmation Recommendation Statement. *JAMA*. 2019;322(5):438-444. doi:10.1001/jama.2019.10232
4. de Jong TL, Koopman D, van der Worp CAJ, et al. Added value of digital FDG-PET/CT in disease staging and restaging in patients with resectable or borderline resectable pancreatic cancer. *Surg Oncol*. 2023;47:101909. doi:10.1016/j.suronc.2023.101909
5. Badheeb M, Abdelrahim A, Esmail A, et al. Pancreatic Tumorigenesis: Precursors, Genetic Risk Factors and Screening. *Curr Oncol*. 2022;29(11):8693-8719. Published 2022 Nov 15. doi:10.3390/curroncol29110686
6. Al-Hawary MM, Francis IR, Chari ST, et al. Pancreatic ductal adenocarcinoma radiology reporting template: consensus statement of the Society of Abdominal Radiology and the American Pancreatic Association. *Gastroenterology*. 2014;146(1):291-304. doi:10.1053/j.gastro.2013.11.004.
7. Tersmette AC, Petersen GM, Offerhaus GJ. Increased risk of incident pancreatic cancer among first-degree relatives of patients with familial pancreatic cancer. *Clin Cancer Res*. 2001;7(3):738-44.
8. Tzeng CW, Abbott DE, Cantor SB et al. Frequency and intensity of postoperative surveillance after curative treatment of pancreatic cancer: a cost-effectiveness analysis. *Ann Surg Oncol*. 2013;20(7):2197-2203. doi:10.1245/s10434-013-2889-6.
9. Furman MJ, Lambert LA, Sullivan ME, Whalen GF. Rational follow-up after curative cancer resection. *Journal of Clinical Oncology*. 2013;31(9):1130-1133. doi:10.1200/JCO.2012.46.4438.
10. Tzeng C, Fleming J, Lee J, et al. Yield of clinical and radiographic surveillance in patients with resected pancreatic adenocarcinoma following multimodal therapy. *HPB*. 2012;14(6):365-372. doi:10.1111/j.1477-2574.2012.00445.x.
11. Sharma, A, Kandlakunta H, Nagpal SJS, et.al. Model to determine risk of pancreatic cancer in patients with new-onset diabetes. *Gastroenterology.* 2018;155(3):730-739.
12. Goggins M, Overbeek KA, Brand R, et. al. Management of patients with increased risk for familial pancreatic cancer: updated recommendations from the International Cancer of the Pancreas Screening Consortium. *Gut*. 2020;69(1):7-17. doi:10.1136/gutjnl-2019-319352.
13. Abe T, Blackford AL, Tamura K, et al. Deleterious germline mutations are a risk factor for neoplastic progression among high-risk individuals undergoing pancreatic surveillance. *J Clin Oncol.* 2019;37(13):1070-1080. doi:10.1200/JCO.18.01512.
14. Khayat S, Choudhary K, Gurav J, et al. Pancreatic cancer: from early detection to personalized treatment approaches. *Ann Med Surg (Lond)*. 2024;86(5):2866-2872. doi:10.1097/MS9.0000000000002011.
15. Hajibandeh S, Intrator C, Carrington-Windo E, et al. Accuracy of the END-PAC model in predicting the risk of developing pancreatic cancer in patients with new-onset diabetes: a systematic review and meta-analysis. *Biomedicines*. 2023;11(11):3040. doi:10.3390/biomedicines11113040.
16. Daly MB, Pal T, AlHilli Z, et al. National Comprehensive Cancer Network (NCCN) Guidelines Version V2.2026 – October 10, 2025. Genetic/Familial High-Risk Assessment: Breast, Ovarian, Pancreatic, and Prostate available at: https://www.nccn.org/professionals/physician_gls/pdf/genetics_bopp.pdf Referenced with permission from the NCCN Clinical Practice Guidelines in Oncology (NCCN Guidelines™) for Genetic/Familial High-Risk Assessment: Breast, Ovarian, Pancreatic, and Prostate V2.2026 – October 10, 2025. ©2025 National Comprehensive Cancer Network, Inc. All rights reserved. The NCCN Guidelines™ and illustrations herein may


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

not be reproduced in any form for any purpose without the express written permission of the NCCN. To view the most recent and complete version of the NCCN Guidelines™, go online to NCCN.org.

17. Kato S, Honda K. Use of biomarkers and imaging for early detection of pancreatic cancer. *Cancers (Basel).* 2020;12(7):1965. doi:10.3390/cancers12071965.
18. Toft J, Hadden WJ, Laurence JM, et al. Imaging modalities in the diagnosis of pancreatic adenocarcinoma: A systematic review and meta-analysis of sensitivity, specificity and diagnostic accuracy. *Eur J Radiol*. 2017;92:17-23. doi:10.1016/j.ejrad.2017.04.009.
19. PDQ® Adult Treatment Editorial Board. PDQ. Bethesda, MD: National Cancer Institute. Pancreatic Cancer Treatment (PDQ®)–Health Professional Version. Available at Pancreatic Cancer Treatment (PDQ®) - NCI.
20. Pu Y, Wang C, Zhao S, et al. The clinical application of 18F-FDG PET/CT in pancreatic cancer: a narrative review. *Transl Cancer Res*. 2021;10(7):3560-3575. doi:10.21037/tcr-21-169
21. Andel PCM, van Goor IWJM, Augustinus S, et al. Routine Imaging or Symptomatic Follow-Up After Resection of Pancreatic Adenocarcinoma. *JAMA Surg*. 2025;160(1):74-84. doi:10.1001/jamasurg.2024.5024
22. Sohal DPS, Kennedy EB, Cinar P, et al. Metastatic Pancreatic Cancer: ASCO Guideline Update. *J Clin Oncol.* 2020;38(27):3217-3230. doi:10.1200/JCO.20.01364
23. Tempero MA, Malafa MP, Chiorean EG, et al. National Comprehensive Cancer Network (NCCN) Guidelines Version V2.2025 – January 10, 2025. Ampullary Adenocarcinoma, available at: https://www.nccn.org/professionals/physician_gls/pdf/ampullary.pdf Referenced with permission from the NCCN Clinical Practice Guidelines in Oncology (NCCN Guidelines™) for Ampullary Adenocarcinoma V2.2025 – January 10, 2025. ©2025 National Comprehensive Cancer Network, Inc. All rights reserved. The NCCN Guidelines™ and illustrations herein may not be reproduced in any form for any purpose without the express written permission of the NCCN. To view the most recent and complete version of the NCCN Guidelines™, go online to NCCN.org
24. Brennan DD, Zamboni G, Sosna J, et al. Virtual Whipple: preoperative surgical planning with volume-rendered MDCT images to identify arterial variants relevant to the Whipple procedure. *AJR Am J Roentgenol*. 2007;188(5):W451-5. doi:10.2214/AJR.06.0925
25. Sayyed R, Baig M, Khan A, Niazi IK, Syed AA, Hanif F. Hepatic arterial system anomalies encountered during pancreaticoduodenectomy - our experience. *J Pak Med Assoc*. 2020;70(2):337-340. doi:10.5455/JPMA.9783
26. Xu YC, Yang F, Fu DL. Clinical significance of variant hepatic artery in pancreatic resection: A comprehensive review. *World J Gastroenterol*. 2022;28(19):2057-2075. doi:10.3748/wjg.v28.i19.2057


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

# Upper GI Cancers (ONC-14)

## Guideline

Hepatocellular Carcinoma (HCC) – General Considerations (ONC-14.1)
Hepatocellular Carcinoma (HCC) – Suspected/Diagnosis (ONC-14.2)
Hepatocellular Carcinoma (HCC) – Initial Work-up/Staging (ONC-14.3)
Hepatocellular Carcinoma (HCC) – Restaging/Recurrence (ONC-14.4)
Hepatocellular Carcinoma (HCC) – Surveillance/Follow-up (ONC-14.5)
Gallbladder and Biliary Tumors – Initial Work-up/Staging (ONC-14.6)
Gallbladder and Biliary Tumors – Restaging/Recurrence (ONC-14.7)
Gallbladder and Biliary Tumors – Surveillance/Follow-up (ONC-14.8)
Gastric Cancer – Initial Work-up/Staging (ONC-14.9)
Gastric Cancer – Restaging/Recurrence (ONC-14.10)
Gastric Cancer – Surveillance/Follow-up (ONC-14.11)
References (ONC-14)


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

# Hepatocellular Carcinoma (HCC) – General Considerations (ONC-14.1)

**ON.GI.0014.1.A**

**v2.0.2026**

- A biopsy is not always required for the diagnosis of Hepatocellular carcinoma (HCC). A dedicated triple-phase CT or MRI is medically necessary. MRI with contrast is the test of choice for the evaluation of liver masses. It offers soft tissue contrast resolution superior to CT as well as the possibility of using two different contrast agents, one of which if more blood flow based and the other which also is blood flow based and demonstrates hepatobiliary function (Eovist). Classical imaging findings include:
  - arterial phase hyper-enhancement
  - venous phase washout appearance
  - capsule appearance
  - threshold growth
- For individuals who are high-risk for developing HCC (cirrhosis, chronic Hepatitis B or current or prior HCC), if the liver lesion is >1cm with 2 classic enhancements on triple-phase CT or MRI, the diagnosis is confirmatory and biopsy is not needed.
- For lesions less than 1cm or with less than 2 classical enhancements or for any liver lesions in individuals who are not high-risk, a biopsy is needed for histological confirmation. PET/CT scan is considered not medically necessary for the diagnosis or staging of HCC.

### Evidence Discussion

HCC does not necessarily require a biopsy for diagnosis as a triple phase CT or MRI can support the diagnosis in the absence of biopsy as these lesions are characterized by arterial hypervascularity and "wash out" on portal venous phases unlike the surrounding liver. For individuals who are high-risk for developing HCC (cirrhosis, chronic Hepatitis B or current or prior HCC), if the liver lesion is >1cm with 2 classic enhancements on triple-phase CT or MRI, the diagnosis is confirmatory and biopsy is not needed. For lesions less than 1cm or with less than 2 classical enhancements or for any liver lesions in individuals who are not high-risk, a biopsy may be needed for histological confirmation. Serum biomarkers such as AFP are not sensitive or specific enough to establish a diagnosis. PET/CT scan is not medically necessary for the diagnosis or staging of HCC due to limited sensitivity.[2,15]


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

# Hepatocellular Carcinoma (HCC) – Suspected/Diagnosis (ONC-14.2)

**ON.GI.0014.2.A**

**v2.0.2026**

- See: **Chronic Liver Disease, Cirrhosis and Screening for HCC (AB-26.1)** in the Abdomen Imaging Guidelines.
- See: **Liver Lesion Characterization (AB-29.1)** in the Abdomen Imaging Guidelines.


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

# Hepatocellular Carcinoma (HCC) – Initial Work-up/Staging (ONC-14.3)

**ON.GI.0014.3.A**
**v2.0.2026**

| Indication | Medically Necessary Imaging Study |
|---|---|
| All individuals | • CT Chest with contrast (CPT® 71260) or CT Chest without contrast (CPT® 71250)<br>And ONE of the following:<br>• CT Abdomen with contrast (CPT® 74160)<br>• CT Abdomen without and with contrast (CPT® 74170)<br>• CT Abdomen and Pelvis with contrast (CPT® 74177) or without and with contrast (CPT® 74178)<br>• MRI Abdomen (CPT® 74183) and MRI Pelvis (CPT® 72197) without and with contrast<br>• Bone scan (CPT® 78306) (for skeletal symptoms) |
| Inconclusive conventional imaging | • PET/CT (CPT® 78815) |

**Evidence Discussion**

Initial imaging of hepatocellular carcinoma seeks to establish the tumor burden in the liver. CT or MRI imaging is preferred over the use of ultrasound. Additionally, common sites of metastases in individuals with hepatocellular carcinoma include the lungs, adrenal glands, peritoneum, and bone. Thus, initial work-up for all newly diagnosed individuals requires chest imaging. Bone scan completes this initial work-up by allowing dedicated imaging to identify potential bone metastases if suspected. PET/CT is a useful tool for evaluating inconclusive findings on the initial imaging studies due to its limited specificity but high sensitivity.[2,8]


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

# Hepatocellular Carcinoma (HCC) – Restaging/Recurrence (ONC-14.4)

**ON.GI.0014.4.A**
**v2.0.2026**

| Indication | Medically Necessary Imaging Study |
|---|---|
| ONE of the following:<br>• After initial therapy<br>• For suspected recurrence or new liver lesions<br>• Individuals receiving systemic therapy (every 2 cycles) | • CT Chest with contrast (CPT® 71260) or CT Chest without contrast (CPT® 71250)<br>And ONE of the following:<br>• CT Abdomen with contrast (CPT® 74160)<br>• CT Abdomen without and with contrast (CPT® 74170)<br>• CT Abdomen and Pelvis with contrast (CPT® 74177) or CT Abdomen and Pelvis without and with contrast (CPT® 74178)<br>• MRI Abdomen (CPT® 74183) and MRI Pelvis (CPT® 72197) without and with contrast |
| Inconclusive conventional imaging | • PET/CT (CPT® 78815) |
| Hepatocellular Carcinoma treated with local therapy (ablation, embolization) | See: **Liver Metastases (ONC-31.2)** for imaging studies prior to and post-procedure |
| Hepatocellular Carcinoma awaiting liver transplant | See: **Liver Transplant, Pre-Transplant (AB-42.1)** in the Abdomen Imaging Guidelines |

### Evidence Discussion

To assess response after treatment, dedicated imaging of the chest, abdomen, and pelvis are medically necessary. NCCN stated, "CT of the chest and CT or MRI of the abdomen and pelvis are the preferred modalities as they reliably assess intranodular arterial vascularity, a key feature of residual or recurrent tumor".[2] Thus, these studies are medically necessary for suspected recurrence or new liver lesions. PET/CT remains a useful tool for evaluation of inconclusive conventional studies due to its limited sensitivity but high specificity.[2] For individuals undergoing liver embolization, CTA Abdomen is medically necessary immediately prior to this procedure. In addition, either


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

MRI or CT of the Abdomen with and without contrast is medically necessary immediately prior and 1 month post-ablation.[2,8] ONC-31.2 provides a broader description of additional appropriate studies prior to and after embolization for liver metastases.


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

# Hepatocellular Carcinoma (HCC) – Surveillance/Follow-up (ONC-14.5)

**ON.GI.0014.5.A**
**v2.0.2026**

| Indication | Medically Necessary Imaging Study |
|---|---|
| Hepatocellular Carcinoma:<br>• Treated with surgical resection<br>• Treated with embolization<br>• Being monitored off therapy | Every 3 months for 2 years, then every 6 months until year 5:<br>• CT Chest with contrast (CPT® 71260) or CT Chest without contrast (CPT® 71250)<br>And ONE of the following:<br>• CT Abdomen with contrast (CPT® 74160)<br>• CT Abdomen without and with contrast (CPT® 74170)<br>• CT Abdomen and Pelvis with contrast (CPT® 74177) or without and with contrast (CPT® 74178)<br>• MRI Abdomen (CPT® 74183) and Pelvis (CPT® 72197) without and with contrast |
| Hepatocellular Carcinoma treated with liver transplant | • See: **Liver Transplant, Post-transplant Imaging (AB-42.3)** in the Abdomen Imaging Guidelines |

### Evidence Discussion

For individuals treated with surgical resection, embolization, or being monitored off therapy, CT Chest with or without contrast is medically necessary every 3 months for 2 years then every 6 months until year 5 as well as one of the following: CT Abdomen with or with/without contrast, CT Abdomen/Pelvis with or with/without contrast or MRI Abdomen/Pelvis with and without contrast. Multiphasic cross-sectional imaging with CT or MRI is preferred due to its reliability in assessing arterial vascularity, which is associated with increased risk of recurrence following treatment.[2,9,10] HCC treated with transplant is addressed in AB-42.3, Liver Transplant and Post-Transplant Imaging.


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

# Gallbladder and Biliary Tumors – Initial Work-up/Staging (ONC-14.6)

**ON.GI.0014.6.A**
**v2.0.2026**

| Indication | Medically Necessary Imaging Study |
|---|---|
| All individuals | • CT Chest with contrast (CPT® 71260) or CT Chest without contrast (CPT® 71250)<br>And ONE of the following:<br>• CT Abdomen with contrast (CPT® 74160)<br>• CT Abdomen without and with contrast (CPT® 74170)<br>• CT Abdomen and Pelvis with contrast (CPT® 74177)<br>• MRI Abdomen (CPT® 74183) and MRI Pelvis (CPT® 72197) without and with contrast<br>• MRCP with 3D rendering (CPT® 74183 and CPT® 76376 or CPT® 76377) |
| Inconclusive liver findings on CT (if MRI not already performed) | MRI Abdomen (CPT® 74183) and MRI Pelvis (CPT® 72197) without and with contrast |
| Inconclusive findings on MRI Abdomen | • PET/CT (CPT® 78815) |

### Evidence Discussion

High-quality contrast-enhanced cross-sectional imaging (CT and/or MRI) of the chest, abdomen, and pelvis is medically necessary to evaluate tumor penetration through the wall of the gallbladder and the presence of nodal and distant metastases, and to detect the extent of direct tumor invasion of other organs/biliary system or major vascular invasion. PET/CT is a useful tool for inconclusive findings on CT/MRI, with downsides including false-positives related to inflammation of the gallbladder.[3,11,12]


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

# Gallbladder and Biliary Tumors – Restaging/Recurrence (ONC-14.7)

**ON.GI.0014.7.A**
**v2.0.2026**

| Indication | Medically Necessary Imaging Study |
|---|---|
| ANY of the following:<br>• After initial therapy<br>• For suspected recurrence or new liver lesions<br>• Individuals receiving systemic chemotherapy (every 2 cycles) | • CT Chest with contrast (CPT® 71260) or CT Chest without contrast (CPT® 71250)<br>And ONE of the following:<br>• CT Abdomen with contrast (CPT® 74160)<br>• CT Abdomen and Pelvis with contrast (CPT® 74177)<br>• MRI Abdomen (CPT® 74183) and MRI Pelvis (CPT® 72197) without and with contrast |
| Inconclusive liver findings on CT (if MRI not already performed for restaging) | • MRI Abdomen (CPT® 74183) and MRI Pelvis (CPT® 72197) without and with contrast |
| Inconclusive findings on MRI Abdomen | • PET/CT (CPT® 78815) |

### Evidence Discussion

CT Chest with or without contrast plus one of the following is medically necessary: CT Abdomen with or with/without contrast, CT Abdomen/Pelvis with contrast and MRI Abdomen/Pelvis with and without contrast. High-quality contrast-enhanced cross-sectional imaging (CT and/or MRI) of the chest, abdomen, and pelvis is recommended to evaluate tumor penetration through the wall of the gallbladder and the presence of nodal and distant metastases, and to detect the extent of direct tumor invasion of other organs/biliary system or major vascular invasion. PET/CT is medically necessary for inconclusive findings on CT/MRI, keeping in mind false positives related to an inflamed gallbladder are problematic.[3,11,12]


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

# Gallbladder and Biliary Tumors – Surveillance/Follow-up (ONC-14.8)

**ON.GI.0014.8.A**
**v2.0.2026**

| Indication | Medically Necessary Imaging Study |
|---|---|
| All individuals | Every 3 months for 2 years, and then every 6 months up to year 5:<br>• CT Chest with contrast (CPT® 71260) or CT Chest without contrast (CPT® 71250)<br>And ONE of the following:<br>• CT Abdomen with contrast (CPT® 74160)<br>• CT Abdomen without and with contrast (CPT® 74170)<br>• CT Abdomen and Pelvis with contrast (CPT® 74177)<br>• MRI Abdomen (CPT® 74183) and MRI Pelvis (CPT® 72197) without and with contrast |
| Biliary carcinoma treated with liver transplant | See: **Liver Transplant, Post-transplant Imaging (AB-42.3)** in the Abdomen Imaging Guidelines |

**Evidence Discussion**

NCCN stated "there are no data to support a specific surveillance schedule following resection of gallbladder cancer".[3] However, NCCN did suggest consideration of imaging studies every three to six months for two years, and then every six to twelve months for up to five years. Recurrence typically occurs within two years.[3] Thus, this guideline allows for all individuals to receive imaging based upon that schedule. Biliary cancer treated with liver transplant would follow AB-42.3, Liver Transplant, Post-transplant Imaging.


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

# Gastric Cancer – Initial Work-up/Staging (ONC-14.9)

**ON.GI.0014.9.A**
**v2.0.2026**

| Indication | Medically Necessary Imaging Study |
|---|---|
| All individuals | • CT Chest with contrast (CPT® 71260)<br>• CT Abdomen and Pelvis with contrast (CPT® 74177) |
| Gastric cancer ≥T2 or higher with no metastatic disease by conventional imaging | • PET/CT (CPT® 78815) |

### Evidence Discussion

All individuals should get CT Chest/Abdomen/Pelvis with contrast. For T2 or higher stage disease with no metastatic disease by CT, PET/CT is medically necessary to complete staging. FDG-PET alone is not an adequate diagnostic procedure in the detection and preoperative staging of gastric cancer, but can be helpful when used in conjunction with CT.[1,13,14]


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

# Gastric Cancer – Restaging/Recurrence (ONC-14.10)

**ON.GI.0014.10.A**
**v2.0.2026**

| Indication | Medically Necessary Imaging Study |
|---|---|
| • After completion of primary therapy (to include chemotherapy and/or chemoradiotherapy), prior to surgery<br>• After completion of chemoradiation therapy with definitive intent (i.e., no metastatic disease and no anticipated resection surgery)<br>• For suspected recurrence | • CT Chest with contrast (CPT® 71260) and CT Abdomen and Pelvis with contrast (CPT® 74177) |
| Monitoring response to chemotherapy<br>(every 2 cycles, ~every 6-8 weeks) for:<br>• Unresected primary disease<br>• Metastatic disease | • CT Abdomen and Pelvis with contrast (CPT® 74177)<br>• CT Chest with contrast (CPT® 71260) |
| New liver lesion(s) and primary site controlled | • CT Abdomen without and with contrast (CPT® 74170) or MRI Abdomen without and with contrast (CPT® 74183) |
| EITHER of the following:<br>• Inconclusive findings on conventional imaging<br>• Restaging of individuals with unresectable disease who cannot undergo CT with contrast due to renal insufficiency or contrast allergy | • PET/CT (CPT® 78815) |

### Evidence Discussion

CT Chest/Abdomen/Pelvis is medically necessary after initial therapy for presumed resectable disease, post curative chemoradiation (no surgery) and for suspected recurrence. Monitoring chemotherapy response should include CT Abdomen/Pelvis and include CT Chest for known disease, new/worsening pulmonary symptoms or abnormal chest x-ray. PET/CT is medically necessary with inconclusive findings on


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

conventional imaging. PET/CT is also the preferred option for imaging individuals who cannot undergo CT evaluations due to contrast allergies or renal insufficiency.[1]


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

# Gastric Cancer – Surveillance/Follow-up (ONC-14.11)

**ON.GI.0014.11.A**
**v2.0.2026**

| Indication | Medically Necessary Imaging Study |
|---|---|
| Stage I (treated with resection alone) | • No routine imaging unless clinical signs/ symptoms of recurrence |
| ANY of the following:<br>• Stage I treated with systemic therapy<br>• Stages II-III<br>• Stage IV - Metastatic disease with no measurable disease post definitive treatment | Every 6 months for 2 years, and then annually for 3 more years:<br>• CT Chest with contrast (CPT® 71260) or CT Chest without contrast (CPT® 71250) and CT Abdomen and Pelvis with contrast (CPT® 74177)<br>◦ In individuals who cannot undergo CT with contrast due to renal insufficiency or contrast allergy, MRI Abdomen without and with contrast (CPT® 74183) and MRI Pelvis without and with contrast (CPT® 72197) are the medically necessary substitute. |
| Measurable metastatic disease on maintenance therapy or being monitored off therapy | Every 3 months for up to 5 years after completion of active treatment:<br>• CT Chest with contrast (CPT® 71260)<br>• CT Abdomen and Pelvis with contrast (CPT® 74177) |

**Evidence Discussion**

Stage I treated with resection alone does not require routine imaging in the absence of signs/symptoms of recurrence. Stage I treated with systemic therapy, Stages II-III and Stage IV s/p definitive treatment of all measurable disease or being observed off therapy should undergo CT Chest/Abdomen/Pelvis every 6 months for 2 years then annually up to 5 years. Measurable metastatic disease on maintenance therapy or being monitored off therapy should undergo CT Chest/Abdomen/Pelvis every 3 months for up to 5 years after completion of active treatment.[1]


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

# References (ONC-14)

**v2.0.2026**

1. Ajani JA, D'Amico TA, Bentrem DJ, et al. National Comprehensive Cancer Network (NCCN) Guidelines Version 1.2026 – December 12, 2025. Gastric cancer, available at: https://www.nccn.org/professionals/physician_gls/pdf/gastric.pdf Referenced with permission from the NCCN Clinical Practice Guidelines in Oncology (NCCN Guidelines™) for Gastric cancer V1.2026 – December 12, 2025. ©2025 National Comprehensive Cancer Network, Inc. All rights reserved. The NCCN Guidelines™ and illustrations herein may not be reproduced in any form for any purpose without the express written permission of the NCCN. To view the most recent and complete version of the NCCN Guidelines™, go online to NCCN.org.
2. Benson AB, D'Angelica MI, Abrams T, et al. National Comprehensive Cancer Network (NCCN) Guidelines Version 2.2025—October 22, 2025, Hepatocellular Carcinoma, available at: https://www.nccn.org/professionals/physician_gls/pdf/hcc.pdf, Referenced with permission from the NCCN Clinical Practice Guidelines in Oncology (NCCN Guidelines™) for Hepatocellular Carcinoma V2.2025 October 22, 2025. ©2025 National Comprehensive Cancer Network, Inc. All rights reserved. The NCCN Guidelines™ and illustrations herein may not be reproduced in any form for any purpose without the express written permission of the NCCN. To view the most recent and complete version of the NCCN Guidelines™, go online to NCCN.org.
3. Benson AB, D'Angelica MI, Abrams T, et al. National Comprehensive Cancer Network (NCCN) Guidelines Version 2.2025—July 2, 2025, Biliary Tract Cancers, available at: https://www.nccn.org/professionals/physician_gls/pdf/btc.pdf, Referenced with permission from the NCCN Clinical Practice Guidelines in Oncology (NCCN Guidelines™) for Biliary Tract Cancers V2.2025 July 2, 2025. ©2025 National Comprehensive Cancer Network, Inc. All rights reserved. The NCCN Guidelines™ and illustrations herein may not be reproduced in any form for any purpose without the express written permission of the NCCN. To view the most recent and complete version of the NCCN Guidelines™, go online to NCCN.org
4. Vallböhmer D, Hölscher AH, Schnieder PM, et al. [18F]-fluorodeoxyglucose-positron emission tomography for the assessment of histopathologic response and prognosis after completion of neoadjuvant chemotherapy in gastric cancer. *J Surg Oncol*. 2010;102(2):135-140. doi:10.1002/jso.21592.
5. Choi CI, Park JK, Jeon TY, Kim DH. Diagnostic performance of F-18 FDG PET or PET/CT for detection of recurrent gastric cancer: a systematic review and meta-analysis. *J Yeungnam Med Sci*. 2023;40(Suppl):S37-S46. doi:10.12701/jyms.2023.00220
6. European Association for the Study of the Liver. EASL-ILCA Clinical Practice Guidelines on the management of intrahepatic cholangiocarcinoma. *J Hepatol*. 2023;79(1):181-208. doi:10.1016/j.jhep.2023.03.010
7. Rushbrook SM, Kendall TJ, Zen Y, et al. British Society of Gastroenterology guidelines for the diagnosis and management of cholangiocarcinoma. *Gut*. 2023;73(1):16-46. Published 2023 Dec 7. doi:10.1136/gutjnl-2023-330029
8. Arora S, Harmath C, Catania R, Mandler A, Fowler KJ, Borhani AA. Hepatocellular carcinoma: metastatic pathways and extra-hepatic findings. *Abdom Radiol (NY)*. 2021;46(8):3698-3707. doi:10.1007/s00261-021-03151-3
9. Hwang YJ, Bae JS, Lee Y, Hur BY, Lee DH, Kim H. Classification of microvascular invasion of hepatocellular carcinoma: correlation with prognosis and magnetic resonance imaging. *Clin Mol Hepatol*. 2023;29(3):733-746. doi:10.3350/cmh.2023.0034
10. Celotti A, Bonafede M, Baiocchi G, et al. Microvascular invasion in hepatocellular carcinoma (Hcc): Implications and strategy. *Curr Surg Rep*. 2025:13(46). doi:10.1007/s40137-025-00481-9
11. Furlan A, Ferris JV, Hosseinzadeh K, Borhani AA. Gallbladder carcinoma update: multimodality imaging evaluation, staging, and treatment options. *AJR Am J Roentgenol*. 2008;191:1440-1447.
12. Lamarca A, Barriuso J, Chander A, et al. (18)F-fluorodeoxyglucose positron emission tomography ((18)FDG-PET) for patients with biliary tract cancer: Systematic review and meta-analysis. *J Hepatol*. 2019;71:115-129.
13. Dassen AE, Lips DJ, Hoekstra CJ, et al. FDG-PET has no definite role in preoperative imaging in gastric cancer. *Eur J Surg Oncol* 2009;35:449- 455.
14. Kudou M, Kosuga T, Kubota T, et al. Value of Preoperative PET-CT in the Prediction of Pathological Stage of Gastric Cancer. *Ann Surg Oncol*. 2018;25(6):1633-1639. doi:10.1245/s10434-018-6455-0


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

15. Mazza S, Frigerio C, Alfieri D, et al. Prognostic Role of Basal Serum Alpha-Fetoprotein in Patients with Hepatocellular Carcinoma Suitable for Curative Treatment. *Medicina (Kaunas).* 2024;60(5):692. Published 2024 Apr 24. doi:10.3390/medicina60050692


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

Click Anywhere in the Header to Return to the Main Table of Contents



# Neuroendocrine Cancers and Adrenal Tumors (ONC-15)

## Guideline

General Considerations (ONC-15.1)
Gastrointestinal/Pancreatic Neuroendocrine Cancers – Suspected/Diagnosis (ONC-15.2)
Gastrointestinal/Pancreatic Neuroendocrine Cancers – Initial Work-up/Staging (ONC-15.3)
Gastrointestinal/Pancreatic Neuroendocrine Cancers – Restaging/Recurrence (ONC-15.4)
Gastrointestinal/Pancreatic Neuroendocrine Cancers – Surveillance (ONC-15.5)
Bronchopulmonary or Thymic Carcinoid – Initial Staging (ONC-15.6)
Bronchopulmonary or Thymic Carcinoid – Restaging/Recurrence (ONC-15.7)
Bronchopulmonary or Thymic Carcinoid – Surveillance (ONC-15.8)
Adrenal Tumors – Suspected/Diagnosis (ONC-15.9)
Adrenal Tumors – Initial Work-up/Staging (ONC-15.10)
Adrenal Tumors – Restaging/Recurrence (ONC-15.11)
Adrenal Tumors – Surveillance (ONC-15.12)
Adrenocortical Carcinoma (ONC-15.13)
References (ONC-15)


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

# General Considerations (ONC-15.1)

**ON.NA.0015.1.A**
**v2.0.2026**

This guideline includes low-grade or well-differentiated carcinoid and endocrine tumors of the lung, thymus, pancreas, gastrointestinal tract, or unknown primary site; including insulinoma, glucagonoma, VIPoma, gastrinoma, somatostatinoma, and others, as well as catecholamine-secreting tumors of the adrenal gland such as pheochromocytoma, paraganglioma, adrenocortical carcinoma, and others.

- For poorly-differentiated or high-grade small cell or large cell neuroendocrine tumors arising outside the lung or from an unknown primary site, see: **Extrathoracic Small Cell and Large Cell Neuroendocrine Tumors (ONC-31.8)**.
- For poorly-differentiated or high-grade neuroendocrine tumors of the lung, see: **Small Cell Lung Cancer (ONC-7)**.
- Neuroblastoma, ganglioneuroblastoma, and ganglioneuroma occurring in adults should be imaged according to **Neuroblastoma (PEDONC-6)** in the Pediatric and Special Populations Oncology Imaging Guidelines.
- Many are associated with Multiple Endocrine Neoplasia (MEN) familial syndromes.
  – See: **Multiple Endocrine Neoplasias (MEN) (PEDONC-2.8)** in the Pediatric and Special Populations Oncology Imaging Guidelines for screening recommendations.
- Somatostatin receptor (SSR) based imaging is more sensitive and specific for evaluation of well-differentiated neuroendocrine tumors and may be performed using $^{111}$In DTPA Octreotide scintigraphy or PET/CT scan with SSR radiotracers (such as $^{68}$Ga–DOTATATE, $^{68}$Ga-DOTATOC, or $^{64}$Cu-DOTATATE). This study is not part of evaluation of poorly-differentiated or high-grade neuroendocrine tumors, which are imaged according to: **Extrathoracic Small Cell and Large Cell Neuroendocrine Tumors (ONC-31.8)**.
- If dotatate PET/CT is medically necessary but not available, octreotide scan (any one of the following planar imaging codes: CPT® 78801, 78802, 78804 **AND** any one of the following SPECT/SPECT-CT codes: CPT® 78803, 78830, 78831, 78832) may be substituted for dotatate PET.

### Evidence Discussion

This guideline includes low-grade or well-differentiated (Grade 1, 2, or 3; Ki-67 >20% and <55%) carcinoid and endocrine tumors of the lung, thymus, pancreas, gastrointestinal tract, or unknown primary site; including insulinoma, glucagonoma, VIPoma, gastrinoma, somatostatinoma, and others, as well as catecholamine-secreting tumors of the adrenal gland such as pheochromocytoma, paraganglioma, adrenocortical carcinoma, and others. These tumors are particularly sensitive and


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

specific to somatostatin receptor (SSR) based imaging (nearly 80% express SSR on the cell surface) while poorly differentiated or high-grade tumors typically are not, with imaging recommendations being addressed in separate guidelines.[1,9]


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

# Gastrointestinal/Pancreatic Neuroendocrine Cancers – Suspected/ Diagnosis (ONC-15.2)

**ON.NA.0015.2.A**
**v2.0.2026**

| Indication | Medically Necessary Imaging Study |
|---|---|
| • Systemic symptoms strongly suggestive of functioning neuroendocrine tumor<br>• Suspicious findings on other imaging studies<br>• Unexplained elevation in ANY of the following:<br>◦ Chromogranin A<br>◦ 5HIAA<br>◦ Insulin<br>◦ VIP<br>◦ Glucagon<br>◦ Gastrin<br>◦ Substance P<br>◦ Serotonin<br>◦ Somatostatin | ANY of the following:<br>• CT Abdomen and Pelvis with contrast (CPT® 74177) or without and with contrast (CPT® 74178) **OR** MRI Abdomen (CPT® 74183) and MRI Pelvis (CPT® 72197) without and with contrast<br>• CT Chest with contrast (CPT® 71260) or CT Chest without contrast (CPT® 71250)<br>• CT with contrast or MRI without and with contrast of any other symptomatic body areas |
| • Continued suspicion with negative/ inconclusive CT or MRI | ONE of the following:<br>• PET/CT (CPT® 78815) or PET/MRI (CPT® 78812 and CPT® 76498) with any ONE of the following SSR radiotracers:<br>◦ $^{68}$Ga-DOTATATE<br>◦ $^{68}$Ga-DOTATOC<br>◦ $^{64}$Cu-DOTATATE |

## Evidence Discussion

Neuroendocrine tumors (NETs) arise from cells of the endocrine system that can be found throughout the body. They can occur sporadically or arise in the context


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

of an inherited genetic syndrome. Presentation is usually attributable to hormonal hypersecretion (functional tumors) that can include flushing/diarrhea/wheezing (Carcinoid syndrome), hypertension, and hypoglycemia versus being found incidentally on various imaging studies. If these symptoms/signs are suspicious for a NET, appropriate serologic/urinary workup may include chromogranin A, 5HIAA, insulin, VIP, glucagon, gastrin, substance P, serotonin and somatostatin. If these markers are elevated, CT chest with or without contrast as well as CT or MRI of abdomen/pelvis/any other symptomatic body area is medically necessary. CT is best for detection of primary small bowel lesions and lymphadenopathy while MRI is preferred for pancreatic NETs and detecting hepatic metastases. If these imaging studies are negative/inconclusive, SSR based imaging with either Octreotide scan or Dotatate/Dotatoc (Gallium-68, Copper-64) is medically necessary (SSR PET/CT). All three of these functional imaging modalities are FDA approved and can be performed in individuals on somatostatin analog therapy and are considered to be superior to Octreotide scan. FDG-based PET/CT has limited use, as the majority of NETs are metabolically inactive and fail to take up the tracer well.[1,9,10,11]


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

# Gastrointestinal/Pancreatic Neuroendocrine Cancers – Initial Work-up/Staging (ONC-15.3)

**ON.NA.0015.3.A**

**v2.0.2026**

- For undifferentiated neuroendocrine tumors, see: **Extrathoracic Small Cell and Large Cell Neuroendocrine Tumors ONC-31.8**

| Indication | Medically Necessary Imaging Study |
|---|---|
| ANY of the following:<br>• Well-differentiated Grade 1-2 tumors<br>◦ Jejunal<br>◦ Ileal<br>◦ Colon<br>◦ Type 3 Gastric<br>◦ Neuroendocrine tumors of unknown primary<br>• Well-differentiated Grade 3 tumors | If not already done, ANY or ALL of the following:<br>• PET/CT (CPT® 78815) or PET/MRI (CPT® 78812 and CPT® 76498) with any ONE of the following SSR radiotracers:<br>◦ $^{68}$Ga-DOTATATE<br>◦ $^{68}$Ga-DOTATOC<br>◦ $^{64}$Cu-DOTATATE<br>• CT Chest with contrast (CPT® 71260) or CT Chest without contrast (CPT® 71250)<br>• And ONE of the following:<br>◦ CT Abdomen and Pelvis with contrast (CPT® 74177)<br>◦ CT Abdomen and Pelvis without and with contrast (CPT® 74178)<br>◦ MRI Abdomen (CPT® 74183) and MRI Pelvis (CPT® 72197) without and with contrast |


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

| Indication | Medically Necessary Imaging Study |
|---|---|
| All other GI or pancreatic neuroendocrine tumors, including, but not limited to, duodenal, appendix (>2cm or any tumor size with incomplete resection or positive nodes/ margins), rectal (T2-T4 or positive nodes), and pancreas (nonfunctional, gastrinoma, insulinoma, glucagonoma, VIPoma) | If not already done:<br>• CT Abdomen and Pelvis with contrast (CPT® 74177) or without and with contrast (CPT® 74178) OR MRI Abdomen (CPT® 74183) and Pelvis (CPT® 72197) without and with contrast<br>• CT Chest with contrast (CPT® 71260) or CT Chest without contrast (CPT® 71250) |
| Locally advanced or metastatic disease (any location or histology) not amenable to curative intent resection to assess candidacy for treatment with somatostatin analogues | If not already done, ANY or ALL of the following:<br>• PET/CT (CPT® 78815) or PET/MRI (CPT® 78812 and CPT® 76498) with any ONE of the following SSR radiotracers:<br>◦ $^{68}$Ga-DOTATATE<br>◦ $^{68}$Ga-DOTATOC<br>◦ $^{64}$Cu-DOTATATE<br>• CT Chest with contrast (CPT® 71260) or CT Chest without contrast (CPT® 71250)<br>• And ONE of the following:<br>◦ CT Abdomen and Pelvis with contrast (CPT® 74177)<br>◦ CT Abdomen and Pelvis without and with contrast (CPT® 74178)<br>◦ MRI Abdomen (CPT® 74183) and MRI Pelvis (CPT® 72197) without and with contrast |
| Inconclusive CT or MRI scans | ONE of the following:<br>• PET/CT (CPT® 78815) or PET/MRI (CPT® 78812 and CPT® 76498) with any ONE of the following SSR radiotracers:<br>◦ $^{68}$Ga-DOTATATE<br>◦ $^{68}$Ga-DOTATOC<br>◦ $^{64}$Cu-DOTATATE |


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

| Indication | Medically Necessary Imaging Study |
|---|---|
| ANY of the following:<br>• Markers fail to normalize after complete resection AND CT/MRI and somatostatin-receptor based study are negative<br>• Biopsy-proven neuroendocrine tumor of unknown primary site AND CT/ MRI and somatostatin-receptor based study are negative | • FDG-PET/CT (CPT® 78815) |

**Evidence Discussion**

For initial evaluation of all neuroendocrine tumors, the National Comprehensive Cancer Network (NCCN) recommended that cross-sectional imaging be performed of the primary site of disease utilizing either CT or MRI. Imaging with chest CT is also an NCCN recommended consideration. For certain disease types including well-differentiated grade 1-2 tumors, including neuroendocrine tumors of the jejunum, ileum, duodenum, and colon, as well as gastric type 3 and neuroendocrine tumors of unknown primary, and grade 3 well-differentiated tumors, the NCCN recommends that a PET/CT or PET/MRI utilizing SSR radiotracers be performed in addition to diagnostic CT or MRI imaging. Brain imaging is not medically necessary for well-differentiated NET without signs and symptoms of neurologic involvement. The NCCN states octreotide scans are "much less sensitive for defining SSTR-positive disease than PET". Thus, these guidelines reserve octreotide scans as a problem-solving tool if PET is inconclusive or not available.[1,10,11]


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

# Gastrointestinal/Pancreatic Neuroendocrine Cancers – Restaging/ Recurrence (ONC-15.4)

**ON.NA.0015.4.A**
**v2.0.2026**

| Indication | Medically Necessary Imaging Study |
|---|---|
| All after surgical resection | • See: **Gastrointestinal/Pancreatic Neuroendocrine Cancers – Surveillance (ONC-15.5)** |
| Unresectable/metastatic disease on treatment with somatostatin analogues | • CT or MRI of involved body area no more frequently than every 3 months |
| Unresectable/metastatic disease on treatment with chemotherapy or PRRT (i.e., Lutathera) | • CT or MRI of involved body area every 2 cycles (6 to 8 weeks) |
| Suspected recurrence | • PET/CT (CPT® 78815) or PET/MRI (CPT® 78812 and CPT® 76498) with any ONE of the following SSR radiotracers:<br>◦ $^{68}$Ga-DOTATATE<br>◦ $^{68}$Ga-DOTATOC<br>◦ $^{64}$Cu-DOTATATE<br>AND<br>• CT Chest without contrast (CPT® 71250) or CT Chest with contrast (CPT® 71260)<br>And ONE of the following:<br>• CT Abdomen and Pelvis with contrast (CPT® 74177)<br>• CT Abdomen and Pelvis without and with contrast (CPT® 74178)<br>• MRI Abdomen (CPT® 74183) and MRI Pelvis (CPT® 72197) without and with contrast |


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

| Indication | Medically Necessary Imaging Study |
|---|---|
| Continued suspicion for recurrence with negative or inconclusive CT or MRI, and PET not available | • Octreotide scan:<br>◦ Any one of the following planar imaging codes - CPT® 78801, 78802, or 78804<br>◦ Any one of the following SPECT/SPECT-CT codes - CPT® 78803, 78830, 78831, 78832 - may be approved as an add-on |
| To assess candidacy for peptide receptor radionuclide therapy (PRRT) with Lutetium $^{177}$Lu-dotatate | • PET/CT (CPT® 78815) or PET/MRI (CPT® 78812 and CPT® 76498) with any ONE of the following SSR radiotracers:<br>◦ $^{68}$Ga-DOTATATE<br>◦ $^{68}$Ga-DOTATOC<br>◦ $^{64}$Cu-DOTATATE |

**Evidence Discussion**

NCCN recommended that for any suspected recurrence of disease, PET/CT or PET/MRI be performed in addition to systemic diagnostic imaging. For individuals with unresectable/metastatic disease, NCCN stated that "anatomic imaging should generally be performed every 12 weeks-12 months based on clinical or pathologic signs of aggressiveness". Thus, CT imaging of involved body area is recommended every 3 months if on somatostatin therapy versus every 2 cycles (6-8 weeks) if on chemotherapy. To assess for candidacy for peptide receptor radionuclide therapy (PRRT) with Lutetium Lu-177 dotatate (Lutathera), any of the 3 SSR PET/CT or PET/MRI options are medically necessary. The NCCN stated octreotide scans are "much less sensitive for defining SSTR-positive disease than PET". Thus, these guidelines reserve octreotide scans as a problem-solving tool if PET is inconclusive or not available.[1]


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

# Gastrointestinal/Pancreatic Neuroendocrine Cancers – Surveillance (ONC-15.5)

**ON.NA.0015.5.A**
**v2.0.2026**

| Indication | Medically Necessary Imaging Study |
|---|---|
| ANY of the following:<br>• Appendix carcinoid <1cm, completely resected<br>• Rectal carcinoid <1cm, completely resected<br>• Gastric carcinoid treated with complete endoscopic resection | • Advanced imaging is not medically necessary for surveillance |
| Rectal carcinoid 1-2cm, completely resected | • MRI Pelvis without and with contrast (CPT® 72197) at 6 and 12 months post resection. No further routine surveillance. |
| All other GI neuroendocrine tumors (stomach, large and small intestine) | • CT Abdomen and Pelvis with contrast (CPT® 74177) or MRI Abdomen (CPT® 74183) and MRI Pelvis (CPT® 72197) without and with contrast once at 3 to 12 months post-operatively and every 12-24 months up to year 10 |
| Unresected GI neuroendocrine tumors being monitored with observation alone | • CT Abdomen with contrast (CPT® 74160) once at 3 to 12 months from initial diagnosis, then every 3 months for 1 year, then every 6 months in year 2, and then annually up to year 10 |
| Pancreatic neuroendocrine tumors | • CT Abdomen with contrast (CPT® 74160) once at 3 to 12 months post-operatively then annually up to year 10 |
| Unresected pancreatic neuroendocrine tumors being monitored with observation alone | • CT Abdomen with contrast (CPT® 74160) once at 3 to 12 months from initial diagnosis then annually up to year 10 |


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

| Indication | Medically Necessary Imaging Study |
|---|---|
| Measurable metastatic disease on maintenance treatment or off therapy | • CT of involved body area no more frequently than every 3 months |

**Evidence Discussion**

In the absence of signs/symptoms of recurrence, advanced imaging is not medically necessary for completely resected appendiceal carcinoid <1cm, completely resected rectal carcinoid <1cm, and gastric carcinoid treated with complete endoscopic resection due to their excellent prognosis and low risk of recurrence.[6,13] For completely resected rectal carcinoid 1-2cm, MRI pelvis with and without contrast at 6 and 12 months post-resection is medically necessary, and if clear, no further imaging. Due to the indolent nature of NETs, long term follow-up is recommended. For all other GI NETs, CT or MRI abdomen/pelvis once 3-12 months post-operatively and then every 12-24 months for 10 years is supported by NCCN. Unresected GI NETs on observation should undergo CT abdomen with contrast once at 3-12 months from initial diagnosis then annually up to year 10. Resected pancreatic NETs should undergo CT abdomen with contrast once at 3-12 months post-operatively then annually up to year 10. Unresected pancreatic NETs should undergo CT Abdomen with contrast once at 3-12 months from initial diagnosis then annually up to year 10. For individuals with measurable metastatic disease on maintenance or off therapy, CT of involved body area is medically necessary no more frequently than every 3 months. After 10 years, surveillance should be as clinically indicated.[1]


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

# Bronchopulmonary or Thymic Carcinoid – Initial Staging (ONC-15.6)

**ON.NA.0015.6.A**
**v2.0.2026**

| Indication | Medically Necessary Imaging Study |
|---|---|
| Initial diagnosis | If not already done:<br>• CT Chest with contrast (CPT® 71260)<br>• CT Abdomen with contrast (CPT® 74160) or without and with contrast (CPT® 74170) or MRI Abdomen (CPT® 74183) without and with contrast |
| Inconclusive CT or MRI scans | ONE of the following:<br>• PET/CT (CPT® 78815) or PET/MRI (CPT® 78812 and CPT® 76498) with any ONE of the following SSR radiotracers:<br>◦ $^{68}$Ga-DOTATATE<br>◦ $^{68}$Ga-DOTATOC<br>◦ $^{64}$Cu-DOTATATE |
| ANY of the following:<br>• Markers fail to normalize after complete resection AND CT/MRI and somatostatin-receptor based study are negative<br>• Biopsy-proven neuroendocrine tumor of unknown primary site AND CT/MRI and somatostatin-receptor based study are negative | • FDG-PET/CT (CPT® 78815) OR PET/MRI (CPT® 78812 and CPT® 76498) |


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

| Indication | Medically Necessary Imaging Study |
|---|---|
| Locally advanced or metastatic disease (any location or histology) not amenable to curative intent resection to assess candidacy for treatment with somatostatin analogues | If not already done, ANY or ALL of the following:<br>• PET/CT (CPT® 78815) or PET/MRI (CPT® 788123 and CPT® 76498) with any ONE of the following SSR radiotracers:<br>◦ $^{68}$Ga-DOTATATE<br>◦ $^{68}$Ga-DOTATOC<br>◦ $^{64}$Cu-DOTATATE<br>• CT Chest with contrast (CPT® 71260) or CT Chest without contrast (CPT® 71250)<br>• And ONE of the following:<br>◦ CT Abdomen and Pelvis with contrast (CPT® 74177)<br>◦ CT Abdomen and Pelvis without and with contrast (CPT® 74178)<br>◦ MRI Abdomen (CPT® 74183) and MRI Pelvis (CPT® 72197) without and with contrast |

**Evidence Discussion**

More than 80% of lung carcinoids are diagnosed at Stage I or II with the most common sites of metastases being liver, bone, and lung.[14] Most thymic carcinoids are diagnosed at Stage III or IV with the most common sites of metastases being pleura, pericardium, bone, lung, and liver. Medically necessary initial imaging includes CT Chest with contrast and CT or MRI of the abdomen. Imaging of the brain, pelvis or osseous structures is based on signs/symptoms of disease. If the CT/MRI is inconclusive, Octreotide scan or SSR-based PET is medically necessary. In the setting where markers fail to normalize after surgery AND CT/MRI and SSR based study are negative OR there is biopsy proven NET of unknown origin AND CT/MRI and SSR based study are negative, FDG-based PET is medically necessary for the concern of a higher-grade NET being present.[10,11]


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

# Bronchopulmonary or Thymic Carcinoid – Restaging/Recurrence (ONC-15.7)

**ON.NA.0015.7.A**
**v2.0.2026**

| Indication | Medically Necessary Imaging Study |
|---|---|
| All after surgical resection | • See: **Bronchopulmonary or Thymic Carcinoid - Surveillance (ONC-15.8)** |
| Unresectable/metastatic disease on treatment with somatostatin analogues | • CT or MRI of involved body area no more frequently than every 3 months |
| Unresectable/metastatic disease on treatment with chemotherapy | • CT or MRI of involved body area every 2 cycles (6 to 8 weeks) |
| Progression of symptoms or elevation of tumor markers | • CT Chest without (CPT® 71250) or CT Chest with contrast (CPT® 71260)<br>And ONE of the following:<br>• CT Abdomen and Pelvis with contrast (CPT® 74177)<br>• CT Abdomen and Pelvis without and with contrast (CPT® 74178)<br>• MRI Abdomen (CPT® 74183) and Pelvis (CPT® 72197) without and with contrast |
| Continued suspicion for recurrence with negative or inconclusive CT or MRI | ONE of the following:<br>• PET/CT (CPT® 78815) or PET/MRI (CPT® 78812 and CPT® 76498) with any ONE of the following SSR radiotracers:<br>◦ $^{68}$Ga-DOTATATE<br>◦ $^{68}$Ga-DOTATOC<br>◦ $^{64}$Cu-DOTATATE |

**Evidence Discussion**

For individuals with unresectable/metastatic disease, CT imaging of involved body area is medically necessary every 3 months if on somatostatin therapy versus every


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

2 cycles (6-8 weeks) if on chemotherapy. CT Chest and CT/MRI Abdomen/Pelvis is medically necessary for progression of symptoms or elevation of tumor markers, while Octreotide scan or SSR PET is medically necessary if conventional imaging is negative/ inconclusive.[10,11]


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

# Bronchopulmonary or Thymic Carcinoid – Surveillance (ONC-15.8)

**ON.NA.0015.8.A**
**v2.0.2026**

| Indication | Medically Necessary Imaging Study |
|---|---|
| Carcinoid tumors of lung or thymus | • CT Chest with contrast (CPT® 71260) or CT Chest without contrast (CPT® 71250) and CT Abdomen with contrast (CPT® 74160) once at 3 to 12 months post-resection and then annually up to year 10 |
| Unresected primary tumors being monitored with observation alone | • CT Chest with contrast (CPT® 71260) or CT Chest without contrast (CPT® 71250) and CT Abdomen with contrast (CPT® 74160) once at 3 to 12 months from initial diagnosis then annually up to year 10 |
| Asymptomatic lung or thymus distant metastasis on observation alone | Every 3 months for 1 year, and then every 6 months:<br>• CT Chest with contrast (CPT® 71260) or CT Chest without contrast (CPT® 71250)<br>• CT Abdomen and Pelvis with contrast (CPT® 74177) or MRI Abdomen (CPT® 74183) and MRI Pelvis (CPT® 72197) without and with contrast |
| Measurable metastatic disease on maintenance treatment or off therapy | • CT Chest with contrast (CPT® 71260)<br>• CT of involved body area no more frequently than every 3 months |

**Evidence Discussion**

For carcinoid tumors of the lung or thymus, prognosis varies. In typical lung carcinoid, 5-year and 10-year overall survival (OS) is approximately 81% to 96%, and 74% to 91%, respectively, for both node negative and node positive disease. With atypical histology, 5-year OS is 82% to 90% in node negative disease and 58 to 71% in node positive disease. Thymic carcinoid 5-year OS is <50%. Due to lack of long-term follow-up imaging studies, it is recommended to minimize risk of radiation exposure using CT or MRI.[14] In individuals with resected disease, CT Chest 3-12 months post resection and then annually for up to 3 years then every 2 years up to year 10 is medically necessary. Unresected primary tumors on observation follow a similar schedule with CT Chest 3-12 months from initial diagnosis and then annually for up to 3 years then every 2 years up to year 10. Measurable metastatic disease on maintenance therapy or observation


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

undergoes CT of involved body area no more frequently than every 3 months. After 10 years, surveillance should be as clinically indicated.[1]


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

# Adrenal Tumors – Suspected/Diagnosis (ONC-15.9)

**ON.NA.0015.9.A**

**v2.0.2026**

- See: **Adrenal Cortical Lesions (AB-16.1)** in the Abdomen Imaging Guidelines for evaluation of indeterminate adrenal masses.
- Adrenal tumors that involve the adrenal medulla or neural crest tissue outside the adrenal gland include pheochromocytoma, paraganglioma, and paraganglioneuroma.
  - These tumors are imaged according to sections **ONC-15.10 through ONC-15.12**.
  - Malignant adrenal tumors that involve the adrenal cortex are addressed in **Adrenocortical Carcinoma (ONC-15.13).**
- Adrenocortical carcinoma is imaged according to **Adrenocortical Carcinoma (ONC-15.13)**.
- If concern for genetic predisposition syndrome such as MEN, neurofibromatosis, or Von Hippel-Lindau disease, see screening recommendations in **Screening Imaging and Cancer Predisposition Syndromes (PEDONC-2)** in the Pediatric and Special Populations Oncology Imaging Guidelines.


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

# Adrenal Tumors – Initial Work-up/Staging (ONC-15.10)

**ON.NA.0015.10.A**

**v2.0.2026**

- This guideline can be applied to **any primary site** (including beyond adrenal gland) for pheochromocytoma, paraganglioma, or paraganglioneuroma.

| Indication | Medically Necessary Imaging Study |
|---|---|
| For ANY of the following:<br>• Pheochromocytoma<br>• Paraganglioma<br>• Paraganglioneuroma | If not already done:<br>• CT Chest without (CPT® 71250) or CT Chest with contrast (CPT® 71260)<br>And ONE of the following (if not already done):<br>• CT Abdomen and Pelvis with contrast (CPT® 74177)<br>• CT Abdomen and Pelvis without and with contrast (CPT® 74178)<br>• MRI Abdomen (CPT® 74183) and MRI Pelvis (CPT® 72197) without and with contrast<br>• CT with contrast or MRI without and with contrast of primary site (i.e., neck) and any other symptomatic body areas |
| Hypercortisolemia with ANY of the following:<br>• Tumor greater than 4cm<br>• Inhomogeneous<br>• Irregular margins<br>• Local invasion<br>• Other malignant imaging characteristics | ANY or ALL of the following:<br>• FDG PET/CT (CPT® 78815)<br>• CT Abdomen with contrast (CPT® 74160) or CT Abdomen without and with contrast (CPT® 74170) or MRI Abdomen without and with contrast (CPT® 74183) |


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

| Indication | Medically Necessary Imaging Study |
|---|---|
| Continued suspicion with negative/ inconclusive CT or MRI | ONE of the following:<br>• PET/CT (CPT® 78815) or PET/MRI (CPT® 78812 and CPT® 76498) with any ONE of the following SSR radiotracers:<br>◦ $^{68}$Ga-DOTATATE<br>◦ $^{68}$Ga-DOTATOC<br>◦ $^{64}$Cu-DOTATATE |
| All above studies done and negative/ inconclusive | • FDG PET/CT scan (CPT® 78815) |

**Evidence Discussion**

Radiologic evaluation of adrenal tumors should follow biochemical conformation of the diagnosis of pheochromocytoma and paraganglioglioma. Ninety-five percent of this group of tumors occur in the abdomen and pelvis. Paragangliomas account for 15% of this group of tumors. The initial work-up/staging of this group of tumors includes CT Chest (with contrast or without contrast), as approximately 10% of paragangliomas are found in the chest, and pheochromocytoma has a potential to metastasize to chest. CT imaging with or without and with contrast or MRI imaging without and with contrast of the abdomen, pelvis and any other symptomatic body areas are medically necessary for initial staging. Hypercortisolemia can be caused by benign and malignant tumors. NCCN stated, "Malignancy should be suspected if the tumor is larger than 4 centimeters or is inhomogeneous with irregular margins and/or has local invasion and other malignant imaging characteristics" and went on to recommend imaging with PET/CT, CT Chest, and CT or MRI abdominal imaging.[1]

Functional imaging is a valuable problem-solving tool when there is continued suspicion for this group of tumors with inconclusive or negative findings on CT/ MRI. $^{123}$I/ $^{131}$I-MIBG sensitivity is higher for detecting pheochromocytoma than for detecting paraganglioma, at 88% and 67%, respectively. Another approach to functional imaging utilizes $^{68}$Ga-DOTA-somatostatin analogs including DOTATOC, DOTANOC, and DOTATATE (SSR-PET/CT). In meta-analyses, the sensitivity of 68Ga-DOTA-somatostatin analogs (93%) is superior to $^{18}$F-FDG (74%), and $^{123}$I/ $^{131}$I-MIBG (38%). Imaging with $^{111}$In-pentetreotide (octreotide) (24%) is less sensitive that imaging with $^{68}$Ga-DOTA-somatostatin analogs. Of note, functional imaging using $^{18}$F-FDG PET/CT can be useful for evaluation in the scenario that CT/MRI and other functional imaging studies are negative/inconclusive.[1,15-18]


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

# Adrenal Tumors – Restaging/Recurrence (ONC-15.11)

**ON.NA.0015.11.A**
**v2.0.2026**

- This guideline can be applied to **any primary site** (including beyond adrenal gland) for pheochromocytoma, paraganglioma, or paraganglioneuroma.

| Indication | Medically Necessary Imaging Study |
|---|---|
| If surgery is primary therapy | See: **ONC-15.12** for surveillance recommendations |
| Recurrence, progression of symptoms, or elevation of tumor markers | • CT Chest without contrast (CPT® 71250) or CT Chest with contrast (CPT® 71260)<br>• CT with contrast of primary site (i.e., neck) and involved areas<br>And ONE of the following:<br>• CT Abdomen and Pelvis with contrast (CPT® 74177)<br>• CT Abdomen and Pelvis without and with contrast (CPT® 74178)<br>• MRI Abdomen (CPT® 74183) and MRI Pelvis (CPT® 72197) without and with contrast |
| Continued suspicion for recurrence with negative or inconclusive CT or MRI | ONE of the following:<br>• PET/CT (CPT® 78815) or PET/MRI (CPT® 78812 and CPT® 76498) with any ONE of the following SSR radiotracers:<br>◦ $^{68}$Ga-DOTATATE<br>◦ $^{68}$Ga-DOTATOC<br>◦ $^{64}$Cu-DOTATATE |
| To assess candidacy for peptide receptor radionuclide therapy (PRRT) with Lutetium $^{177}$Lu-dotatate | • PET/CT (CPT® 78815) or PET/MRI (CPT® 78812 and CPT® 76498) with any ONE of the following SSR radiotracers:<br>◦ $^{68}$Ga-DOTATATE<br>◦ $^{68}$Ga-DOTATOC<br>◦ $^{64}$CU-DOTATATE |


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

| Indication | Medically Necessary Imaging Study |
|---|---|
| For ANY of the following:<br>• All above studies done and negative/ inconclusive<br>• Hypercortisolemia with inconclusive findings on CT<br>• Pheochromocytoma bone-dominant disease<br>• Paraganglioma bone-dominant disease | • FDG-PET/CT scan (CPT® 78815) |

**Evidence Discussion**

In individuals who underwent surgery for resection of localized disease, CT Abdomen with contrast is medically necessary within the first year post-resection. Follow-up imaging is based on surveillance recommendations noted in Adrenal Tumors – Surveillance (ONC 15.12). In individuals who develop recurrence, progression of symptoms or elevation of tumor markers, the extent of disease must be determined with CT/MRI imaging. CT chest (with contrast or without contrast), CT imaging with or without and with contrast, or MRI imaging without and with contrast of the abdomen, pelvis and any any other symptomatic body areas are medically necessary. Functional imaging with $^{111}$In-pentetreotide (octreotide scan) or $^{68}$Ga-DOTA-somatostatin analog PET is a valuable problem solving tool when there is continued suspicion of recurrence with inconclusive or negative findings on CT/MRI. Further evaluation using $^{18}$F-FDG PET/CT can be useful for evaluation in the scenario that CT/MRI and other functional imaging studies are negative/inconclusive. $^{18}$F-FDG PET/CT is also supported by NCCN for the evaluation of hypercortisolemia with inconclusive findings on CT, pheochromocytoma bone-dominant disease, and paraganglioma bone-dominant disease.[1,15-18]


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

# Adrenal Tumors – Surveillance (ONC-15.12)

**ON.NA.0015.12.A**

**v2.0.2026**

- This guideline can be applied to **any primary site** (including beyond adrenal gland) for pheochromocytoma, paraganglioma, paraganglioneuroma, or hypercortisolemia.

| Indication | Medically Necessary Imaging Study |
|---|---|
| All individuals | Once within 3-12 months post resection and then annually for 10 years:<br>• CT Chest with contrast (CPT® 71260) or without contrast (CPT® 71250)<br>• CT Abdomen and Pelvis with contrast (CPT® 74177) or MRI Abdomen and Pelvis without and with contrast (CPT® 74183 and 72197)<br>• CT with contrast of primary site (i.e., neck) and other involved body areas |
| Measurable metastatic disease being observed off therapy or on maintenance treatment | • CT of involved body area no more frequently than every 3 months for up to 5 years after completion of definitive therapy and annually thereafter |

## Evidence Discussion

In individuals who had resectable disease, CT imaging of the chest and either CT or MR imaging of the abdomen, pelvis, and any other previously involved body areas are medically necessary once within 3-12 months post-resection then annually for 10 years. Individuals with measurable metastatic disease being observed off therapy or on maintenance therapy are at greater risk for recurrence. In addition to the imaging schedule noted above, imaging of the involved body area is medically necessary with greater frequency (3 months) for up to 5 years followed by annual imaging.[1,15-18]


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

# Adrenocortical Carcinoma (ONC-15.13)

**ON.NA.0015.13.A**
**v2.0.2026**

| Indication | Medically Necessary Imaging Study |
|---|---|
| Initial Staging | • FDG PET/CT (CPT® 78815)<br>• CT Chest without (CPT® 71250) or CT Chest with contrast (CPT® 71260)<br>And ONE of the following (if not already done):<br>• CT Abdomen and Pelvis with contrast (CPT® 74177)<br>• CT Abdomen and Pelvis without and with contrast (CPT® 74178)<br>• MRI Abdomen (CPT® 74183) and MRI Pelvis (CPT® 72197) without and with contrast |
| Suspected recurrence | • CT Chest without (CPT® 71250) or CT Chest with contrast (CPT® 71260)<br>And ONE of the following:<br>• CT Abdomen and Pelvis with contrast (CPT® 74177)<br>• CT Abdomen and Pelvis without and with contrast (CPT® 74178)<br>• MRI Abdomen (CPT® 74183) and MRI Pelvis (CPT® 72197) without and with contrast |
| • Inconclusive findings on conventional imaging | • FDG PET/CT (CPT® 78815) |
| Surveillance after complete response to definitive treatment | Annually for 5 years:<br>• CT Chest with contrast (CPT® 71260) or CT Chest without contrast (CPT® 71250)<br>• CT Abdomen with contrast (CPT® 74160) or MRI Abdomen (CPT® 74183) without and with contrast<br>• CT of other involved body areas with contrast |


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

| Indication | Medically Necessary Imaging Study |
|---|---|
| Measurable metastatic disease on maintenance therapy or being monitored off therapy | Every 3 months for up to 5 years after completion of definitive therapy:<br>• CT Chest with contrast (CPT® 71260) or CT Chest without contrast (CPT® 71250)<br>• CT Abdomen and Pelvis with contrast (CPT® 74177) or MRI Abdomen (CPT® 74183) and MRI Pelvis (CPT® 72197) without and with contrast<br>• CT with contrast of other involved body areas |

**Evidence Discussion**

Adrenocortical carcinoma (ACC) is a rare, aggressive tumor arising from the adrenal cortex. Most cases of ACC are sporadic; however, ACC has been described as a component of hereditary cancer syndromes that include Li-Fraumeni syndrome, Beckwith-Weidemann syndrome and multiple endocrine neoplasia type 1 (MEN1). Recommended imaging guidelines for screening of individuals with these syndromes are summarized in Screening Imaging in Cancer Predisposition Syndromes (PEDONC-2). ACCs that secrete excess adrenal hormones are classified as functional tumors and occur in 15-30% of cases in adults. Those individuals with functional tumors present with Cushing's syndrome and/or virilization. The majority of adults with non-functioning ACCs present symptomatically with abdominal pain or flank pain; however, these tumors may present asymptomatically as a large palpable intra-abdominal mass or incidentally as a small adrenal mass. Approximately 30% of ACCs present with metastatic disease in lymph nodes, lung, liver, and bone. ACCs may also present with invasion of adjacent structures and with venous extension.

CT and MRI cross-sectional imaging are the standard imaging modalities used for the evaluation of ACC. Due to the measurable risk for widely metastatic disease at initial presentation, cross-section imaging of the chest and abdomen/pelvis is medically necessary. CT Chest (with contrast or without contrast) is medically necessary to evaluate for lung metastases. Cross-sectional imaging of the abdomen/pelvis using CT Abdomen/Pelvis (with or with and without contrast) or MRI Abdomen as well as MRI Pelvis (with and without contrast) are medically necessary for characterization of the primary tumor and evaluation for metastatic disease. If recurrence is suspected, the same imaging studies should be completed as was done for initial staging. Additional imaging may be needed to assess other suspicious sites of disease based on clinical signs/symptoms.

NCCN endorsed the use of FDG PET/CT in addition to diagnostic CT or MRI for initial imaging of suspected adrenocortical carcinoma. FDG PET/CT scan is a valuable


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

problem-solving tool; thus, FDG PET/CT is medically necessary to characterize inconclusive findings CT/MRI.

CT imaging is the standard approach in surveillance. In individuals who had complete response to definitive therapy, the recommendation is annual imaging for 5 years after completion of treatment as the rate of recurrence is <25% and overall survival rate approaches 74% to 95% at 5 years. In individuals with metastatic disease on maintenance therapy or being monitored off treatment, the frequency of CT imaging is shortened and repeated at 3 month intervals for up to 5 years.[1,19-22]


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

# References (ONC-15)

**v2.0.2026**

1. Bergsland E, Rose JB, Benson III AB, et al. National Comprehensive Cancer Network (NCCN) Guidelines Version 3.2025 – October 1, 2025. Neuroendocrine and Adrenal tumors, available at: https://www. nccn.org/professionals/physician_gls/pdf/neuroendocrine.pdf Referenced with permission from the NCCN Clinical Practice Guidelines in Oncology (NCCN Guidelines™) for Neuroendocrine and Adrenal tumors V3.2025 – October 1, 2025. ©2025 National Comprehensive Cancer Network, Inc. All rights reserved. The NCCN Guidelines™ and illustrations herein may not be reproduced in any form for any purpose without the express written permission of the NCCN. To view the most recent and complete version of the NCCN Guidelines™, go online to NCCN.org.
2. Chauhan A, Chan K, Halfdanarson TR, et al. Critical updates in neuroendocrine tumors: Version 9 American Joint Committee on Cancer staging system for gastroenteropancreatic neuroendocrine tumors. *CA Cancer J Clin.* 2024;74(4):359-367. doi:10.3322/caac.21840
3. Sharma S, Fishbein L. Diagnosis and Management of Pheochromocytomas and Paragangliomas: A Guide for the Clinician. *Endocr Pract.* 2023;29(12):999-1006. doi:10.1016/j.eprac.2023.07.027
4. Ruys AT, Bennink RJ, van Westreenen HL, et al. FDG-positron emission tomography/computed tomography and standardized uptake value in the primary diagnosis and staging of hilar cholangiocarcinoma. *HPB (Oxford)*. 2011;13(4):256-262. doi:10.1111/j.1477-2574.2010.00280.x.
5. Laganà M, Gallo F, Salvetti M, et al. Predictors of survival outcomes in patients with neuroendocrine neoplasms: a real-world retrospective study. *Endocr Relat Cancer*. 2025;32(12):e250243. Published 2025 Dec 1. doi:10.1530/ERC-25-0243
6. Wang Y, Geng Y, Hu W. Survival and prognostic factors for postoperative primary appendiceal cancer: a retrospective cohort study based on the Surveillance, Epidemiology, and End Results database. *J Gastrointest Oncol*. 2022;13(3):1433-1443. doi:10.21037/jgo-22-454
7. Del Rivero J, Gangi A, Annes JP, et al. American Association of Clinical Endocrinology Consensus Statement on Management of Multiple Endocrine Neoplasia Type 1. *Endocr Pract*. Published online March 26, 2025. doi:10.1016/j.eprac.2025.02.001
8. Singh S, Moody L, Chan DL, et al. Follow-up recommendations for completely resected gastroenteropancreatic neuroendocrine tumors. *JAMA Oncol*. 2018;4(11):1597-1604. doi:10.1001/jamaoncol.2018.2428.
9. Zhang J, Kunz P. Making sense of a complex disease: a practical approach to managing neuroendocrine tumors. *JCO Oncology Practice*. 2022;18(4):258-264.
10. Hesami M, Blake M, Anderson MA, et al. Diagnostic Anatomic Imaging for Neuroendocrine Neoplasms: Maximizing Strengths and Mitigating Weaknesses. *J Comput Assist Tomogr.* 2024;48(4):521-532. doi:10.1097/RCT.0000000000001615
11. Galgano S, Iravani A, Bodei L, et al. Imaging of neuroendocrine neoplasms: monitoring treatment response—AJR expert panel narrative review. *AJR*. 2022;218(5):767-780.
12. Strosberg J, El-Haddad G, Wolin E, et al. Phase 3 trial of Lu-177 dotatate for midgut neuroendocrine tumors. *New England Journal of Medicine*. 2017;376(2):125-135.
13. Maione F, Chini A, Milone M, et al. Diagnosis and Management of Rectal Neuroendocrine Tumors (NETs). *Diagnostics (Basel)*. 2021;11(5):771. Published 2021 Apr 25. doi:10.3390/diagnostics11050771
14. Baudin E, Caplin M, Garcia-Carbonero R, et al. Lung and thymic carcinoids: ESMO Clinical Practice Guidelines for diagnosis, treatment and follow-up. *Annals of Oncology*. 2021;32(4):439-451.
15. Carrasquillo JA, Chen CC et al. Imaging of pheochromocytoma and paraganglioma. *J Nucl Med*. 2021;62(8):1033–1042.
16. Fishbein L, Del Rivero J, et al. The North American Neuroendocrine Tumor Society consensus guidelines for surveillance and management of metastatic and/or unresectable pheochromocytoma and paraganglioma. *Pancreas*. 2021;50(4):469-493. doi:10.1097/MPA.0000000000001792.
17. Han S, Suh CH, Woo S, Kim YJ, Lee JJ. Performance of 68Ga-DOTA-conjugated somatostatin receptor-targeting peptide PET in detection of pheochromocytoma and paraganglioma: a systematic review and metaanalysis. *J Nucl Med*. 2019;60:369–376.


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

18. Leung K, Stamm M, Raja A, Low G. Pheochromocytoma: the range of appearances on ultrasound, CT, MRI, and functional imaging. *AJR*. 2013;200(2).237-468. doi:10.2214/AJR.12.9126.
19. Howard B, Elsayed A, Klimkowski S, Lee J, Elsayes K. Imaging of Adrenocortical Carcinoma: An Update. *Semin Roentgenol.* 2025;60(1):78-87. doi:10.1053/j.ro.2024.11.005
20. Fassnacht M, Dekkers O, Else T, et al. European Society of Endocrinology clinical practice guidelines on the management of adrenocortical carcinoma in adults, in collaboration with the European Network for the Study of Adrenal Tumors. *Eur J Endocrinol.* 2018;179(4)G1-G46. doi:1.1530/EJE-18-0608.
21. Fassnacht M, Johanssen S, Fenske W, et al. Improved survival in patients with stage II adrenocortical carcinoma followed up prospectively by specialized centers. *J Clin Endocrinol Metab*. 2010;95(11):4925. doi:10.1210/jc.2010-0803.
22. Ghosh C, Hu J, Kebebew E. Advances in translational research of the rare cancer type adrenocortical carcinoma. *Nat Rev Cancer*. 2023;23(12):805-824. doi:10.1038/s41568-023-00623-0


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

# Colorectal and Small Bowel Cancer (ONC-16)

Guideline

Colorectal Cancer – General Considerations (ONC-16.0)
Colorectal Cancer – Suspected/Diagnosis (ONC-16.1)
Colorectal Cancer – Initial Work-up/Staging (ONC-16.2)
Colorectal Cancer – Restaging/Recurrence (ONC-16.3)
Colorectal Cancer – Surveillance/Follow-up (ONC-16.4)
Small Bowel Cancer – Initial Work-up/Staging (ONC-16.5)
Small Bowel Cancer – Restaging/Recurrence (ONC-16.6)
Small Bowel Cancer – Surveillance/Follow-up (ONC-16.7)
References (ONC-16)


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

# Colorectal Cancer – General Considerations (ONC-16.0)

ON.CC.0016.0.A

**v2.0.2026**

- Neuroendocrine tumors of the bowel are covered in: **Neuroendocrine Cancers and Adrenal Tumors (ONC-15)**.
- Appendiceal adenocarcinoma (including pseudomyxoma peritonei) follows imaging guidelines for colorectal cancer.
- For squamous cell carcinoma of the rectum, see: **Anal Carcinoma (ONC-24)**.

### Health Equity Considerations

In 2021, it was estimated that approximately 53,000 individuals in the United States died from colorectal cancer. However, these mortality rates do not affect groups of individuals equally. These disparities - differences in health outcomes that are related to factors such as social or economic disadvantages - often cause individuals to experience higher rates of colon cancer incidence and mortality.[16]

While the rates of new colorectal cancer have been declining over time with the increase in screening colonoscopies, the rate of decline is not equitably distributed among individual groups. Data from the National Cancer Registries between 2012 and 2016 showed that Black individuals had an almost 20% higher rate of colorectal cancer than White individuals. According to a 2018 report from the Surveillance, Epidemiology, and End Results Program (SEER), the incidence rates for Black individuals was 39.8 per 100,000 individuals compared to 36.4 for White individuals. These data also showed that Black individuals have an age-adjusted mortality rate of 16.8 per 100,000 compared to 13.1 for White individuals.[16]

Native Alaskans, who represent about 3% of the US population, have the highest rates of colorectal cancer and highest mortality rates in the world. Approximately 2.6 million American Indian/Alaska Native individuals receive healthcare through Indian Health Service or tribal care facilities - which are historically underfunded - and as a result, many of these facilities do not offer cancer screenings. Since screenings and cancer prevention services are not guaranteed in these facilities, health disparities in the Native community are often seen.[17]

Colorectal cancer is the second leading cause of cancer deaths in the Hispanic community in the US. While screenings for colorectal cancer have increased in the past 20 years, Hispanics in the US are still less likely to undergo colorectal cancer screenings than Black and White US residents.[18]


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

Click Anywhere in the Header to Return to the Main Table of Contents



# Colorectal Cancer – Suspected/ Diagnosis (ONC-16.1)

**ON.CC.0016.1.A**

**v2.0.2026**

- See: **GI Bleeding (AB-22)** or **CT Colonography (CTC) (AB-25.1)** in the Abdomen Imaging Guidelines for evaluation of suspected colorectal malignancies.
- See: **Abnormal Findings on Endoscopy/Colonoscopy (AB-13.3)** in the Abdomen Imaging Guidelines for evaluation of abnormal findings on endoscopy/colonoscopy.


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

# Colorectal Cancer – Initial Work-up/ Staging (ONC-16.2)

**ON.CC.0016.2.A**
**v2.0.2026**

| Indication | Medically Necessary Imaging Study |
|---|---|
| Carcinoma within a polyp that is completely removed | • No advanced imaging |
| • Biopsy-proven invasive colon adenocarcinoma<br>• Colonoscopy findings consistent with colon cancer | • CT Chest with contrast (CPT® 72160) or without contrast (CPT® 72150) AND<br>• CT Abdomen and Pelvis with contrast (CPT® 74177) |
| • Biopsy-proven invasive rectal adenocarcinoma<br>• Colonoscopy findings consistent with rectal cancer | • CT Chest with contrast (CPT® 71260) OR without contrast (CPT® 71250) AND<br>◦ Any one of the following:<br>▪ CT Abdomen with contrast (CPT® 74160) OR MRI Abdomen without and with contrast (CPT® 74183) AND<br>▪ MRI Pelvis without and with contrast (CPT® 72197) OR MRI Pelvis without contrast (CPT® 72195) (in addition to CT Pelvis if already performed) |
| • Further evaluation of an inconclusive liver lesion seen on CT<br>• Potentially resectable liver metastases | • MRI Abdomen without and with contrast (CPT® 74183) |
| Rectal adenocarcinoma with ANY one of the following:<br>• Rectal MRI is contraindicated<br>• Rectal MRI is inconclusive<br>• Superficial lesions | • Endorectal ultrasound (CPT® 76872) |


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

| Indication | Medically Necessary Imaging Study |
|---|---|
| ONE of the following:<br>• Isolated metastatic lesion(s) on other imaging and individual is a candidate for aggressive surgical resection or other localized treatment to metastasis for curative intent<br>• Inconclusive conventional imaging | • PET/CT (CPT® 78815) |

**Evidence Discussion**

- Carcinoma within a polyp that is completely resected does not require advanced imaging.[1]
- Invasive cancer at any stage requires advanced imaging with CT of Chest/Abdomen/Pelvis with contrast needed to adequately visualize lung, nodal, and especially liver lesions with MRI of abdomen appropriate in the event of unclear liver lesions. The chest CT can identify lung metastases, which occur in approximately 4% - 9% of individuals with colon and rectal cancer.[11]
- Rectal cancer requires additional dedicated imaging with MRI Pelvis that is superior to CT imaging to locally stage this form of colon cancer with endorectal/endoscopic ultrasound (EUS), providing additional staging information when MRI is contraindicated/inconclusive/superficial. MRI is considered superior to EUS due to the latter's limitations in regard to high/bulky tumors, tumor deposits, or vascular invasion.[12] The American College of Radiology also supports MRI Abdomen for local staging, as well as for the assessment of hepatic and extrahepatic metastatic disease.[19]
- PET/CT is reserved for inconclusive CT/MRI imaging and to confirm isolated metastases that are amenable to definitive localized treatment with curative intent.[1]


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

# Colorectal Cancer – Restaging/ Recurrence (ONC-16.3)

**ON.CC.0016.3.A**
**v2.0.2026**

| Indication | Medically Necessary Imaging Study |
|---|---|
| • Complete resection<br>• Individuals receiving post-operative adjuvant chemotherapy | • See: **Surveillance/Follow-up (ONC-16.4)** |
| Recurrence suspected for colon cancer (i.e., signs or symptoms, elevated CEA) | • CT Chest with contrast (CPT® 72160) or without contrast (CPT® 72150) AND<br>• CT Abdomen and Pelvis with contrast (CPT® 74177) |
| Recurrence suspected for rectal cancer (i.e., signs or symptoms, elevated CEA) | • CT Chest with contrast (CPT® 71260) OR without contrast (CPT® 71250) AND<br>◦ Any one of the following:<br>▪ CT Abdomen with contrast (CPT® 74160) OR MRI Abdomen without and with contrast (CPT® 74181) AND<br>▪ MRI Pelvis without and with contrast (CPT® 72197) OR MRI Pelvis without contrast (CPT® 72195) (in addition to CT Pelvis if already performed) |
| After completion of planned neoadjuvant therapy | Prior to surgical resection in individuals with non-metastatic rectal cancer:<br>• CT Chest with contrast (CPT® 71260) and<br>Any ONE of the following:<br>• CT Abdomen and Pelvis with contrast (CPT® 74177)<br>• CT Abdomen with contrast (CPT® 74160) and MRI Pelvis without and with contrast (CPT® 72197) |


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

| Indication | Medically Necessary Imaging Study |
|---|---|
| Unresected primary disease or metastatic disease on chemotherapy | Every 2 cycles of chemotherapy treatment and at the completion of chemoradiotherapy:<br>• CT Chest with contrast (CPT® 71260)<br>• CT Abdomen and Pelvis with contrast (CPT® 74177)<br>• CT with contrast of other involved or symptomatic areas |
| • Further evaluation of an inconclusive liver lesion seen on CT<br>• Potentially resectable liver metastases | • MRI Abdomen without and with contrast (CPT® 74183) |
| ONE of the following:<br>• Postoperative elevated or rising CEA or LFTs with negative recent conventional imaging<br>• Isolated metastatic lesion(s) on other imaging and individual is a candidate for aggressive surgical resection or other localized treatment (thermal ablation/embolization) to metastasis for curative intent<br>• Differentiate local tumor recurrence from postoperative and/or post-radiation scarring<br>• Liver-directed therapies (resection, ablation, embolization) are being considered and member has a contraindication to IV contrast | • PET/CT (CPT® 78815) |
| New or worsening pelvic pain and recent CT imaging negative or inconclusive | • MRI Pelvis without and with contrast (CPT® 72197) or without contrast (CPT® 72195) |

**Evidence Discussion**

- If colon cancer recurrence is suspected, CT Chest/Abdomen/Pelvis is the first line of imaging.[1]


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

- NCCN stated that ctDNA is not recommended for surveillance.[1]
- Upon completion of neoadjuvant therapy, to ensure the cancer has not progressed prior to definitive surgery, repeat imaging of the chest, abdomen and pelvis is medically necessary.[1]
- With measurable disease or unresected primary disease on chemotherapy, CT imaging is medically necessary every 2 cycles of treatment to assess response and appropriateness to continue the same treatment or change to new therapy.[1]
- MRI Abdomen is medically necessary for inconclusive liver lesion or to better define resectability.[1]
- PET/CT may be used in specific situations to better determine cancer recurrence if CT/MRI is inconclusive. These results may allow aggressive interventions (e.g., surgery, radiation, liver directed therapy) to take place with goal of cure, explain elevated or rising CEA level or LFTs with negative conventional imaging and can also be useful to differentiate surgical/radiation scarring from cancer. A systemic review and meta-analysis of 11 studies using PET/CT with elevated CEA and negative CT Chest/Abdomen/Pelvis showed a sensitivity of 94% and specificity of 77% in detection of tumor recurrence.[1,6]


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

# Colorectal Cancer – Surveillance/Follow-up (ONC-16.4)

**ON.CC.0016.4.A**
**v2.0.2026**

| Indication | Medically Necessary Imaging Study |
|---|---|
| Colon and rectal adenocarcinoma:<br>• Stage I | • No routine advanced imaging |
| Colon and rectal adenocarcinoma treated with surgery:<br>• Stage II-III | • CT Chest with contrast (CPT® 71260) and CT Abdomen and Pelvis with contrast (CPT® 74177) after completion of surgery and then annually for 5 years |
| Stage II-III rectal cancer treated with chemoradiation alone<br>(no surgical treatment) | • CT Chest with contrast (CPT® 71260) and CT Abdomen and Pelvis with contrast (CPT® 74177) after completion of chemoradiotherapy and then annually for 5 years<br>AND<br>• MRI Pelvis (CPT® 72197) without and with contrast or without contrast (CPT 72195) every 6 months for 3 years |
| Colon and rectal adenocarcinoma:<br>• Stage IV or distant metastatic disease (post definitive treatment of all measurable disease or being observed off therapy) | • CT Chest with contrast (CPT® 71260) and CT Abdomen and Pelvis with contrast (CPT® 74177) every 6 months for 2 years and then annually for 3 years |
| Measurable metastatic disease on maintenance therapy | Every 3 months for up to 5 years after completion of active treatment:<br>• CT Chest with contrast (CPT® 71260)<br>• CT Abdomen and Pelvis with contrast (CPT® 74177) |


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

| Indication | Medically Necessary Imaging Study |
|---|---|
| Rectal cancer treated with transanal excision alone | Any one of the following every 6 months for 5 years:<br>• Endorectal ultrasound (CPT® 76872)<br>• MRI Pelvis without and with contrast (CPT® 72197)<br>• MRI Pelvis without contrast (CPT® 72195) |
| Pseudomyxoma peritonei | ONE of each of the following, every 3 months for first year, then every 6 months for 4 more years:<br>• CT Chest with (CPT® 71260) or CT Chest without contrast (CPT® 71250)<br>• CT Abdomen and Pelvis with contrast (CPT® 74177) or MRI Abdomen (CPT® 74183) and MRI Pelvis (CPT® 72197) without and with contrast or without contrast (CPT® 72195) |

**Evidence Discussion**

- Up to 95% of recurrences occur in the first 5 years after surgery with 80% occurring in the first 3 years, many of which can still be cured, supporting the need for CT imaging.
- Given the >90% cure rate with Stage I cancer, routine imaging is not medically necessary.[1]
- Given the recurrence rate between 20%-30% in Stage II-III disease, CT Chest/ Abdomen/Pelvis is medically necessary after completion of surgery (new baseline) and annually for 5 years. More frequent imaging has a lower level of support based on the following trials: FACS, COLOFOL, CEAwatch, and PRODIGE 13.[15]
- For Stage IV cancer status post definitive treatment or being observed off therapy, CT imaging is medically necessary every 6 months for 2 years then annually for 3 years.[15]
- For Stage IV cancer that is measurable and on maintenance therapy, CT imaging is medically necessary every 3 months for up to 5 years after completion of active treatment.
- For rectal cancer treated with transanal excision alone, due to higher risk of local recurrence, endorectal ultrasound (EUS) should be performed every 6 months for 5 years with pelvic MRI reserved for abnormal findings on EUS or EUS can't be performed as well as new signs/symptoms concerning for local recurrence.[2]


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

- Treatment with chemoradiation alone (no surgery) is becoming more common in the setting of rectal cancer in the presence of a complete response to therapy with 5-year survival rates exceeding 80% in several trials. These individuals require additional follow-up studies to include MRI Pelvis every 6 months for 3 years as well as digital rectal exam (DRE)/endoscopy every 3-4 months for 2 years and every 6 months for 3 more years to assess for local recurrence even without signs/symptoms of recurrence.[2]
- Pseudomyxoma peritonei is a condition associated with appendiceal cancer and requires close imaging follow-up due to high risk of recurrence; thus, imaging with CT/MRI is medically necessary every 3 months for year 1 and every 6 months for 4 more years.[1]


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

# Small Bowel Cancer – Initial Work-up/ Staging (ONC-16.5)

**ON.CC.0016.5.A**
**v2.0.2026**

This section provides imaging guidelines for small bowel adenocarcinoma arising from the duodenum, jejunum, and ileum.

| Indication | Medically Necessary Imaging Study |
|---|---|
| Carcinoma within a polyp that is completely removed | • No advanced imaging |
| Invasive adenocarcinoma | • CT Chest with contrast (CPT® 71260) and CT Abdomen and Pelvis (CPT® 74177) with contrast<br>◦ MRI Abdomen without and with contrast (CPT® 74183) and MRI Pelvis without and with contrast (CPT® 72197) if CT is inconclusive or cannot be performed |

**Evidence Discussion**

- Cancerous polyps that are completely removed do not require imaging.[1]
- Invasive cancer at any stage requires advanced imaging with CT of Chest/Abdomen/ Pelvis with contrast needed to adequately visualize lung, nodal, and especially liver lesions with MRI of abdomen/pelvis appropriate in the event the CT is inconclusive or cannot be performed.[1]


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

# Small Bowel Cancer – Restaging/ Recurrence (ONC-16.6)

**ON.CC.0016.6.A**
**v2.0.2026**

| Indication | Medically Necessary Imaging Study |
|---|---|
| Complete resection | • See Surveillance below |
| Recurrence suspected | • CT Chest (CPT® 71260) and CT Abdomen and Pelvis (CPT® 74177) with contrast |
| Unresected primary disease or metastatic disease on chemotherapy | Every 2 cycles of chemotherapy:<br>• CT Chest with contrast (CPT® 71260)<br>• CT Abdomen and Pelvis with contrast (CPT® 74177) |
| Further evaluation of an inconclusive liver lesion seen on CT | • MRI Abdomen without and with contrast (CPT® 74183) |
| ONE of the following:<br>• Postoperative elevated or rising CEA or LFTs with negative recent conventional imaging<br>• Isolated metastatic lesion(s) on other imaging and individual is a candidate for aggressive surgical resection or other localized treatment to metastasis for curative intent | • PET/CT (CPT® 78815) |

**Evidence Discussion**

- If recurrence is suspected, CT Chest/Abdomen/Pelvis with contrast is the first line of imaging.
- With measurable disease or unresected primary disease on chemotherapy, CT imaging is medically necessary every 2 cycles of treatment to assess response and appropriateness to continue the same treatment or change to new therapy.
- MRI Abdomen is medically necessary for inconclusive liver lesion on CT


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

- PET/CT may be used in specific situations to better determine cancer recurrence if CT/MRI is inconclusive. These results may allow aggressive interventions (surgery, radiation, liver directed therapy) to take place with goal of cure and also explain elevated or rising CEA level or LFTs with negative conventional imaging.[3]


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

# Small Bowel Cancer – Surveillance/ Follow-up (ONC-16.7)

**ON.CC.0016.7.A**
**v2.0.2026**

| Indication | Medically Necessary Imaging Study |
|---|---|
| Stage I-III | • CT Chest (CPT® 71260) and CT Abdomen and Pelvis (CPT® 74177) with contrast after completion of surgery, and then annually for 5 years |
| Stage IV - Metastatic disease (post definitive treatment of all measurable disease, or being observed off therapy) | • CT Chest with contrast (CPT® 71260) and CT Abdomen and Pelvis (CPT® 74177) with contrast every 6 months for 2 years and then annually for 3 years |
| Measurable metastatic disease on maintenance therapy | Every 3 months for up to 5 years after completion of active treatment:<br>• CT Chest with contrast (CPT® 71260)<br>• CT Abdomen and Pelvis with contrast (CPT® 74177) |

**Evidence Discussion**

- Stage I, II and III cancers undergo CT Chest/Abdomen/Pelvis at completion of surgery then annually for 5 years, similar to Colorectal guidelines due to lack of data regarding optimal approach.[3,15]
- For Stage IV cancer s/p definitive treatment or being observed off therapy, CT imaging is medically necessary every 6 months for 2 years then annually for 3 years.
- For Stage IV cancer that is measurable and on maintenance therapy, CT imaging is medically necessary every 3 months for up to 5 years after completion of active treatment.


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

# References (ONC-16)

**v2.0.2026**

1. Benson III AB, Venook AP, Adam M, et al. National Comprehensive Cancer Network (NCCN) Guidelines Version 5.2025 –October 30, 2025. Colon cancer, available at: https://www.nccn.org/professionals/physician_gls/pdf/colon.pdf. Referenced with permission from the NCCN Clinical Practice Guidelines in Oncology (NCCN Guidelines™) for Colon cancer V5.2025 – October 30, 2025. ©2025 National Comprehensive Cancer Network, Inc. All rights reserved. The NCCN Guidelines™ and illustrations herein may not be reproduced in any form for any purpose without the express written permission of the NCCN. To view the most recent and complete version of the NCCN Guidelines™, go online to NCCN.org.
2. Benson III AB, Venook AP, Adam M, et al. National Comprehensive Cancer Network (NCCN) Guidelines Version 4.2025 – October 31, 2025. Rectal cancer, available at: https://www.nccn.org/professionals/physician_gls/pdf/rectal.pdf. Referenced with permission from the NCCN Clinical Practice Guidelines in Oncology (NCCN Guidelines™) for Rectal cancer V4.2025 – October 31, 2025. ©2025 National Comprehensive Cancer Network, Inc. All rights reserved. The NCCN Guidelines™ and illustrations herein may not be reproduced in any form for any purpose without the express written permission of the NCCN. To view the most recent and complete version of the NCCN Guidelines™, go online to NCCN.org.
3. Benson III AB, Venook AP, Pedersen K, et al. National Comprehensive Cancer Network (NCCN) Guidelines Version 4.2025 – October 31 31, 2025. Small Bowel Adenocarcinoma, available at: https://www.nccn.org/professionals/physician_gls/pdf/small_bowel.pdf. Referenced with permission from the NCCN Clinical Practice Guidelines in Oncology (NCCN Guidelines™) for Small Bowel Adenocarcinoma V4.2025 – October 31, 2025. ©2025 National Comprehensive Cancer Network, Inc. All rights reserved. The NCCN Guidelines™ and illustrations herein may not be reproduced in any form for any purpose without the express written permission of the NCCN. To view the most recent and complete version of the NCCN Guidelines™, go online to NCCN.org.
4. Expert Panel on Gastrointestinal Imaging, Thomas DE, Horvat N, et al. ACR Appropriateness Criteria® Colorectal Cancer Screening: 2024 Update. *J Am Coll Radiol*. 2025;22(5S):S190-S201. doi:10.1016/j.jacr.2025.02.032
5. Fujimoto T, Tamura K, Nagayoshi K, et al. Optimizing Positron Emission Tomography-Computed Tomography (PET-CT) Use in Colorectal Cancer: Identifying Patients at High Risk of Recurrence. *Cureus.* 2025;17(4):e83230. Published 2025 Apr 30. doi:10.7759/cureus.83230
6. Ren Q, Chen Y, Shao X, Guo L, Xu X. Lymph nodes primary staging of colorectal cancer in 18F-FDG PET/MRI: a systematic review and meta-analysis. *Eur J Med Res*. 2023;28(1):162. Published 2023 May 4. doi:10.1186/s40001-023-01124-4
7. Jonsson J, Hemmingsson O, Strengbom R, Axelsson J, Riklund K, Nyström H. Does 18F-FDG PET/CT change the surgical management of potentially resectable colorectal liver metastases?. *Scand J Surg.* 2022;111(1):14574969221083144. doi:10.1177/14574969221083144
8. Kennedy E, Zwaal C, Asmis T, et al. An Evidence-Based Guideline for Surveillance of Patients after Curative Treatment for Colon and Rectal Cancer. *Curr Oncol*. 2022;29(2):724-740. Published 2022 Jan 30. doi:10.3390/curroncol29020062
9. van de Velde CJ, Boelens PG, Borras JM, et al. EURECCA colorectal: multidisciplinary management: European concensus conference colon & rectum. *Eur J Cancer*. 2014;50(1):e1-e34. doi:10.1016/j.ejca.2013.06.048.
10. Akce M, El-Rayes BF. Nonsurgical management of rectal cancer. *Journal of Oncology Practice*. 2019;15(3):123-131. doi:10.1200/JOP.18.00769.
11. Qiu M, Hu J, Yang D, et al. Pattern of distant metastases in colorectal cancer: a SEER based study. *Oncotarget*. 2015;6:38658-38666. doi:10.18632/oncotarget.6130.
12. Negoi I. Guidance for the Management of Rectal Cancer: An Umbrella Review of Existing Guidelines Regarding Surgical Anatomy, Adjuvant Therapy, Follow-Up and Surveillance, Specific Considerations, Documentation, and Palliative Care. *Cureus*. 2025;17(5):e83345. Published 2025 May 2. doi:10.7759/cureus.83345
13. Lu YY, Chen JH, Chien CR, et al. Use of FDG-PET or PET/CT to detect recurrent colorectal cancer in patients with elevated CEA: a systematic review and meta-analysis. *Int J Colorectal Dis*. 2013;28:1039-1047. doi:10.1007/s00384-013-1659-z.


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

14. Byun HK, Koom WS. A practical review of watch-and-wait approach in rectal cancer. *Radiat Oncol Jl*. 2023;41:4-11. doi:10.3857/roj.2023.00038.
15. Hardiman KM, Felder SI, Friedman G, et al. The American Society of Colon and Rectal Surgeons clinical practice guidelines for the surveillance and survivorship care of patients after curative treatment of colon and rectal cancer. *Diseases of the Colon & Rectum*. 2021;64(5):517-533. doi:10.1097/DCR.0000000000001984.
16. Hollis RH, Chu DI. Healthcare Disparities and Colorectal Cancer. Surg Oncol Clin N Am. 2022;31(2):157-169. doi:10.1016/j.soc.2021.11.002
17. Kratzer TB, Jemal A, Miller KD, et al. Cancer statistics for American Indian and Alaska Native individuals, 2022: Including increasing disparities in early onset colorectal cancer. CA Cancer J Clin. 2023;73(2):120-146. doi:10.3322/caac.21757
18. Heintzman JD, Ezekiel-Herrera DN, Quiñones AR, et al. Disparities in Colorectal Cancer Screening in Latinos and Non-Hispanic Whites. Am J Prev Med. 2022;62(2):203-210. doi:10.1016/j.amepre.2021.07.009
19. Expert Panel on Gastrointestinal Imaging, Korngold EK, Kambadakone AR, et al. ACR Appropriateness Criteria® Staging and Disease Monitoring of Rectal Cancer. *J Am Coll Radiol*. 2025;22(11S):S638-S657. doi:10.1016/j.jacr.2025.08.035
20. Expert Panel on Gastrointestinal Imaging, Korngold EK, Kambadakone AR, et al. ACR Appropriateness Criteria® Staging and Disease Monitoring of Colon Cancer and Appendiceal Cancer. *J Am Coll Radiol*. 2025;22(11S):S625-S637. doi:10.1016/j.jacr.2025.08.036


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

Click Anywhere in the Header to Return to the Main Table of Contents



# Renal Cell Cancer (RCC) (ONC-17)

Guideline

Renal Cell Cancer (RCC) – General Considerations (ONC-17.0)
Renal Cell Cancer (RCC) – Suspected/Diagnosis (ONC-17.1)
Renal Cell Cancer (RCC) – Initial Work-up/Staging (ONC-17.2)
Renal Cell Cancer (RCC) – Restaging/Recurrence (ONC-17.3)
Renal Cell Cancer (RCC) – Surveillance (ONC-17.4)
References (ONC-17)


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

# Renal Cell Cancer (RCC) – General Considerations (ONC-17.0)

**ON.RC.0017.0.A**

**v2.0.2026**

- PET is considered not medically necessary for initial diagnosis, staging or restaging of renal cell cancer.
- A minority of adult individuals with renal cell cancer (RCC) will have translocations in TFE3 or TFEB, which have a different natural history than “adult type” RCC. Individuals of any age with TFE3 or TFEB translocated RCC should be imaged according to guidelines in **Pediatric Renal Cell Carcinoma (RCC) (PEDONC-7.4)** in the Pediatric and Special Populations Oncology Imaging Guidelines.
- Individuals of any age with a Wilms tumor should be imaged according to guidelines in section **Unilateral Wilms Tumor (UWT) (PEDONC-7.2)** or **Bilateral Wilms Tumor (BWT) (PEDONC-7.3)** in the Pediatric and Special Populations Oncology Imaging Guidelines.
- Oncocytoma in individuals of all ages should be imaged according to these guidelines.


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

# Renal Cell Cancer (RCC) – Suspected/ Diagnosis (ONC-17.1)

**ON.RC.0017.1.A**
**v2.0.2026**

| Indication | Medically Necessary Imaging Study |
|---|---|
| • Solitary renal mass suspicious for renal cell cancer | • See: **Indeterminate Renal Lesion (AB-35.1)** in the Abdomen Imaging Guidelines for evaluation of suspected renal malignancies<br>• CT Chest with contrast with (CPT® 71260) or without contrast (CPT® 71250) |

### Evidence Discussion

In individuals with RCC or suspicion of RCC, complete staging is typically completed with chest radiography (CXR) or chest CT. CT Chest is preferred.[1,17]


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

# Renal Cell Cancer (RCC) – Initial Work-up/Staging (ONC-17.2)

**ON.RC.0017.2.A**
**v2.0.2026**

| Indication | Medically Necessary Imaging study |
|---|---|
| All individuals | If not done previously:<br>• CT Chest with (CPT® 71260) or without (CPT® 71250) contrast<br>• CT Abdomen and Pelvis, contrast as requested |
| ANY of the following:<br>• Extension of tumor into the vena cava by other imaging<br>• Inconclusive findings on CT | • MRI Abdomen without and with contrast (CPT® 74183) |
| Bone pain | • Bone scan (CPT® 78306) (See: **Nuclear Medicine (NM) Imaging in Oncology (ONC-1.3)** for additional bone scan codes) |
| EITHER of the following:<br>• Signs/symptoms suspicious for brain metastases<br>• Newly diagnosed stage IV/ metastatic RCC | • MRI Brain without and with contrast (CPT® 70553) |

## Evidence Discussion

American Urological Association (AUA) and the National Comprehensive Cancer Network (NCCN) guidelines stated that pre- and post-contrast enhanced axial imaging, either CT or MRI, is the ideal imaging technique for the diagnosis and staging of clinically localized renal masses. Contrast-enhanced abdominal imaging best characterizes the mass, provides information regarding both the affected and unaffected renal unit, can assess extrarenal tumor spread (venous invasion or regional lymph nodes), and evaluates the adrenal glands and other abdominal organs for visceral metastasis.[1,20,21]

Masses initially diagnosed by ultrasound should be confirmed with pre- and post-contrast enhanced imaging.[1]


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

In individuals with RCC or suspicion of RCC, complete staging is typically completed with chest radiography (CXR) or chest CT. Chest CT is preferred.[1] Bone scans should be reserved primarily for individuals with bone pain as the prevalence of osseous metastasis for localized renal cell cancer has been shown to be low in individuals without symptoms suggestive of osseous metastasis. Brain imaging is reserved for individuals with neurologic symptoms, as most individuals with metastasis to the central nervous system are symptomatic, or individuals with newly diagnosed metastatic disease.[1]


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

# Renal Cell Cancer (RCC) – Restaging/ Recurrence (ONC-17.3)

**ON.RC.0017.3.A**
**v2.0.2026**

| Indication | Medically Necessary Imaging Study |
|---|---|
| Unresectable disease or metastatic disease on systemic therapy | Every 2 cycles of treatment (commonly every 6 to 8 weeks):<br>• CT Chest with contrast (CPT® 71260)<br>• CT Abdomen and Pelvis, contrast as requested (CPT® 74177, CPT® 74178, or CPT® 74176)<br>• CT with contrast of other involved or symptomatic areas |
| Recurrence suspected | • CT Chest with contrast (CPT® 71260)<br>• CT Abdomen and Pelvis, contrast as requested (CPT® 74177, CPT® 74178, or CPT® 74176) |
| EITHER of the following:<br>• Biopsy-proven recurrent/ metastatic disease<br>• Signs or symptoms concerning for brain metastases | • MRI Brain without and with contrast (CPT® 70553) |

**Evidence Discussion**

Individuals presenting with findings suggesting a new renal primary or local recurrence of renal malignancy should undergo metastatic evaluation including chest and abdominal imaging.[1,20,21] The most common sites of distant metastasis include lung, bone, retroperitoneal and mediastinal nodes, liver, brain, or multiple sites.[29,30]


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

# Renal Cell Cancer (RCC) – Surveillance (ONC-17.4)

**ON.RC.0017.4.A**
**v2.0.2026**

| Indication | Medically Necessary Imaging Study |
|---|---|
| RCC on active surveillance of renal mass <1cm | ALL of the following, once within 6 months of surveillance initiation and annually thereafter:<br>• CT Abdomen, contrast as requested (CPT® 74170, CPT® 74160, or CPT® 74150) or MRI Abdomen without and with contrast (CPT® 74183)<br>• Chest x-ray<br>◦ CT Chest with contrast (CPT® 71260) or without contrast (CPT® 71250) is medically necessary instead of chest x-ray for any of the following:<br>▪ Known prior thoracic disease<br>▪ New or worsening pulmonary symptoms<br>▪ New or worsening chest x-ray findings |
| RCC on active surveillance of renal mass ≥1cm | ALL of the following, every 3 months for year 1, every 6 months for years 2 and 3 and annually thereafter:<br>• CT Abdomen, contrast as requested (CPT® 74170, CPT® 74160, or CPT® 74150) OR MRI Abdomen without and with contrast (CPT® 74183)<br>• Chest x-ray<br>◦ CT Chest with contrast (CPT® 71260) or without contrast (CPT® 71250) is medically necessary instead of chest x-ray for any of the following:<br>▪ Known prior thoracic disease<br>▪ New or worsening pulmonary symptoms<br>▪ New or worsening chest x-ray findings |


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

| Indication | Medically Necessary Imaging Study |
|---|---|
| Follow up after post-ablation therapy of RCC | EITHER of the following, at 1 to 3 months, 6 months, and 12 months post-ablation and then annually thereafter:<br>• CT Abdomen, contrast as requested (CPT® 74170), CPT® 74160, or CPT® 74150 or<br>• MRI Abdomen without and with contrast (CPT® 74183)<br>AND<br>Annually for 5 years:<br>• Chest x-ray or CT Chest with contrast (CPT® 71260) or without contrast (CPT® 71250) |
| Follow up after SBRT | ONE of each of the following, every 3 months for 1 year, every 6 months in year 2, every 9 months in years 3-4, and once in year 5 (to complete 5 years surveillance):<br>• CT Chest with (CPT® 71260) or CT Chest without contrast (CPT® 71250)<br>• CT Abdomen, contrast as requested (CPT® 74170, CPT® 74160, or CPT® 74150) or MRI Abdomen without and with contrast (CPT® 74183) |
| Stage I RCC, after partial or radical nephrectomy | ONE of each of the following, 3 to 12 months post-resection:<br>• CT Chest with (CPT® 71260) or CT Chest without contrast (CPT® 71250)<br>• CT Abdomen, contrast as requested (CPT® 74170, CPT® 74160, or CPT® 74150) or MRI Abdomen without and with contrast (CPT® 74183)<br>ONE of each of the following, annually for 5 years:<br>• CT Chest with (CPT® 71260) or CT Chest without (CPT® 71250) contrast<br>• MRI Abdomen without and with contrast (CPT® 74183) or CT Abdomen, contrast as requested (CPT® 74170, CPT® 74160, or CPT® 74150) |


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

| Indication | Medically Necessary Imaging Study |
|---|---|
| Stage II RCC, post-nephrectomy | ONE of each of the following, 3 to 6 months post-resection:<br>• CT Chest with (CPT® 71260) or CT Chest without (CPT® 71250) contrast<br>• CT Abdomen, contrast as requested (CPT® 74170, CPT® 74160, or CPT® 74150), or CT Abdomen and Pelvis, contrast as requested (CPT® 74177, CPT® 74176, or CPT® 74178), or MRI Abdomen without and with contrast (CPT® 74183) +/- MRI Pelvis without and with contrast (CPT® 72197)<br>ONE of each of the following, every 6 months for 2 years, then annually until year 5:<br>• CT Chest with (CPT® 71260) or CT Chest without (CPT® 71250) contrast<br>• MRI Abdomen without and with contrast (CPT® 74183) +/- MRI Pelvis without and with contrast (CPT® 72197), or CT Abdomen, contrast as requested (CPT® 74170, CPT® 74160, or CPT® 74150), or CT Abdomen and Pelvis, contrast as requested (CPT® 74177, CPT® 74176, CPT® 74178) |
| Stage III RCC, post-nephrectomy | ONE of each of the following, 3 to 6 months post-resection:<br>• CT Chest with (CPT® 71260) or CT Chest without (CPT® 71250) contrast<br>• CT Abdomen, contrast as requested (CPT® 74170, CPT® 74160, or CPT® 74150), or CT Abdomen and Pelvis, contrast as requested (CPT® 74177, CPT® 74176, or CPT® 74178), or MRI Abdomen without and with contrast (CPT® 74183) +/- MRI Pelvis without and with contrast (CPT® 72197)<br>ONE of each of the following, every 3 months for 3 years, then annually to year 5:<br>• CT Chest with (CPT® 71260) or CT Chest without (CPT® 71250) contrast<br>• CT Abdomen, contrast as requested (CPT® 74170, CPT® 74160, or CPT® 74150), or CT Abdomen and Pelvis, contrast as requested (CPT® 74177, CPT® 74176, CPT® 74178), or MRI Abdomen without and with contrast (CPT® 74183) +/- MRI Pelvis without and with contrast (CPT® 72197) |


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

| Indication | Medically Necessary Imaging Study |
|---|---|
| Stage IV/metastatic disease on maintenance therapy or being observed off therapy | ONE of each of the following, every 3 months for up to 5 years after completion of active treatment:<br>• CT Chest with contrast (CPT® 71260) or CT Chest without contrast (CPT® 71250)<br>• CT Abdomen, contrast as requested (CPT® 74170, CPT® 74160, or CPT® 74150), or CT Abdomen and Pelvis contrast as requested (CPT® 74177, CPT® 74176, or CPT® 74178), or MRI Abdomen without and with contrast (CPT® 74183) +/- MRI Pelvis without and with contrast (CPT® 72197) |

**Evidence Discussion**

Active surveillance Stage T1a:

Active surveillance entails serial abdominal imaging in order to study the growth rate of the tumor, and abdominal imaging (CT or MRI with contrast) is medically necessary within 6 months from initiation of active surveillance; subsequent imaging (with CT, MRI, or ultrasound [US]) is medically necessary annually thereafter. CT and MRI have both been found to accurately predict pathologic tumor size in a retrospective analysis.[23] Therefore, best clinical judgment should be used in choosing the imaging modality. A chest x-ray or chest CT at baseline and annually is medically necessary as clinically indicated to assess for pulmonary metastases. Repeat chest imaging can be considered if intervention is being contemplated.[1]

Follow up after ablative therapy for Stage T1a:

An abdominal imaging, either CT or MRI with and without IV contrast (unless otherwise contraindicated), is medically necessary at 1 through 6 months to assess treatment response, followed by annual abdominal CT or MRI (preferred) for 5 years or longer as clinically indicated. If the individual cannot receive IV contrast, MRI is preferred.[1]

Follow up after partial or radical nephrectomy for Stages 1-2:

For Stage I RCC, abdominal CT or MRI (preferred) is medically necessary within 3 to 12 months following renal surgery, then annually for up to 5 years or longer as clinically indicated. For individuals with stage II RCC, an increase in abdominal imaging frequency is medically necessary, with baseline abdominal CT or MRI (preferred) every 6 months for 2 years, then annually for up to 5 years or longer, as clinically indicated.[1]

Yearly chest x-ray or CT is medically necessary for at least 5 years and as clinically indicated thereafter.[1]

Follow up for individuals with Stage 3 RCC:


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

A baseline abdominal CT or MRI is medically necessary within 3 to 6 months following surgery, followed by CT, MRI (preferred), or US every 3 to 6 months for at least 3 years, and annually thereafter for up to 5 years.[1]

A baseline chest CT within 3 to 6 months following surgery is also medically necessary along with continued imaging (CT preferred) every 3 to 6 months for at least 3 years, and annually thereafter for up to 5 years.[1]

CT is the preferred modality for those with a high risk of recurrence.

Follow up for an individual with relapse or unresectable disease or Stage 4 RCC:

Chest, abdominal and pelvic imaging is medically necessary at baseline and then as clinically indicated based on clinical status, and therapeutic schedule.[1]


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

# References (ONC-17)

**v2.0.2026**

1. Motzer RJ, Jonasch E, Agarwal N, et al. National Comprehensive Cancer Network (NCCN) Guidelines Version 1.2026 – July 24, 2025. Kidney cancer, available at: https://www.nccn.org/professionals/physician_gls/pdf/kidney.pdf Referenced with permission from the NCCN Clinical Practice Guidelines in Oncology (NCCN Guidelines™) for Kidney cancer V1.2026 – July 24, 2025. ©2025 National Comprehensive Cancer Network, Inc. All rights reserved. The NCCN Guidelines™ and illustrations herein may not be reproduced in any form for any purpose without the express written permission of the NCCN. To view the most recent and complete version of the NCCN Guidelines™, go online to NCCN.org.
2. Expert Panel on Urological Imaging, Purysko AS, Nikolaidis P, et al. ACR Appropriateness Criteria® Post-Treatment Follow-up and Active Surveillance of Clinically Localized Renal Cell Carcinoma: 2021 Update. *J Am Coll Radiol*. 2022;19(5S):S156-S174. doi:10.1016/j.jacr.2022.02.015
3. Herts BR, Silverman SG, Hindman NM, et al. *Management of the incidental renal mass on CT: a white paper of the ACR incidental findings committee*. J Am Coll Radiol. 2018;15(2):264-273. doi:10.1016/j.jacr.2017.04.028.
4. Finelli A, Ismaila N, Bro B, et al. Management of small renal masses. American Society of Clinical Oncology clinical practice guideline. *Journal of Clinical Oncology*. 2017;35(6):668-680. doi:10.1200/JCO.2016.69.9645.
5. Lam CJ, Wong NC, Voss M, et al. Surveillance post-radiofrequency ablation for small renal masses: Recurrence and followup. *Can Urol Assoc J*. 2020;14(12):398-403. doi:10.5489/cuaj.6374
6. Knight A, Gunn AJ. Percutaneous Ablation of T1b Renal Cell Carcinoma: An Overview. *Curr Oncol Rep*. 2024;26(7):754-761. doi:10.1007/s11912-024-01531-8
7. Rais-Bahrami S, Guzzo TJ, Jarrett TW, Kavoussi LR, Allaf ME. Incidentally discovered renal masses: oncological and perioperative outcomes in patients with delayed surgical intervention. *BJU Int*. 2009;103(10):1355-1358. doi:10.1111/j.1464-410X.2008.08242.x.
8. Lindenberg L, Mena E, Choyke PL, Bouchelouche K. PET imaging in renal cancer. *Curr Opin Oncol*. 2019;31(3):216-221. doi:10.1097/CCO.0000000000000518
9. Kim EH, Strope SA. Postoperative surveillance imaging for patients undergoing nephrectomy for renal cell carcinoma. *Urol Oncol*. 2015;33(12):499-502. doi:10.1016/j.urolonc.2015.08.008.
10. Abou Elkassem AM, Lo SS, Gunn AJ, et al. Role of Imaging in Renal Cell Carcinoma: A Multidisciplinary Perspective. *Radiographics*. 2021;41(5):1387-1407. doi:10.1148/rg.2021200202
11. Expert Panel on Urological Imaging, Ganeshan D, Khatri G, et al. ACR Appropriateness Criteria® Staging of Renal Cell Carcinoma: 2022 Update. *J Am Coll Radiol*. 2023;20(5S):S246-S264. doi:10.1016/j.jacr.2023.02.008
12. Campbell S, Uzzo R, Allaf M, et al. Renal mass and localized renal cancer: AUA guideline. *J Urol*. 2017:198(3):520-529. doi:10.1016/j.juro.2017.04.100.
13. Vijay V, Vokshi FH, Smigelski M, Nagpal S, Huang WC. Incidence of Benign Renal Masses in a Contemporary Cohort of Patients Receiving Partial Nephrectomy for Presumed Renal Cell Carcinoma. *Clin Genitourin Cancer.* 2023;21(3):e114-e118. doi:10.1016/j.clgc.2022.11.006
14. Lane BR, Babineau D, Kattan MW, et al. A preoperative prognostic nomogram for solid enhancing renal tumors 7 cm or less amenable to partial nephrectomy. *J Urol*. 2007;178:429.
15. Johnson DC, Vukina J, Smith AB, et al. Preoperatively misclassified, surgically removed benign renal masses: a systematic review of surgical series and United States population level burden estimate. *J Urol*. 2015;193:30.
16. Davenport MS, Perazella MA, Yee J, et al. Use of intravenous iodinated contrast media in patients with kidney disease: Consensus statements from the American College of Radiology and the National Kidney Foundation. *Radiology*. 2020;294:660.
17. Mano R, Vertosick E, Sankin AI, et al. Subcentimeter pulmonary nodules are not associated with disease progression in patients with renal cell carcinoma. *J Urol*. 2015;193:776.
18. Weinreb JC, Rodby RA, Yee J, et al. Use of intravenous gadolinium-based contrast media in patients with kidney disease: Consensus statements from the American College of Radiology and the national kidney foundation. *Radiology*. 2021;298:28.
19. Koga S, Tsuda S, Nishikido M, et al. The diagnostic value of bone scan in patients with renal cell carcinoma. *J Urol*. 2001;166:2126.


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

20. Campell SC, Clark PE, Chang SS, et al. Renal mass and localized renal cancer: evaluation, management, and follow-up: AUA guideline part I. *J Urol.* 2021;206:199.
21. Campbell SC, Uzzo RG, Karam JA, et al Renal mass and localized renal cancer: evaluation, management, and follow-up: AUA guideline: Part II. *J Urol*. 2021;206:209.
22. Park S, Lee HY, Lee S. Role of F-18 FDG PET/CT in the follow-up of asymptomatic renal cell carcinoma patients for postoperative surveillance: based on conditional survival analysis. *J Cancer Res Clin Oncol*. 2022;148(1):215-224. doi:10.1007/s00432-021-03688-2
23. Dabestani S, Beisland C, Stewart GD, et al. Long-term outcomes of follow-up for initially localised clear cell renal cell carcinoma: RECUR database analysis. *Eur Urol Focus.* 2019;5:857-866.
24. Thompson RH, Hill JR, Babayev Y, et al. Metastatic renal cell carcinoma risk according to tumor size. *J Urol.* 2009;182:41-5.
25. Umbreit EC, Shimko MS, Childs MA, et al. Metastatic potential of a renal mass according to original tumour size at presentation. *BJU Int*. 2012;109:190-4; discussion 94
26. Winter H, Meimarakis G, Angele MK, et al. Tumor infiltrated hilar and mediastinal lymph nodes are an independent prognostic factor for decreased survival after pulmonary metastasectomy in patients with renal cell carcinoma. *J Urol*. 2010;184:1888-94
27. Barragan-Carrillo R, Scavuzzo A, Jimenez-Rios MA, Sobrevilla-Moreno N. Management of Metastatic Renal Cell Carcinoma: Guideline Updates. *Eur Urol Focus*. 2025;11(3):436-439. doi:10.1016/j.euf.2025.04.001
28. Griffin N, Gore ME, Sohaib SA. Imaging in metastatic renal cell carcinoma. *AJR Am J Roentgenol*. 2007;189:360-70.


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

Click Anywhere in the Header to Return to the Main Table of Contents



# Transitional Cell Cancer (ONC-18)

## Guideline

Transitional Cell Cancer – General Considerations (ONC-18.0)
Transitional Cell Cancer – Suspected/Diagnosis (ONC-18.1)
Transitional Cell Cancer – Initial Work-up/Staging (ONC-18.2)
Transitional Cell Cancer – Restaging/Recurrence (ONC-18.3)
Transitional Cell Cancer – Surveillance/Follow-up (ONC-18.4)
References (ONC-18)


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

# Transitional Cell Cancer – General Considerations (ONC-18.0)

**ON.TS.0018.0.A**

**v2.0.2026**

- Transitional cell cancers can include: tumors of the bladder, ureters, prostate, urethra, or renal pelvis. For primary cancer of the kidney, see: **Renal Cell Cancer (RCC) (ONC-17)**.
- Most common histology of bladder cancer is transitional cell (TCC) or urothelial carcinoma (UCC). Rare histologies include adenocarcinoma, squamous cell (imaged according to **Transitional Cell Cancer (ONC-18)**), or small cell (imaged according to **Extrathoracic Small Cell and Large Cell Neuroendocrine Tumors (ONC-31.8)**).
- Urachal cancer is rare type of bladder cancer; the most common histology is adenocarcinoma. These are imaged according to muscle invasive bladder cancer.
- PET is not medically necessary in transitional cell cancer with exception noted below in **Transitional Cell Cancer – Initial Work-up/Staging (ONC-18.2)**.


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

# Transitional Cell Cancer – Suspected/ Diagnosis (ONC-18.1)

**ON.TS.0018.1.A**

**v2.0.2026**

- See: **Hematuria and Hydronephrosis (AB-39)** in the Abdomen Imaging Guidelines for evaluation of suspected transitional cell malignancies.


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

# Transitional Cell Cancer – Initial Work-up/Staging (ONC-18.2)

**ON.TS.0018.2.A**
**v2.0.2026**

| Indication | Medically Necessary Imaging Study |
|---|---|
| All individuals | ONE of the following:<br>• CT Abdomen and Pelvis without and with contrast (CPT® 74178)<br>◦ MRI Abdomen (CPT® 74183) and MRI Pelvis (CPT® 72197) without and with contrast if contraindication to CT contrast<br>• CT Abdomen and Pelvis without contrast (CPT® 74176) with retrograde pyelogram or renal ultrasound (CPT® 76770 or CPT® 76775) in individuals who cannot receive either CT or MRI contrast |
| Sessile or high-grade tumors | In addition to the imaging above, if not already performed:<br>• MRI Pelvis without and with contrast (CPT® 72197) |
| ANY of the following:<br>• Muscle invasive bladder carcinoma<br>• Urethral carcinoma<br>• Urothelial carcinoma of the prostate | • CT Chest without (CPT® 71250) or with (CPT® 71260) contrast |
| Individuals without metastatic disease, when requested by operating surgeon for operative planning | • CT with contrast or MRI without and with contrast of all operative sites |


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

| Indication | Medically Necessary Imaging Study |
|---|---|
| Evaluation of suspected bone metastasis:<br>• Individuals with symptoms of bone metastasis<br>• Laboratory indicators of bone metastasis<br>• Individuals with muscle invasive disease<br>• Suspected sites of extra-osseous metastatic disease | Any ONE of the following:<br>• Bone scan (CPT® 78306) (see: **Nuclear Medicine (NM) Imaging in Oncology [ONC-1.3]** for additional bone scan codes)<br>• MRI without and with contrast of areas of suspected involvement<br>• FDG PET/CT (CPT® 78815) |
| To evaluate inconclusive findings on conventional imaging | • PET/CT (CPT® 78815) |
| Suspected brain metastases | See: **Brain Metastases (ONC-31.3)** |

**Evidence Discussion**

**Initial staging of non-muscle invasive bladder cancer (NMIBC)**

A clinician should perform upper tract imaging as a component of the initial evaluation of an individual with bladder cancer. NCCN guidelines recommend CT urography CTU (CT of the abdomen and pelvis without and with IV contrast with excretory imaging), which is an imaging study that is tailored to improve visualization of both the upper and lower urinary tracts. CT scan can require a significant dose of ionizing radiation, but the speed of image acquisition reduces the potential for motion artifact.

MR urography (MRU) may be appropriate, especially in an individual with poor renal function or iodinated contrast allergy but with GFR >30 and no acute renal failure. MRU can be degraded due to motion artifact, but there is no ionizing radiation with this imaging modality.

CTU and MRU allow for comprehensive evaluation of the genitourinary tract, as well as assessment of retroperitoneal and pelvic lymph nodes.

Renal ultrasound (US) or CT without contrast may be utilized in conjunction with retrograde ureteropyelography in individuals who cannot receive either iodinated or gadolinium-based contrast material. Ultrasound requires no ionizing radiation, but is not sufficient for evaluation alone, and must be combined with either retrograde ureteropyelography or ureteroscopy to completely evaluate the upper urinary tract.[1]

NCCN guidelines stated that chest imaging may not be necessary in the initial staging of non-invasive disease, as the risk of chest metastasis in individuals with TA or T1 NMBIC is low.[1,8]


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

FDG PET/CT is not medically necessary to delineate the anatomy of the upper urinary tract as it does not provide detailed imaging of the bladder. Thus, it is reserved as a problem-solving tool when other imaging studies are inconclusive.[1]

**Initial staging of non-metastatic muscle-invasive bladder cancer (MIBC)**

Prior to muscle-invasive bladder cancer management, clinicians should perform a complete staging evaluation, including imaging of the chest and cross-sectional imaging of the abdomen and pelvis with intravenous contrast if not contraindicated. Laboratory evaluation should include a comprehensive metabolic panel (complete blood count, liver function tests, alkaline phosphatase, and renal function).

All individuals with MIBC require imaging of the thorax. Chest radiography is an effective screening exam. Any abnormality should be followed up with a CT exam.

For sessile or high-grade tumors, MRI Pelvis is medically necessary in addition to CTU for local staging.[1]

NCCN indicated that bone imaging is medically necessary if there are clinical indications of bone metastases or in individuals with muscle-invasive disease.[1]

FDG PET/CT is not medically necessary to delineate the anatomy of the upper urinary tract as it does not provide detailed imaging of the bladder. Thus, it is reserved as a problem-solving tool when other imaging studies are inconclusive.

**Initial staging of Urothelial Carcinoma of the prostate/primary carcinoma of the urethra**

Initial work up is similar to non-metastatic muscle invasive bladder cancer and should include Chest CT, CTU or MRU.


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

# Transitional Cell Cancer – Restaging/ Recurrence (ONC-18.3)

**ON.TS.0018.3.A**
**v2.0.2026**

| Indication | Medically Necessary Imaging Study |
|---|---|
| After definitive surgery | • CT Abdomen and Pelvis with contrast (CPT® 74177) or CT Abdomen and Pelvis without and with contrast (CPT® 74178) for post-operative baseline |
| Recurrence suspicion | • CT Abdomen and Pelvis with contrast (CPT® 74177) or with and without contrast (CPT® 74178)<br>• CT Chest with contrast (CPT® 71260) for ANY of the following:<br>◦ Known prior thoracic disease<br>◦ New or worsening pulmonary symptoms<br>◦ New or worsening chest x-ray findings<br>◦ Known prior or suspected muscle invasive disease |
| After neoadjuvant therapy and before resection | • CT Chest with contrast (CPT® 71260) and CT Urogram (CPT® 74178) |
| Monitoring therapy for metastatic disease | Every 2 cycles of therapy:<br>• CT Abdomen and Pelvis with contrast (CPT® 74177)<br>• CT Chest with contrast (CPT® 71260) for ANY of the following:<br>◦ Known prior thoracic disease<br>◦ New or worsening pulmonary symptoms<br>◦ New or worsening chest x-ray findings |
| To evaluate inconclusive findings on conventional imaging | • PET/CT (CPT® 78815) |

## Evidence Discussion

Individuals presenting with findings suggesting a new primary or local recurrence of malignancy should undergo metastatic evaluation including abdominal and pelvic


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

imaging. The most common sites for metastasis include lymph nodes, bone, lung, liver, and peritoneum.[10] The recommended imaging for restaging of suspected recurrence mirrors that which is performed in initial staging.[1,6]


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

# Transitional Cell Cancer – Surveillance/ Follow-up (ONC-18.4)

**ON.TS.0018.4.A**
**v2.0.2026**

| Indication | Medically Necessary Imaging Study |
|---|---|
| ANY of the following:<br>• Papillary urothelial neoplasm of low malignant potential<br>• Low risk lesions<br>◦ Solitary Ta lesions ≤3cm<br>• Intermediate risk lesions<br>◦ Low-grade >3cm<br>◦ Low-grade multifocal<br>◦ T1 lesions<br>◦ High-grade solitary Ta ≤3cm | One-time baseline imaging at the end of therapy:<br>• CT Urogram (CPT® 74178) or MR Urogram (CPT® 74183 and CPT® 72197)<br>• Further advanced imaging is not routinely medically necessary for surveillance |
| ANY of the following high-risk non-muscle invasive transitional cell carcinoma of the bladder or upper tracts:<br>• Multifocal high-grade lesions<br>• High-grade lesions >3cm<br>• Superficial and minimally invasive (Tis and T1)<br>• BCG unresponsive<br>• Lymphovascular invasion<br>• Prostatic urethral invasion | • CT Urogram (CPT® 74178) or MR Urogram (CPT® 74183 and CPT® 72197) (imaging as performed at initial staging) every 1-2 years for 10 years |
| Non-muscle-invasive transitional carcinoma of the bladder treated with cystectomy | • CT Urogram (CPT® 74178) or MR Urogram (CPT® 74183 and CPT® 72197) (imaging as performed at initial staging) at 3 and 12 months post-cystectomy, and then annually for years 2-5 |


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

| Indication | Medically Necessary Imaging Study |
|---|---|
| Muscle invasive lower and upper genitourinary tumors treated with cystectomy, nephrectomy, or chemoradiation | Every 3-6 months for 2 years, then annually for 3 more years:<br>• CT Chest with contrast (CPT® 71260) or CT Chest without contrast (CPT® 71250), and CT Abdomen and Pelvis with contrast (CPT® 74177) or without and with contrast (CPT® 74178)<br>OR<br>• CT Chest with contrast (CPT® 71260) or CT Chest without contrast (CPT® 71250), and MR Urogram (CPT® 74183 and CPT® 72197) |
| Measurable metastatic disease on maintenance therapy or being monitored off therapy | Every 3 months for up to 5 years after completion of active treatment:<br>• CT Chest with contrast (CPT® 71260)<br>• CT Abdomen and Pelvis with contrast (CPT® 74177), CT Urogram (CPT® 74178), or MR Urogram (CPT® 74183 and CPT® 72197) (imaging as performed at initial staging) |
| Urethral cancers (high-risk T1 or greater) and urothelial carcinoma of the prostate | Every 3-6 months for 2 years, then annually:<br>• CT Abdomen and Pelvis with contrast (CPT® 74177) or without and with contrast (CPT® 74178)<br>OR<br>• MR Urogram (CPT® 74183 and CPT® 72197)<br>AND<br>• Chest x-ray<br>◦ CT Chest with contrast (CPT® 71260) or CT Chest without contrast (CPT® 71250) for any of the following:<br>▪ Signs/symptoms of pulmonary disease<br>▪ Abnormal chest x-ray<br>▪ Prior involvement of the chest |


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

## Evidence Discussion

### Surveillance of non-muscle invasive bladder cancer[1,7]

In an asymptomatic individual with a history of low-risk NMIBC, a clinician should not perform routine surveillance upper tract imaging after the initial baseline.

For an intermediate or high-risk individual, a clinician should perform surveillance upper tract imaging at 1-2 year intervals. Initially, clinicians should obtain imaging at 12 months, then every 1-2 years up to 10 years. CT urography (CTU), MRU, or retrograde ureteropyelography with non-contrast CT or US or ureteroscopy with a non-contrast CT or US are medically necessary.

Routine chest imaging is not medically necessary for individuals with NMBIC unless an abnormality is identified with chest radiography.

### Surveillance of non-metastatic muscle-invasive bladder cancer[1,7]

Clinicians should obtain chest imaging and cross-sectional imaging of the abdomen and pelvis with CT or MRI at 6-12 month intervals for 2-3 years and then may continue annually.


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

# References (ONC-18)

**v2.0.2026**

1. Flaig TW, Spiess PE, Abern M, et al. National Comprehensive Cancer Network (NCCN) Guidelines Version 3.2025 – December 19, 2025. Bladder cancer, available at: https://www.nccn.org/professionals/physician_gls/pdf/bladder.pdf Referenced with permission from the NCCN Clinical Practice Guidelines in Oncology (NCCN Guidelines™) for Bladder cancer V3.2025, December 19, 2025. ©2025 National Comprehensive Cancer Network, Inc. All rights reserved. The NCCN Guidelines™ and illustrations herein may not be reproduced in any form for any purpose without the express written permission of the NCCN. To view the most recent and complete version of the NCCN Guidelines™, go online to NCCN.org.
2. Verma S, Rajesh A, Prasad SR et al. Urinary bladder cancer: role of MR imaging. *Radiographics*. 2012;32(2):371-387. doi:10.1148/rg.322115125.
3. Abdlkadir AS, Al-Adhami D, Allouzi S, et al. Diagnostic efficacy of [18F]FDG PET/CT and [18F]FDG PET/MRI in preoperative staging of locoregional urinary bladder cancer: a systematic review and Meta-Analysis. *Discov Oncol.* 2025;16(1):1241. Published 2025 Jul 1. doi:10.1007/s12672-025-03020-1
4. Gakis G, Bruins HM, Cathomas R, et al. European Association of Urology Guidelines on Primary Urethral Carcinoma-2020 Update. *Eur Urol Oncol.* 2020;3(4):424-432. doi:10.1016/j.euo.2020.06.003
5. Rouprêt M, Seisen T, Birtle AJ, et al. European Association of Urology Guidelines on Upper Urinary Tract Urothelial Carcinoma: 2023 Update. *Eur Urol*. 2023;84(1):49-64. doi:10.1016/j.eururo.2023.03.013
6. Holzbeierlein J, Bixler BR, Buckley DI, et al. Treatment of non-metastatic muscle-invasive bladder cancer: AUA/ASCO/SUO guideline (2017; amended 2020, 2024). *J Urol*. 2024. doi:10.1097/JU.0000000000003981.
7. Holzbeierlein J, Bixler BR, Buckley DI, et al. Diagnosis and treatment of non-muscle invasive bladder cancer: AUA/SUO guideline: 2024 amendment. *J Urol*. 2024. doi:10.1097/JU.0000000000003846.
8. Coleman JA, Clark PE, Bixler BR, et al. Diagnosis and management of non-metastatic upper tract urothelial carcinoma: AUA/SUO guideline. *J Urol*. 2023;209(6):1071-1081.
9. Juri H, Koyama M, Azuma H, Narumi Y. Are there any metastases to the chest in non-muscle invasive bladder cancer patients on follow-up computed tomography? *Int Urol Nephrol*. 2018;50:1771-78.
10. Wang D, Zhang WS, Xiong MH, Yu M, Xu JX. Bladder tumors: dynamic contrast-enhanced axial imaging, multiplanar reformation, three-dimensional reconstruction and virtual cystoscopy using helical CT. *Chin Med J (Engl)*. 2004;117:62-6.
11. Witjes JA, Bruins HM, Carrión A, et al. EUA guidelines on muscle-invasive and metastatic bladder cancer. *European Association of Urology*. 2024;6-97.
12. Powles T, Bellmunt J, Comperat E, et al. Bladder cancer: ESMO clinical practice guideline for diagnosis, treatment and follow-up. *Ann Oncol*. 2022;33:244-58.


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

Click Anywhere in the Header to Return to the Main Table of Contents



# Prostate Cancer (ONC-19)

Guideline

Prostate Cancer – General Considerations (ONC-19.0)
Suspected Prostate Cancer (ONC-19.1)
Prostate Cancer – Initial Work-up/Staging (ONC-19.2)
Prostate Cancer – Restaging/Recurrence (ONC-19.3)
Prostate Cancer – Follow-up On Active Surveillance (ONC-19.4)
Surveillance/Follow-up For Treated Prostate Cancer (ONC-19.5)
References (ONC-19)


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

# Prostate Cancer – General Considerations (ONC-19.0)

**ON.PR.0019.0.A**

**v2.0.2026**

- Prostate cancer screening begins at age 45 for individuals at average risk of prostate cancer. However, individuals at high-risk may begin screening at age 40. High-risk features include:
  - Black/African American identity
  - germline mutations (BRCA1 or 2, HOXB13, ATM, CHEK2, or mismatch repair genes (MLH1, MSH2, MSH6, PMS2) that increase the risk of prostate cancer
  - family history of first or second-degree relative with prostate, male breast, colorectal, pancreatic, endometrial or female breast cancer at age <45 years
- Treatment of benign prostatic hyperplasia with 5-alfa reductase inhibitors (such as finasteride and dutasteride) can falsely reduce the measured PSA levels by 50%. Thus, the reported PSA level should be doubled when prostate cancer is suspected in individuals on these medications.
- Individuals with high-risk adverse clinical and pathological factors may benefit from a more aggressive diagnostic and therapeutic approach at the time of relapse after initial treatment. These factors include pre-treatment Gleason score of ≥8, pre-treatment clinical stage of cT3b or higher, positive surgical margins, post-treatment PSA doubling time of <3 months, and an interval to biochemical failure of <3 years after initial treatment.
- PET/CT scans using $^{18}$F-FDG radiotracer are not medically necessary for evaluation of prostate cancer.
- $^{11}$C Choline, $^{18}$F-Fluciclovine (AXUMIN®), and PSMA-specific radiopharmaceuticals have recently gained FDA approval for evaluation of prostate cancer. Optimal detection rates for these radiotracers vary greatly with PSA levels. False positive rate is high and histological confirmation of positive sites is recommended.
- PSMA-specific PET radiopharmaceuticals that are currently FDA-approved and medically necessary in prostate cancer are: $^{68}$Ga PSMA-11 (UCSF & UCLA), $^{18}$F Piflufolastat (Pylarify®), $^{18}$F Flotufolastat (Posluma®), and $^{68}$Ga Gozetotide (Illuccix®, Locametz®, and Gozellix®).
- While early detection of low-volume recurrence after treatment of prostate cancer using PET/CT scans may influence therapeutic decisions, there is lack of evidence that this approach has any meaningful impact on overall survival.
- As high-intensity focused ultrasound prostate ablation is considered investigational and experimental at this time, advanced imaging for treatment planning and/or


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

surveillance of high intensity focused ultrasound prostate ablation is not medically necessary.
- MR Spectroscopy (CPT® 76390) is considered not medically necessary in the evaluation of prostate cancer at this time.
- As laser prostate ablation is considered investigational and experimental at this time, advanced imaging for treatment planning and/or surveillance of laser prostate ablation is not medically necessary.
- Monitoring an elevated prostate-specific antigen level (PSA) with serial MRI is not medically necessary for suspected prostate cancer.
- Requests for imaging based on PSA must provide a recent PSA.

**ISUP Prostate Cancer Grade Groups**

| Grade Group | Gleason Score | Gleason Pattern |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | ≤6 | ≤3+3 |
| 2 | 7 | 3+4 |
| 3 | 7 | 4+3 |
| 4 | 8 | 4+4, 3+5, 5+3 |
| 5 | 9 or 10 | 4+5, 5+4, or 5+5 |

**NCCN Initial Risk Stratification**
- Low Risk
  - ALL of the following features are present:
    - Clinical T Stage = cT1-cT2a (palpable tumor limited to ≤1/2 of one side)
    - PSA (ng/mL) <10
    - Gleason Grade Group = 1
- Intermediate Risk
  - No "high-risk" or "very high-risk" features and one or more of the following intermediate risk factors (IRFs):
    - cT2b-cT2c
    - Grade group 2 or 3
    - PSA 10-20 ng/mL
  - Favorable Intermediate Risk
    - ALL of the following features must be present:


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

        - Only 1 IRF
        - Gleason Grade Group = 1 or 2
        - <50% biopsy cores positive (e.g., <6 of 12 cores)
    - Unfavorable Intermediate Risk
        - One or more of the following must be present:
            - 2 or 3 IRFs
            - Gleason grade group = 3
            - ≥50% biopsy cores positive (e.g., ≥6 of 12 cores)
- High-Risk
    - ONE or more of the following high-risk features is present:
        - Clinical T Stage = cT3-cT4
        - PSA (ng/mL) >20
        - Gleason Grade Group = 4 or 5
- Very High-Risk
    - At least TWO of the following features is present:
        - Clinical T stage = cT3-cT4 (extension into the seminal vesicles or invasion into adjacent structures)
        - Primary Gleason Pattern = 5
        - Gleason Grade Group = 4 or 5
        - PSA (ng/mL) >40

**3D Rendering of MRI for MRI / Ultrasound Fusion Biopsy:**

- When specific target lesion(s) is (are) detected on multi-parametric MRI (mpMRI) prostate and classified as PIRADS 3, 4, or 5, 3D Rendering (CPT® 76377) to generate prostate segmentation data image set for target identification on MRI/ Transrectal ultrasound (TRUS) fusion biopsy is medically necessary as:
    - a subsequent separate standalone request; or
    - a retrospective request for medical necessity
- For MRI/TRUS fusion biopsy of a PIRADS 1-2 lesion, approval of 3D rendering at independent workstation (CPT® 76376 or CPT® 76377) can be considered on a case-by-case basis.
- If there is no target lesion identified on MRI, then 3D rendering and MRI/TRUS fusion biopsy is generally not medically necessary.
- The 3D rendering for the TRUS component of the fusion is a part of the UroNav Fusion Equipment Software and an additional 3D code CPT® 76376 or CPT® 76377 is not medically necessary.


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

## Evidence Discussion

Screening can begin as early as age 40 for high-risk individuals (Black/African American identity, certain germline mutations, or concerning family history) and 45 for individuals with average risk. Those with a first-degree relative diagnosed at age less than 60 years have a more than 2-fold increase in likelihood of prostate cancer diagnosis. Individuals with Black/African American identity have a 60% higher incidence of prostate cancer. Individuals with high-risk adverse clinical and pathologic factors may benefit from a more aggressive diagnostic and therapeutic approach at the time of relapse after initial treatment.[2]


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

# Suspected Prostate Cancer (ONC-19.1)

**ON.PR.0019.1.A**
**v2.0.2026**

| Indication | Medically Necessary Imaging Study |
|---|---|
| ANY of the following:<br>• Age 40-44 years with PSA >3 ng/ml or very suspicious DRE and ONE of the following high-risk features:<br>◦ Black/African American identity<br>◦ Germline mutations that increase the risk of prostate cancer<br>◦ Family history of first- or second-degree relative with prostate, male breast, pancreatic, or ovarian cancer<br>◦ Family history of two or more first-degree relatives diagnosed at any age with colorectal, endometrial, breast, or prostate cancer<br>◦ Family history of first- or second-degree relative diagnosed at age ≤45 years with female breast cancer<br>◦ Family history of first- or second-degree relative diagnosed at age ≤50 years with colorectal or endometrial cancer<br>• Age 45-75 years and ONE of the following:<br>◦ PSA >3ng/ml<br>◦ Very suspicious DRE<br>• Age >75 years and ONE of the following:<br>◦ PSA ≥4ng/ml<br>◦ Very suspicious DRE<br>• At least one negative/non-diagnostic TRUS biopsy and ANY of the following:<br>◦ Rising PSA<br>◦ Abnormal DRE<br>◦ Need for confirmatory MR/US fusion biopsy | ANY of the following:<br>• Transrectal ultrasound (CPT® 76872)<br>• TRUS-guided biopsy (CPT® 76942)<br>• MRI/US fusion biopsy (CPT® 76942)<br>• MRI Pelvis without and with contrast (CPT® 72197) or without contrast (CPT® 72195) |


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

| Indication | Medically Necessary Imaging Study |
|---|---|
| • PIRADS 3, 4, or 5 lesion identified on recent diagnostic MRI Pelvis (CPT® 72195 or CPT® 72197) and planning for biopsy to be done by MRI/TRUS fusion technique | • 3D Rendering (CPT® 76376 or CPT® 76377) |
| ANY of the following:<br>• Multifocal (2 or more lesions) high-grade prostatic intraepithelial neoplasia (PIN)<br>• Atypia on biopsy | • Extended pattern re-biopsy within 6 months by TRUS-guided biopsy (CPT® 76942) |
| • Solitary PIN (1 lesion) | ONE of the following, to be repeated in one year:<br>• MRI Pelvis without contrast (CPT® 72195)<br>• MRI Pelvis without and with contrast (CPT® 72197)<br>• MRI/US fusion biopsy (CPT® 76942 or 76872)<br>◦ These codes are medically necessary in addition to MR Pelvis codes above, if requested |
| In office, transperineal, MRI guided biopsy without US fusion (i.e., ProMaxo) | Neither MRI CPT® 77021 nor 76498 are medically necessary in conjunction with procedure codes (see: **CT-, MR-, or US-Guided Procedures (Preface-4.2)**). MRI is bundled in with the procedure code. |
| An existing MRI cannot be used for MRI/US fusion biopsy | Unlisted MRI code (CPT® 76498) |

### Evidence Discussion

Based on the high-risk factors outlined above along with age, digital rectal exam (DRE) findings and PSA level, further imaging work-up may be medically necessary to include transrectal ultrasound with or without biopsy, MRI of the pelvis without and/or with


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

contrast, as well as MRI/US fusion biopsy. These interventions will help dictate the appropriate therapy for each individual diagnosed with prostate cancer.[1]


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

# Prostate Cancer – Initial Work-up/ Staging (ONC-19.2)

**ON.PR.0019.2.A**
**v2.0.2026**

| Indication | Medically Necessary Imaging Study |
|---|---|
| Localized prostate cancer with any of the following risk groups (see: **ONC-19.0** for definition of risk groups):<br>• Low risk<br>• Favorable intermediate risk | Advanced imaging is not routinely medically necessary for initial staging<br><br>If not already performed prior to biopsy, MRI Pelvis without and with contrast (CPT® 72197) is medically necessary for any of the following:<br>• Prior to planned treatment (surgery and/or radiation therapy)<br>• To establish candidacy for active surveillance |


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

| Indication | Medically Necessary Imaging Study |
|---|---|
| Localized prostate cancer with any of the following risk groups (see: **ONC-19.0** for definition of risk groups):<br>• Unfavorable intermediate risk<br>• High-risk<br>• Very high-risk | Any ONE of the following combinations, not all (may be obtained in addition to mpMRI prostate):<br>• CT Chest with contrast (CPT® 71260), CT Abdomen and Pelvis with contrast (CPT® 74177), and Bone scan (CPT® 78306)<br>• CT Chest with contrast (CPT® 71260), CT Abdomen with contrast (CPT® 74160), MRI Pelvis without and with contrast (CPT® 72197) if not previously performed, and Bone scan (CPT® 78306) (see: Nuclear Medicine (NM) Imaging in Oncology (ONC-1.3) for additional bone scan codes)<br>• PSMA PET/CT scan (CPT® 78815 or CPT® 78816) or PSMA PET/MRI (CPT® 78813 and CPT® 76498) using any one of the following radiotracers:<br>◦ $^{68}$Ga-PSMA-11<br>◦ $^{18}$F Piflufolastat (Pylarify®)<br>◦ $^{68}$Ga Gozetotide (Illuccix®,Locametz®, and Gozellix®)<br>◦ $^{18}$F Flotufolastat (Posluma®) |
| To confirm oligo- or low volume metastatic prostate cancer suspected on conventional imaging in individuals with biopsy-proven prostate cancer | • PSMA PET/CT (CPT® 78815 or CPT® 78816) or PSMA PET/MRI (CPT® 78813 and CPT® 76498) with any of the following radiotracers:<br>◦ $^{68}$Ga-PSMA-11<br>◦ $^{18}$F Piflufolastat (Pylarify®)<br>◦ $^{18}$F Flotufolastat (Posluma®)<br>◦ $^{68}$Ga Gozetotide (Illuccix®, Locametz®, and Gozellix®) |


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

| Indication | Medically Necessary Imaging Study |
|---|---|
| Known diffuse metastatic prostate cancer (including prior to prostate biopsy)<br><br>(In obvious diffuse metastatic prostate cancer based on other imaging, PSMA PET is not medically necessary) | Any ONE of the following combinations, not all:<br>• CT Chest with contrast (CPT® 71260), CT Abdomen and Pelvis with contrast (CPT® 74177), and Bone scan (CPT® 78306)<br>• CT Chest with contrast (CPT® 71260), CT Abdomen with contrast (CPT® 74160), MRI Pelvis without and with contrast (CPT® 72197) if not previously performed, and Bone scan (CPT® 78306) (see: Nuclear Medicine (NM) Imaging in Oncology (ONC-1.3) for additional bone scan codes) |
| Inconclusive bone scan | Any ONE of the following:<br>• CT with contrast of involved body site<br>• MRI without and with contrast of involved body site<br>• PET/CT (CPT® 78815 or CPT® 78816) or PET/MRI (CPT® 78813 and CPT® 76498) using any one of the following radiotracers:<br>◦ $^{18}$F Fluciclovine<br>◦ $^{11}$C Choline<br>◦ $^{68}$Ga-PSMA-11<br>◦ $^{18}$F Piflufolastat (Pylarify®)<br>◦ $^{18}$F Flotufolastat (Posluma®)<br>◦ $^{68}$Ga Gozetotide (Illuccix®, Locametz®, and Gozellix®)<br>◦ $^{18}$F sodium fluoride |

At present, neither the AUA guidelines nor NCCN guidelines consider cribriform histology and/or perineural invasion as standalone risk factors that move individuals into an unfavorable intermediate risk or higher group.


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

## Evidence Discussion

Risk stratification uses a minimum of stage, Gleason grade, and PSA to assign individuals to risk groups that in turn help select the imaging options and predict the probability of biochemical recurrence after definitive local therapy. The current prostate cancer grading system was adopted from the ISUP 2014 consensus conference with the goal to limit overtreatment. The grading system is divided into 5 risk groups.

The goal of imaging is to detect and characterize disease in order to guide disease management. Low risk and favorable intermediate risk does not routinely require advanced imaging. NCCN stated that "conventional bone scans are rarely positive in asymptomatic individuals with PSA <10 ng/mL".[1] Low risk and favorable intermediate risk groups have very low risk of positive bone scan or CT scan.[1]

Unfavorable intermediate risk, high-risk, and very high-risk do require imaging that can be a combination of CT/MRI Pelvis or PSMA PET using specific radiotracers. In individuals with known or suspected metastatic disease, CT Chest, Abdomen, and Pelvis along with bone scan are medically necessary. MRI Pelvis is an acceptable choice in lieu of CT Pelvis due to MRI's ability to provide detailed soft tissue characterization and contrast. NCCN supported bone imaging for those at high risk for skeletal metastases[1]

For inconclusive bone findings, NCCN stated that additional imaging using CT, MRI, PSMA-PET/CT or PSMA-PET/MRI, or PET/CT or PET/MRI with F-18 sodium fluoride, C-11 choline, or F-18 fluciclovine can be considered. For conventional imaging suggesting oligo- or low-volume metastatic disease, PET/CT using specific radiotracers can be performed to confirm the individual is a candidate for localized treatment. F18-FDG PET/CT scans are considered not medically necessary for evaluation of prostate cancer because, per NCCN, there is a lack of data surrounding the use of this radiotracer in individuals with prostate cancer. Other radiotracers (C11 choline, F18-Fluciclovine, PSMA-specific) are FDA approved and have influenced treatment planning, but the impact on long-term survival remains to be studied. However, data does indicate that PSMA-PET has a high sensitivity for metastatic disease and small-volume disease compared to conventional imaging, and therefore, it has become a useful tool for the evaluation of individuals with prostate cancer.[1]


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

# Prostate Cancer – Restaging/Recurrence (ONC-19.3)

**ON.PR.0019.3.A**
**v2.0.2026**

| Indication | Medically Necessary Imaging Study |
|---|---|
| For ANY of the following:<br>• Obvious progression by DRE with plans for prostatectomy or radiation therapy<br>• Repeat TRUS biopsy for rising PSA shows progression to a higher Gleason's score with plans for prostatectomy or radiation therapy<br>• Inconclusive findings on CT scan | • MRI Pelvis without and with contrast (CPT® 72197) |
| Non-metastatic prostate cancer previously treated with ablation, hormonal therapy, or chemotherapy **and** any one of the following:<br>• Clinical suspicion of relapse/recurrence<br>• Palpable anastomotic recurrence<br>• PSA rises above post-treatment baseline to >0.2ng/mL on two consecutive measurements | Any ONE of the following combinations:<br>• CT Chest with contrast (CPT® 71260), CT Abdomen and Pelvis with contrast (CPT® 74177), and Bone scan (CPT® 78306) (see: **Nuclear Medicine (NM) Imaging in Oncology (ONC-1.3)** for additional bone scan codes)<br>• CT Chest with contrast (CPT® 71260), CT Abdomen with contrast (CPT® 74160), MRI Pelvis without and with contrast (CPT® 72197), and Bone scan (CPT® 78306) (see: **Nuclear Medicine (NM) Imaging in Oncology (ONC-1.3)** for additional bone scan codes) |


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

| Indication | Medically Necessary Imaging Study |
|---|---|
| Non-metastatic prostate cancer previously treated with prostatectomy and **all** of the following are met:<br>• Persistent detectable PSA after prostatectomy, or<br>• Undetectable PSA that subsequently becomes detectable with two consecutive increases in PSA (to any amount), or<br>• Any increase in PSA to 0.1 ng/mL or higher | Any ONE of the following:<br>• PSMA PET/CT scan (CPT® 78815 or CPT® 78816) or PET/MRI (CPT® 78813 and CPT® 76498) with any of the following radiotracers:<br>◦ $^{68}$Ga-PSMA-11<br>◦ $^{18}$F Piflufolastat (Pylarify®)<br>◦ $^{18}$F Flotufolastat (Posluma®)<br>◦ $^{68}$Ga Gozetotide (Illuccix®, Locametz®, and Gozellix®)<br>• CT Chest with contrast (CPT® 71260), CT Abdomen and Pelvis with contrast (CPT® 74177), and Bone scan (CPT® 78306) (see: **Nuclear Medicine (NM) Imaging in Oncology (ONC-1.3)** for additional bone scan codes)<br>• CT Chest with contrast (CPT® 71260), CT Abdomen with contrast (CPT® 74160), MRI Pelvis without and with contrast (CPT® 72197), and Bone scan (CPT® 78306) (see: **Nuclear Medicine (NM) Imaging in Oncology (ONC-1.3)** for additional bone scan codes) |


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

| Indication | Medically Necessary Imaging Study |
|---|---|
| Non-metastatic prostate cancer previously treated with radiation therapy and two consecutive increases in PSA above nadir | Any ONE of the following:<br>• PSMA PET/CT scan (CPT® 78815 or CPT® 78816) or PET/MRI (CPT® 78813 and CPT® 76498) with any of the following radiotracers:<br>◦ $^{68}$Ga-PSMA-11<br>◦ $^{18}$F Piflufolastat (Pylarify®)<br>◦ $^{18}$F Flotufolastat (Posluma®)<br>◦ $^{68}$Ga Gozetotide (Illuccix®, Locametz®, and Gozellix®)<br>• CT Chest with contrast (CPT® 71260), CT Abdomen and Pelvis with contrast (CPT® 74177), and Bone scan (CPT® 78306) (see: Nuclear Medicine (NM) Imaging in Oncology (ONC-1.3) for additional bone scan codes)<br>• CT Chest with contrast (CPT® 71260), CT Abdomen with contrast (CPT® 74160), MRI Pelvis without and with contrast (CPT® 72197), and Bone scan (CPT® 78306) (see: **Nuclear Medicine (NM) Imaging in Oncology (ONC-1.3)** for additional bone scan codes) |
| Non-metastatic prostate cancer previously treated with prostatectomy or radiation therapy, and **all** of the following are met:<br>• PSA rises on two consecutive measurements above post-treatment baseline **and**<br>• PSA ≥1 ng/mL **and**<br>• Recent CT scan and bone scan are negative for metastatic disease | • PET/CT scan (CPT® 78815 or CPT® 78816) using any **ONE** of the following radiotracers:<br>◦ $^{18}$F-Fluciclovine<br>◦ $^{11}$C Choline |


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

| Indication | Medically Necessary Imaging Study |
|---|---|
| Suspected progression of known metastatic disease based on:<br>• New or worsening signs/symptoms<br>• Rising PSA levels | • CT Chest with contrast (CPT® 71260), CT Abdomen and Pelvis with contrast (CPT® 74177), and Bone scan (CPT® 78306) (see: **Nuclear Medicine (NM) Imaging in Oncology (ONC-1.3)** for additional bone scan codes)<br>• CT with contrast of any involved or symptomatic body part |
| Metastatic prostate cancer receiving treatment with chemotherapy or Pluvicto® | One of the following combinations, every 2 cycles (6 to 8 weeks), while on chemotherapy:<br>• CT Abdomen and Pelvis with contrast (CPT® 74177) and CT scan with contrast of any involved body part<br>OR<br>• CT Abdomen with contrast (CPT® 74160), MRI Pelvis without and with contrast (CPT® 72197)<br>AND, every 3-6 months:<br>• Bone scan (CPT® 78306) (see: **Nuclear Medicine (NM) Imaging in Oncology (ONC-1.3)** for additional bone scan codes)<br><br>Restaging PSMA and/or SPECT/CT is not medically necessary in the absence of equivocal conventional imaging |


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

| Indication | Medically Necessary Imaging Study |
|---|---|
| Metastatic prostate cancer receiving anti-androgen therapy | One of the following combinations, every 3 months, while on anti-androgen therapy:<br>• CT Abdomen and Pelvis with contrast (CPT® 74177) and CT scan of any involved body part<br>OR<br>• CT Abdomen with contrast (CPT® 74160), MRI Pelvis without and with contrast (CPT® 72197)<br>AND, every 3-6 months:<br>• Bone scan (CPT® 78306) (see: **Nuclear Medicine (NM) Imaging in Oncology (ONC-1.3)** for additional bone scan codes) |
| Previously treated metastatic prostate cancer progressed on conventional imaging and being considered for $^{177}$Lu-PSMA-617 (Pluvicto®) treatment | • PSMA PET/CT scan (CPT® 78815 or CPT® 78816) with one of the following agents:<br>◦ $^{68}$Ga PSMA-11<br>◦ $^{18}$F Piflufolastat (Pylarify®)<br>◦ $^{68}$Ga Gozetotide (Illuccix®, Locametz®, and Gozellix®)<br>◦ $^{18}$F Flotufolastat (Posluma®) |


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

| Indication | Medically Necessary Imaging Study |
|---|---|
| Non-metastatic prostate cancer treated with prostatectomy or radiation therapy who do not meet ALL above criteria for PSMA PET/CT but have clinical signs/ symptoms of recurrence | Any ONE of the following combinations:<br>• CT Chest with contrast (CPT® 71260), CT Abdomen and Pelvis with contrast (CPT® 74177), and Bone scan (CPT® 78306) (see: **Nuclear Medicine (NM) Imaging in Oncology (ONC-1.3)** for additional bone scan codes)<br>• CT Chest with contrast (CPT® 71260), CT Abdomen with contrast (CPT® 74160), MRI Pelvis without and with contrast (CPT® 72197), and Bone scan (CPT® 78306) (see: **Nuclear Medicine (NM) Imaging in Oncology (ONC-1.3)** for additional bone scan codes) |
| Prior to start of Xofigo® (Radium-223) therapy | • ONE time CT Chest, Abdomen, and Pelvis with contrast (CPT® 71260 and CPT® 74177) |
| Inconclusive bone scan | Any ONE of the following:<br>• CT with contrast of involved body site<br>• MRI without and with contrast of involved body site<br>• PET/CT (CPT® 78815 or CPT® 78816) or PET/MRI (CPT® 78813 and CPT® 76498) using any one of the following radiotracers:<br>◦ $^{18}$F Fluciclovine<br>◦ $^{11}$C Choline<br>◦ $^{68}$Ga-PSMA-11<br>◦ $^{18}$F Piflufolastat (Pylarify®)<br>◦ $^{18}$F Flotufolastat (Posluma®)<br>◦ $^{68}$Ga Gozetotide (Illuccix®, Locametz®, and Gozellix®)<br>◦ $^{18}$F sodium fluoride |


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

| Indication | Medically Necessary Imaging Study |
|---|---|
| Conventional imaging studies (CT and bone scan) suggests oligo- or low volume metastatic disease that needs further confirmation | • PET/CT scan (CPT® 78815 or CPT® 78816) using any one of the following radiotracers:<br>◦ $^{18}$F Fluciclovine<br>◦ $^{11}$C Choline<br>◦ $^{68}$Ga-PSMA-11<br>◦ $^{18}$F Piflufolastat (Pylarify®)<br>◦ $^{68}$Ga Gozetotide (Illuccix®, Locametz®, and Gozellix®)<br>◦ $^{18}$F Flotufolastat (Posluma®) |

**Evidence Discussion**

The use of PSMA PET radiotracers has been shown to impact treatment planning, but more research is needed on the impact to long-term outcomes. However, the benefit to individuals of initiating treatment earlier for recurrent disease detected on PSMA PET outweighs the disadvantages of possible false-positives. For non-metastatic prostate cancer previously treated with prostatectomy, NCCN stated that PET can be used without prerequisite conventional imaging for suspected biochemical recurrence. This recommendation is due to "increased sensitivity and specificity of PSMA-PET tracers for detecting micrometastatic disease compared to conventional imaging". Conventional imaging is also noted as useful for workup of recurrence or progression. For individuals treated with radiation therapy, NCCN stated that suspected recurrence can also be imaged using these modalities. In the setting of distant metastatic disease, CT imaging along with bone scan is the mainstay of imaging with PET/CT reserved for inconclusive conventional imaging or oligo-/low volume disease that needs confirmation. NCCN stated "CT provides a high level of anatomic detail, and may detect gross extracapsular disease, nodal metastatic disease, and/or visceral metastatic disease." PSMA imaging at baseline is medically necessary for individuals being considered for 177Lu-PSMA-617 (Pluvicto®) treatment.[1]


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

Click Anywhere in the Header to Return to the Main Table of Contents



# Prostate Cancer – Follow-up On Active Surveillance (ONC-19.4)

**ON.PR.0019.4.A**
**v2.0.2026**

Active surveillance is being increasingly utilized in prostate cancer, and this therapeutic option involves regimented monitoring of an individual with known diagnosis of low-risk prostate cancer for disease progression, without specific anticancer treatment. While being treated with active surveillance, an individual is generally considered a potential candidate for curative intent treatment approaches in the event that disease progression occurs.

It is important to distinguish active surveillance from watchful waiting (or observation), which is generally employed in individuals with limited life expectancy. Watchful waiting involves cessation of routine monitoring and treatment is initiated only if symptoms develop.

Current active surveillance guidelines suggest the following protocol:

- PSA every 6 months
- Digital Rectal Exam (DRE) every 12 months
- Repeat prostate biopsy every 12 months
- Repeat mpMRI (CPT® 72195 or CPT® 72197) no more often than every 12 months

| Indication | Medically Necessary Imaging Study |
|---|---|
| Routine monitoring on active surveillance protocol | • MRI Pelvis without (CPT® 72195) or without and with contrast (CPT® 72197) at initiation of active surveillance, and every 12 months thereafter |
| Planning for re-biopsy to be done by MRI/US fusion technique | • 3D Rendering (CPT® 76376 or CPT® 76377) |


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

| Indication | Medically Necessary Imaging Study |
|---|---|
| For ANY of the following:<br>• Progression is suspected based on DRE changes or rising PSA and a recent TRUS biopsy was negative<br>• Repeat TRUS biopsy shows progression to a higher Gleason score | • MRI Pelvis without (CPT® 72195) or MRI Pelvis without and with contrast (CPT® 72197) |
| Individuals on active surveillance who are noted to have progression and have plans to initiate treatment | • Imaging studies for initial staging as per **ONC-19.2** |

**Evidence Discussion**

For certain individuals who fall into a low-risk category, close monitoring in the absence of treatment can be pursued with the intent to offer curative therapy in the event progression occurs. Current guidelines include PSA every 6 months, DRE every 12 months, repeat prostate biopsy every 12 months and repeat mpMRI no more often than every 12 months. NCCN stated that a metastatic staging evaluation is not medically necessary for those on active surveillance. With progression and the decision to pursue treatment, imaging is performed according to the same principles as stated in initial staging.[1]


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

# Surveillance/Follow-up For Treated Prostate Cancer (ONC-19.5)

**ON.PR.0019.5.A**
**v2.0.2026**

| Indication | Medically Necessary Imaging Study |
|---|---|
| ANY of the following:<br>• Asymptomatic or stable chronic symptoms<br>• Stable DRE findings<br>• Stable PSA levels | • Advanced imaging is not routinely medically necessary for surveillance |

**Evidence Discussion**

For individuals who are asymptomatic or have chronic stable findings to include DRE and PSA, advanced imaging is not medically necessary. This form of monitoring is also referred to as observation. NCCN stated that the advantages of observation include the avoidance of "possible side effects of unnecessary confirmatory testing and definitive therapy".[1]


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

# References (ONC-19)

**v2.0.2026**

1. Spratt DE, Srinivas S, Schaeffer EM, et al. National Comprehensive Cancer Network (NCCN) Guidelines Version 4.2026 – December 4, 2025. Prostate cancer, available at: https://www.nccn.org/professionals/physician_gls/pdf/prostate.pdf. Referenced with permission from the NCCN Clinical Practice Guidelines in Oncology (NCCN Guidelines™) for Prostate cancer V4.2026 – December 4, 2025. ©2025 National Comprehensive Cancer Network, Inc. All rights reserved. The NCCN Guidelines™ and illustrations herein may not be reproduced in any form for any purpose without the express written permission of the NCCN. To view the most recent and complete version of the NCCN Guidelines™, go online to NCCN.org.
2. Moses KA, Sprenkle PC, Bahler C, et al. National Comprehensive Cancer Network (NCCN) Guidelines V1.2026 – November 25, 2025. Prostate Cancer Early Detection available at: https://www.nccn.org/professionals/physician_gls/pdf/prostate_detection.pdf. Referenced with permission from the NCCN Clinical Practice Guidelines in Oncology (NCCN Guidelines™) for Prostate Cancer Early Detection V1.2026 – November 25, 2025 ©2025 National Comprehensive Cancer Network, Inc. All rights reserved. The NCCN Guidelines™ and illustrations herein may not be reproduced in any form for any purpose without the express written permission of the NCCN. To view the most recent and complete version of the NCCN Guidelines™, go online to NCCN.org.
3. Jadvar H, Calais J, Fanti S, et. al. Society of Nuclear Medicine and Molecular Imaging (SNMMI). Appropriate Use Criteria for Prostate-Specific Membrane Antigen (PSMA) PET Imaging. Published March 24, 2022. Accessible from https://www.snmmi.org.
4. Hofman MS, Lawrentschuk N, Francis RJ, et. al. Prostate-specific membrane antigen PET-CT in patients with high-risk prostate cancer before curative-intent surgery or radiotherapy (proPSMA): a prospective, randomised, multicentre study. *Lancet*. 2020;395(10231):1208-1216. doi:10.1016/S0140-6736(20)30314-7.
5. Pienta KJ, Gorin MA, Rowe SP, et. al. A phase 2/3 prospective multicenter study of the diagnostic accuracy of prostate specific membrane antigen PET/CT with $^{18}$F-DCFPyL in prostate cancer patients (OSPREY). *J Urol*. 2021;206(1):52-61. doi:10.1097/JU.0000000000001698.
6. Artibani W, Porcaro AB, De Marco V, et. al. Management of biochemical recurrence after primary curative treatment for prostate cancer: A review. *Urol Int*. 2018;100:251–262. doi:10.1159/000481438.
7. Zumsteg ZS, Spratt DE, Romesser PB, et. al. The natural history and predictors of outcome following biochemical relapse in the dose escalation era for prostate cancer patients undergoing definitive external beam radiotherapy. *Eur Urol*. 2015;67(6):1009-1016. doi:10.1016/j.eururo.2014.09.028.
8. Trabulsi EJ, Rumble RB, Jadvar H, et al. Optimum imaging strategies for advanced prostate cancer: ASCO guideline. *J Clin Oncol*. 2020 Jan 15. doi:10.1200/JCO/19.02757 (Epub ahead of print).
9. Andriole G, Siegel B, LOCATE Study Group. PD60-12 Sites of prostate cancer recurrence delineated with 18F-Flucicloved positron emission tomography in patients with negative or equivocal conventional imaging. *Journal of Urology*. 2019;201(4):e1100-e1101. doi:10.1097/01.JU.0000557289.21741.20.
10. Expert Panel on Urological Imaging, Akin O, Woo S, et al. ACR Appropriateness Criteria® Pretreatment Detection, Surveillance, and Staging of Prostate Cancer: 2022 Update. *J Am Coll Radiol*. 2023;20(5S):S187-S210. doi:10.1016/j.jacr.2023.02.010
11. Schoots IG, Nieboer D, Giganti F, Moore CM, Bangma CH, Roobol MJ. Is magnetic resonance imaging-targeted biopsy a useful addition to systematic confirmatory biopsy in men on active surveillance for low risk prostate cancer? A systematic review and meta-analysis. *BJU Int*. 2018;122(6):946-958. doi:10.1111/bju.14358.
12. Chamorro Castillo L, García Morales L, Ruiz López D, et al. The role of multiparametric magnetic resonance in active surveillance of a low-risk prostate cancer cohort from clinical practice. *Prostate*. 2023;83(8):765-772. doi:10.1002/pros.24515
13. Lu-Yao GL, Albertsen PC, Moore DF, et al. Outcomes of localized prostate cancer following conservative management. *JAMA*. 2009;302(11):1202-1209. doi:10.1001/jama.2009.1348.
14. Chen RC, Rumble RB, Loblaw DA, et al. Active surveillance for the management of localized prostate cancer (Cancer Care Ontario guideline): American Society of Clinical Oncology clinical practice guideline endorsement. *J Clin Oncol*. 2016;34(18):2182-2190. doi:10.1200/JCO.2015.65.7759.


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

15. Cooperberg MR, Meeks W, Fang R, Gaylis FD, Catalona WJ, Makarov DV. Time Trends and Variation in the Use of Active Surveillance for Management of Low-risk Prostate Cancer in the US. *JAMA Netw Open*. 2023;6(3):e231439. Published 2023 Mar 1. doi:10.1001/jamanetworkopen.2023.1439
16. Klotz L, Zhang L, Lam A, Nam R, Mamedov A, Loblaw A. Clinical results of long-term follow-up of a large, active surveillance cohort with localized prostate cancer. *J Clin Oncol*. 2010;28(1):126-131. doi:10.1200/JCO.2009.24.2180.
17. Gravestock P, Somani BK, Tokas T, Rai BP. A Review of Modern Imaging Landscape for Prostate Cancer: A Comprehensive Clinical Guide. *J Clin Med*. 2023;12(3):1186. Published 2023 Feb 2. doi:10.3390/jcm12031186
18. Schoots IG, Petrides N, Giganti F, et al. Magnetic resonance imaging in active surveillance of prostate cancer: a systematic review. *Eur Urol*. 2015;67(4):627-636. doi:10.1016/j.eururo.2014.10.050.
19. Perrin A, Venderink W, Patak MA, et al. The utility of in-bore multiparametric magnetic resonance-guided biopsy in men with negative multiparametric magnetic resonance-ultrasound software-based fusion targeted biopsy. *Urol Oncol.* 2021;39(5):297.e9-297.e16. doi:10.1016/j.urolonc.2020.11.041
20. Newcomb LF, Schenk JM, Zheng Y, et al. Long-Term Outcomes in Patients Using Protocol-Directed Active Surveillance for Prostate Cancer. *JAMA*. 2024;331(24):2084-2093. doi:10.1001/jama.2024.6695
21. Cooperberg MR. Long-term active surveillance for prostate cancer: answers and questions. *J Clin Oncol*. 2015;33(3):238-240. doi:10.1200/JCO.2014.59.2329.
22. Risko R, Merdan S, Womble PR, et al. Clinical predictors and recommendations for staging CT scan among men with prostate cancer. *Urology*. 2014;84(6):1329-1334. doi:10.1016.j.urology.2014.07.051.
23. Anttinen M, Ettala O, Malaspina S, et al. A Prospective Comparison of 18F-prostate-specific Membrane Antigen-1007 Positron Emission Tomography Computed Tomography, Whole-body 1.5 T Magnetic Resonance Imaging with Diffusion-weighted Imaging, and Single-photon Emission Computed Tomography/Computed Tomography with Traditional Imaging in Primary Distant Metastasis Staging of Prostate Cancer (PROSTAGE). *Eur Urol Oncol.* 2021;4(4):635-644. doi:10.1016/j.euo.2020.06.012
24. Armstrong JM, Martin CR, Dechet C, et al. $^{18}$F-fluciclovine PET CT detection of biochemical recurrent prostate cancer at specific PSA thresholds after definitive treatment. *J Urol Onc*. 2020;38(7):636.e1-636.e6. doi:10.1016/j.urolonc.2020.03.021.
25. Baruch B, Lovrec P, Solanki A, et al. Fluorine 18 labeled fluciclovine PET/CT in clinical practice: factors affecting the rate of detection of recurrent prostate cancer. *AJR*. 2019;213(4):851-858. doi:10.2214/AJ.19.21153.
26. Marcus C, Butler P, Bagrodia A, et al. Fluorine-18-labeled fluciclovine PET/CT in primary and biochemical recurrent prostate cancer management. *AJR*. 2020:1-10. doi:10.2214/AJR.19.22404.
27. Trabulsi EJ, Rumble BR, Jadvar H, et. al. Optimum imaging strategies for advanced prostate cancer: ASCO guideline. *J Clin Oncol*. 2020;38:1963-1996. doi:10.1200/JCO.19.02757.
28. Lowrance WT, Breau RH, Chou R, et. al. Advanced Prostate Cancer: AUA/ASTRO/SUO Guideline PART I. *J Urol*. 2021;205:14.
29. van Leenders GJLH, van der Kwast TH, Grignon DJ, et al. The 2019 International Society of Urological Pathology (ISUP) Consensus Conference on Grading of Prostatic Carcinoma. *Am J Surg Pathol.* 2020;44(8):e87-e99. doi:10.1097/PAS.0000000000001497
30. U.S. Food and Drug Administration. FDA expands Pluvicto's metastatic castration-resistant prostate cancer indication. FDA website. Published March 28, 2025.
31. Sartor O, de Bono J, Chi KN, et. al. Lutetium-177-PSMA-617 for metastatic castration-resistant prostate cancer. *N Engl J Med*. 2021;385:1091-1103. doi:10.1056/NEJMoa2107322.
32. Rubenstein J. How to code for magnetic resonance imaging-informed prostate biopsies. *Rev Urol*. 2014;16(2):88-89. doi:10.3909/riu0613.
33. Eastham JA, Auffenberg GB, Barocas DA, et al. Clinically localized prostate cancer: AUA/ASTRO guideline. *J Urol*. 2022;208(1):10-33.
34. Niu Y, Förster S, Muders M. The Role of Perineural Invasion in Prostate Cancer and Its Prognostic Significance. *Cancers (Basel)*. 2022;14(17):4065. Published 2022 Aug 23. doi:10.3390/cancers14174065
35. Teramoto Y, Wang Y, Miyamoto H. Risk stratification by quantification of perineural cancer invasion on prostate needle core biopsy: should it be counted?. *J Urol*. 2023;210(4):639-648.
36. Gordetsky JB, Schaffer K, & Hurley PJ. Intraductal carcinoma of the prostate and invasive cribriform cancer: Emerging important prognostic factors. *AUA News.* 2022.


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

37. Harryman WL, Hinton JP, Sainz R, et al. Intermediate risk prostate tumors contain lethal subtypes. *Front Urol*. 2024;4:1487873. doi:10.3389/fruro.2024.1487873
38. Yu Y, Lajkosz K, Finelli A, Fleshner N, van der Kwast TH, Downes MR. Impact of cribriform pattern 4 and intraductal prostatic carcinoma on National Comprehensive Cancer Network (NCCN) and Cancer of Prostate Risk Assessment (CAPRA) patient stratification. *Mod Pathol*. 2022;35(11):1695-1701. doi:10.1038/s41379-022-01111-w


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

Click Anywhere in the Header to Return to the Main Table of Contents



# Testicular, Ovarian and Extragonadal Germ Cell Tumors (ONC-20)

Guideline

Testicular, Ovarian and Extragonadal Germ Cell Tumors – General Considerations (ONC-20.0)
Testicular, Ovarian and Extragonadal Germ Cell Tumors – Initial Work-Up/Staging (ONC-20.1)
Testicular, Ovarian and Extragonadal Germ Cell Tumors – Restaging/Recurrence (ONC-20.2)
Testicular, Ovarian and Extragonadal Germ Cell Tumors – Surveillance (ONC-20.3)
References (ONC-20)


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

# Testicular, Ovarian and Extragonadal Germ Cell Tumors – General Considerations (ONC-20.0)

**ON.TO.0020.0.A**

**v2.0.2026**

- This section applies to primary germ cell tumors occurring outside the central nervous system for individuals aged >15 years at the time of initial diagnosis. Individuals aged ≤15 years at diagnosis should be imaged according to pediatric guidelines in: **Pediatric Germ Cell Tumors (PEDONC-10)** in the Pediatric and Special Populations Oncology Imaging Guidelines.
- These guidelines are for germ cell tumors of the testicle, ovary and extragonadal sites as well as malignant sex cord stromal tumors.
- Requests for imaging must state the histologic type of the cancer being evaluated.
- Classified as seminoma/dysgerminoma, non-seminomatous germ cell tumors (NSGCT), or mixed.
  - Dysgerminoma is the ovarian equivalent of seminoma. There is no testicular dysgerminoma.
  - Mixed tumors are treated as NSGCTs, as they tend to be more aggressive.
  - Germ Cell Tumors include:
    - Teratomas
    - Yolk sac tumors
    - Choriocarcinomas
    - Embryonal carcinomas
    - Mixed germ cell tumors
    - Dysgerminoma
  - Sex Cord Stromal Tumors include:
    - Granulosa Cell Tumor (juvenile/adult)
    - Fibroma/Fibrosarcoma
    - Thecoma
    - Levdig Cell Tumor
    - Sertoli Cell Tumor
    - Mixed (Sertoli-Levdig, Gynadroblastoma)
- MRI in place of CT scans to reduce risk of secondary malignancy is not supported by the peer-reviewed literature. CT scans are medically necessary for surveillance and are the preferred modality of imaging to assess for recurrence.


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

- PET/CT is considered not medically necessary for evaluation of non-seminomatous germ cell tumors.
- Active surveillance in testicular cancer refers to treatment with surgery (orchiectomy) alone without any additional post-operative treatment such as chemotherapy or radiotherapy.


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

# Testicular, Ovarian and Extragonadal Germ Cell Tumors – Initial Work-Up/ Staging (ONC-20.1)

**ON.TO.0020.1.A**
**v2.0.2026**

| Indication | Medically Necessary Imaging Study |
|---|---|
| Suspicious testicular mass or ovarian mass with concern for metastatic disease on ultrasound<br>• For all other ovarian masses prior to tissue diagnosis, see **Complex Adrenal Masses (PV-5.3)** | EITHER of the following:<br>• CT Abdomen and Pelvis with contrast (CPT® 74177) or<br>• MRI Abdomen without and with contrast (CPT® 74183) and MRI Pelvis without and with contrast (CPT® 72197) |
| After orchiectomy or oophorectomy:<br>• Orchiectomy/oophorectomy is both diagnostic and therapeutic, and imaging was not performed prior to surgery OR<br>• Individual is Stage IS (i.e., has persistently elevated tumor markers) | EITHER of the following:<br>• CT Abdomen and Pelvis with contrast (CPT® 74177) or<br>• MRI Abdomen without and with contrast (CPT® 74183) and MRI Pelvis without and with contrast (CPT® 72197) |
| Prior to initiation of chemotherapy to confirm staging, if prior imaging was performed ≥4 weeks ago | Repeat abdominal imaging with ONE of the following:<br>• CT Abdomen and Pelvis with contrast (CPT® 74177) or<br>• MRI Abdomen without and with contrast (CPT® 74183) and MRI Pelvis without and with contrast (CPT® 72197) |


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

| Indication | Medically Necessary Imaging Study |
|---|---|
| For ANY of the following:<br>• Testicular non-seminoma histology<br>• Any ovarian germ cell tumor<br>• Abdominal lymphadenopathy noted on CT scan<br>• Abnormal chest x-ray or signs/ symptoms suggestive of chest involvement<br>• Individual is Stage IS (i.e., has persistently elevated tumor markers) | In addition to the above abdominal/pelvic imaging:<br>• CT Chest with contrast (CPT® 71260) |
| Individual is Stage IS (i.e., has persistently elevated tumor markers) | In addition to the above, scrotal ultrasound (CPT® 76856 or CPT® 76857) to assess for a contralateral testis mass if one has not been conducted in the last 3 months |
| Prior surgery with incomplete staging for ovarian germ cell tumors | EITHER of the following:<br>• CT Chest with contrast (CPT® 71260) and CT Abdomen and Pelvis with contrast (CPT® 74177) or<br>• MRI Abdomen without and with contrast (CPT® 74183) and MRI Pelvis without and with contrast (CPT® 72197) |
| Inconclusive conventional imaging for ovarian germ cell tumors | PET/CT (CPT® 78815) or PET/MRI (CPT® 78813 and CPT® 76498) |
| Extragonadal Germ Cell Tumor | CT Chest with contrast (CPT® 71260) and CT Abdomen and Pelvis with contrast (CPT® 74177) |
| Sex Cord Stromal Tumors | Once diagnosis confirmed, no imaging is medically necessary. |

**Evidence Discussion**

- American Urological Association guideline recommended scrotal ultrasound with Doppler should be obtained in individuals with a unilateral or bilateral scrotal mass suspicious for neoplasm and that MRI should not be used in the initial evaluation and diagnosis of a testicular lesion suspected of being a neoplasm.[12]


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

- Ultrasound requires no ionizing radiation and is readily available. Overall, ultrasound is relatively quick and non-invasive modality to evaluate a testicular lesion. There are relatively few disadvantages of ultrasound for testicular lesions and primarily relate to sonographer experience.
- As advanced imaging modalities, CT and MRI offer excellent 3-D resolution. A CT scan can require a significant dose of ionizing radiation, but the speed of image acquisition reduces the potential for motion artifact. MRI yields better soft contrast resolution than CT and does not expose individuals to ionizing radiation, but due to longer image time is motion artifact-prone and may require sedation.

Seminoma

- NCCN recommended CT of the abdomen and pelvis with contrast or MRI of the abdomen and pelvis with and without contrast, and a chest x-ray. Chest CT with contrast is recommended if there is a positive finding on abdomen CT or abnormal chest x-ray.[1]

Nonseminoma

- NCCN recommended CT of the abdomen, pelvis and chest with contrast or MRI of the abdomen and pelvis with and without contrast in addition to a chest CT with contrast.[1]


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

# Testicular, Ovarian and Extragonadal Germ Cell Tumors – Restaging/ Recurrence (ONC-20.2)

**ON.TO.0020.2.A**
**v2.0.2026**

| Indication | Medically Necessary Imaging Study |
|---|---|
| Treatment response for individuals with measurable disease or persistent elevated tumor markers, every 2 cycles | • CT Abdomen and Pelvis with contrast (CPT® 74177) OR<br>• MRI Abdomen without and with contrast (CPT® 74183) and MRI Pelvis without and with contrast (CPT® 72197)<br>AND<br>• CT with contrast of previously involved body areas |
| For any of the following<br>• At end of adjuvant therapy<br>◦ Any stage embryonal tumor<br>◦ Any stage endodermal sinus tumor (i.e., yolk sac tumor)<br>◦ Stage II-IV dysgerminoma<br>◦ Stage I, Grade 2 or 3 immature teratoma<br>◦ Any grade, Stage II-IV immature teratoma<br>◦ Any stage non-gestational choriocarcinoma<br>• During adjuvant therapy only for signs and symptoms of disease progression | EITHER of the following:<br>• CT Chest with contrast (CPT® 71260) and CT Abdomen and Pelvis with contrast (CPT® 74177) or<br>• MRI Abdomen without and with contrast (CPT® 74183) and MRI Pelvis without and with contrast (CPT® 72197)<br>◦ If inconclusive, PET/CT (CPT® 78815) or PET/MRI (CPT® 78813 and CPT® 76498) |


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

| Indication | Medically Necessary Imaging Study |
|---|---|
| Seminoma with residual mass >3cm after completion of chemotherapy | • PET/CT (CPT® 78815)<br>◦ If PET/CT is positive, biopsy or resection should be considered<br>◦ If biopsy or resection is not performed, PET/CT may be repeated once in 6-12 weeks |
| Nonseminoma or pure seminoma with partial response or with residual mass and ALL of the following:<br>• Abnormal AFP or beta-hCG levels<br>• Need to evaluate for occult brain metastases | • MRI Brain without and with contrast (CPT® 70553) |
| Stage IIA pure seminoma or stage IIA nonseminoma with borderline retroperitoneal lymph nodes on preoperative imaging, 4-8 weeks after preoperative imaging | ONE of the following:<br>• CT Abdomen and Pelvis with contrast (CPT® 74177) or<br>• MRI Abdomen without and with contrast (CPT® 74183) and MRI Pelvis without and with contrast (CPT® 72197) |
| End of therapy evaluation for NSGCT post chemotherapy or post retroperitoneal lymph node dissection (RPLND) | • CT Abdomen and Pelvis with contrast (CPT® 74177) |
| Recurrence suspected, including increased tumor markers | • CT Chest (CPT® 71260) and CT Abdomen and Pelvis (CPT® 74177) with contrast<br>• Ultrasound (CPT® 76856 or CPT® 76857) of the remaining gonad if applicable |
| Unexplained pulmonary symptoms despite a negative chest x-ray, or new findings on chest x-ray | • CT Chest with contrast (CPT® 71260) |
| Sex cord stromal tumors with elevated inhibin or signs and symptoms of recurrence | • CT Chest with contrast (CPT® 71260) AND one of the following:<br>◦ CT Abdomen and Pelvis (CPT® 74177) OR<br>◦ MRI Abdomen (CPT® 74183) and MRI Pelvis (CPT® 72197) |


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

## Evidence Discussion

In individuals with pure seminoma with a residual mass >3cm post-primary chemotherapy, PET/CT is medically necessary. If this PET/CT scan is positive, biopsy or resection should be considered. An alternative option, if biopsy is not performed, is to wait an additional 6-12 weeks and repeat PET/CT to assess for any changes. If the mass is persistently positive, biopsy or resection is recommended.[1]


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

# Testicular, Ovarian and Extragonadal Germ Cell Tumors – Surveillance (ONC-20.3)

**ON.TO.0020.3.A**
**v2.0.2026**

| Indication | Medically Necessary Imaging Study |
|---|---|
| Stage I seminoma treated with orchiectomy alone (no radiotherapy or chemotherapy, also called active surveillance) | ONE of the following, every 4 months in year 1, then every 6 months for years 2 and 3, and then annually until year 5:<br>• CT Abdomen and Pelvis with contrast (CPT® 74177)<br>• CT Abdomen with contrast (CPT® 74160)<br>• MRI Abdomen without and with contrast (CPT® 74183)<br>• MRI Abdomen without and with contrast (CPT® 74183) and MRI Pelvis without and with contrast (CPT® 72197) |
| Stage I seminoma treated with radiotherapy and/or chemotherapy | ONE of the following, annually for 3 years:<br>• CT Abdomen and Pelvis with contrast (CPT® 74177)<br>• CT Abdomen with contrast (CPT® 74160)<br>• MRI Abdomen without and with contrast (CPT® 74183)<br>• MRI Abdomen without and with contrast (CPT® 74183) and MRI Pelvis without and with contrast (CPT® 72197) |


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

| Indication | Medically Necessary Imaging Study |
|---|---|
| Stage IIA and non-bulky stage IIB seminomas treated with radiotherapy or chemotherapy | ONE of the following, once at 3 months, then once at 9-12 months after completion of therapy, then annually for 2 additional years:<br>• CT Abdomen and Pelvis with contrast (CPT® 74177)<br>• CT Abdomen with contrast (CPT® 74160)<br>• MRI Abdomen without and with contrast (CPT® 74183)<br>• MRI Abdomen without and with contrast (CPT® 74183) and MRI Pelvis without and with contrast (CPT® 72197) |
| Stage II seminoma treated with primary RPLND and NOT treated with adjuvant chemotherapy | ONE of the following, every 4 months in year 1, every 6 months in year 2, and annually in year 3:<br>• CT Abdomen and Pelvis with contrast (CPT® 74177)<br>• CT Abdomen with contrast (CPT® 74160)<br>• MRI Abdomen without and with contrast (CPT® 74183)<br>• MRI Abdomen without and with contrast (CPT® 74183) and MRI Pelvis without and with contrast (CPT® 72197) |
| Stage II seminoma treated with primary RPLND AND adjuvant chemotherapy | ONE of the following, at 6 months, 12 months, and 24 months:<br>• CT Abdomen and Pelvis with contrast (CPT® 74177)<br>• CT Abdomen with contrast (CPT® 74160)<br>• MRI Abdomen without and with contrast (CPT® 74183)<br>• MRI Abdomen without and with contrast (CPT® 74183) and MRI Pelvis without and with contrast (CPT® 72197) |


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

| Indication | Medically Necessary Imaging Study |
|---|---|
| Bulky stage IIB, IIC, and III seminomas treated with chemotherapy | For individuals with ≤3cm residual mass, ONE of the following every 4 months for 1 year, every 6 months for 1 year, and then annually for 2 additional years:<br>• CT Abdomen and Pelvis with contrast (CPT® 74177)<br>• CT Abdomen with contrast (CPT® 74160)<br>• MRI Abdomen without and with contrast (CPT® 74183)<br>• MRI Abdomen without and with contrast (CPT® 74183) and MRI Pelvis without and with contrast (CPT® 72197)<br>For individuals with >3cm residual mass and negative PET scan, ONE of the following at 6 and 12 months after completion of therapy, then annually until year 5:<br>• CT Abdomen and Pelvis with contrast (CPT® 74177)<br>• CT Abdomen with contrast (CPT® 74160)<br>• MRI Abdomen without and with contrast (CPT® 74183)<br>• MRI Abdomen without and with contrast (CPT® 74183) and MRI Pelvis without and with contrast (CPT® 72197)<br>For individuals with thoracic disease:<br>• CT Chest with contrast (CPT® 71260) every 2 months for 1 year, then every 3 months for 1 year, then annually until year 5 after completion of therapy |


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

| Indication | Medically Necessary Imaging Study |
|---|---|
| Stage IA non-seminomatous germ cell tumors treated with orchiectomy alone (without risk factors) | ONE of the following, every 4 months for one year, every 6 months in the second year, and then annually for years 3, 4, and 5:<br>• CT Abdomen and Pelvis with contrast (CPT® 74177)<br>• CT Abdomen with contrast (CPT® 74160)<br>• MRI Abdomen without and with contrast (CPT® 74183)<br>• MRI Abdomen without and with contrast (CPT® 74183) and MRI Pelvis without and with contrast (CPT® 72197)<br>• Scrotal ultrasound (CPT® 76856 or CPT® 76857) to assess for a contralateral testis mass if one has not been conducted in the last 3 months |
| Stage IB non-seminomatous germ cell tumors treated with orchiectomy alone (with risk factors – lymphovascular invasion or invasion into spermatic cord/scrotum) | ONE of the following, every 4 months for years 1 and 2, then every 6 months for year 3, and then once in year 4:<br>• CT Abdomen and Pelvis with contrast (CPT® 74177)<br>• CT Abdomen with contrast (CPT® 74160)<br>• MRI Abdomen without and with contrast (CPT® 74183)<br>• MRI Abdomen without and with contrast (CPT® 74183) and MRI Pelvis without and with contrast (CPT® 72197)<br>• Scrotal ultrasound (CPT® 76856 or CPT® 76857) to assess for a contralateral testis mass if one has not been conducted in the last 3 months |


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

| Indication | Medically Necessary Imaging Study |
|---|---|
| Stage IA/IB non-seminomatous germ cell tumors treated with chemotherapy and/or primary RPLND | ONE of the following, annually for 2 years:<br>• CT Abdomen and Pelvis with contrast (CPT® 74177)<br>• CT Abdomen with contrast (CPT® 74160)<br>• MRI Abdomen without and with contrast (CPT® 74183)<br>• MRI Abdomen without and with contrast (CPT® 74183) and MRI Pelvis without and with contrast (CPT® 72197)<br>• Scrotal ultrasound (CPT® 76856 or CPT® 76857) to assess for a contralateral testis mass if one has not been conducted in the last 3 months |
| Stage II-III non-seminomatous germ cell tumors with complete response to chemotherapy +/- post-chemotherapy RPLND | ONE of the following, every 4 months in year 1, every 6 months in year 2, and then annually in year 3:<br>• CT Abdomen and Pelvis with contrast (CPT® 74177)<br>• CT Abdomen with contrast (CPT® 74160)<br>• MRI Abdomen without and with contrast (CPT® 74183)<br>• MRI Abdomen without and with contrast (CPT® 74183) and MRI Pelvis without and with contrast (CPT® 72197)<br><br>For individuals with known thoracic disease or thoracic symptoms, every 4 months in year 1, every 6 months in year 2, then annually until year 4 after completion of therapy:<br>• CT Chest with contrast (CPT® 71260) |


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

| Indication | Medically Necessary Imaging Study |
|---|---|
| Stage IIA, IIB, or IIC non-seminomatous germ cell tumors treated with post-primary RPLND AND adjuvant chemotherapy | ONE of the following, once at 3-4 months after completion of RPLND:<br>• CT Abdomen and Pelvis with contrast (CPT® 74177)<br>• CT Abdomen with contrast (CPT® 74160)<br>• MRI Abdomen without and with contrast (CPT® 74183)<br>• MRI Abdomen without and with contrast (CPT® 74183) and MRI Pelvis without and with contrast (CPT® 72197) |
| Stage IIA or IIB non-seminomatous germ cell tumors treated with post-primary RPLND WITHOUT adjuvant chemotherapy | ONE of the following, once at 4 months after completion of therapy and once in year 2:<br>• CT Abdomen and Pelvis with contrast (CPT® 74177)<br>• CT Abdomen with contrast (CPT® 74160)<br>• MRI Abdomen without and with contrast (CPT® 74183)<br>• MRI Abdomen without and with contrast (CPT® 74183) and MRI Pelvis without and with contrast (CPT® 72197) |
| All ovarian germ cell tumors | • CT Chest with contrast (CPT® 71260) and CT Abdomen and Pelvis with contrast (CPT® 74177) every 3 months for 2 years, every 6 months for an additional year, and then after year 3, only for signs and symptoms of recurrence |
| • Sex cord stromal tumors (male and female)<br>• Mature teratoma | • No routine advanced imaging is medically necessary for surveillance.<br>• For symptoms, elevated biomarkers, or suspicious findings on physical exam, see **Testicular, Ovarian and Extragonadal Germ Cell Tumors - Restaging/Recurrence (ONC-20.2)** for suspected recurrence. |
| Extragonadal germ cell tumors | • CT of the involved region every 3 months for one year and every 6 months for one year |


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

## Evidence Discussion

Pure seminoma:[1,13-16]

- Chest radiography is sufficient when compared with CT for follow-up of stage 1 pure seminoma and is recommended by NCCN. While CT is more sensitive than radiography for detecting recurrent disease in the chest, this added sensitivity is offset by lower specificity and a higher false positive detection rate for abnormalities that are not metastatic.
- Scrotal US does not have a role in the restaging of men with testicular cancer that has been established by orchiectomy, unless there is concern for contralateral tumor or equivocal clinical exam.
- CT Abdomen and Pelvis is the reference standard imaging test used for assessing the retroperitoneum. It is rapid, reproducible, and provides excellent imaging of the para-aortic and paracaval regions but does expose individuals to significant ionizing radiation.
- MRI of the abdomen and pelvis
  - MRI has comparable accuracy with CT for the detection of metastatic retroperitoneal lymph nodes and has the benefit of no ionizing radiation. The disadvantage of MRI is longer imaging time which can lead to motion artifact.
- CT of the abdomen and pelvis is the standard imaging test used for assessing the retroperitoneum for nodal metastasis but does expose the individual to high levels of ionizing radiation.
- NCCN guidelines recommended chest radiography for the surveillance of stage I nonseminomatous testicular cancer but chest CT with contrast is preferred in the presence of thoracic symptoms.

Nonseminoma:[1]

- CT of the abdomen and pelvis is the standard imaging test used for assessing the retroperitoneum for nodal metastasis but does expose the individual to high levels of ionizing radiation.
- NCCN guidelines recommended chest radiography for the surveillance of stage 1 nonseminomatous testicular cancer but chest CT with contrast is preferred in the presence of thoracic symptoms.
- MRI of the abdomen and pelvis shows comparable accuracy with CT in the detection of metastatic retroperitoneal lymph nodes and does not have high levels of ionizing radiation but is subject to motion artifact due to longer imaging time.
- Scrotal US does not have a role in the restaging of men with testicular cancer that has been established by orchiectomy, unless there is concern for contralateral tumor or equivocal clinical exam.


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

# References (ONC-20)

**v2.0.2026**

1. Gilligan T, Lin DW, Adra N, et al. National Comprehensive Cancer Network (NCCN) Guidelines Version 1.2026 – October 15, 2025. Testicular cancer, available at: https://www.nccn.org/professionals/physician_gls/pdf/testicular.pdf Referenced with permission from the NCCN Clinical Practice Guidelines in Oncology (NCCN Guidelines™) for Testicular cancer V1.2026 – October 15, 2025. ©2025 National Comprehensive Cancer Network, Inc. All rights reserved. The NCCN Guidelines™ and illustrations herein may not be reproduced in any form for any purpose without the express written permission of the NCCN. To view the most recent and complete version of the NCCN Guidelines™, go online to NCCN.org.
2. Armstrong DK, Alvarez RD, Backes FJ, et. al. National Comprehensive Cancer Network (NCCN) Guidelines Version 3.2025 – July 16, 2025. Ovarian cancer, including fallopian tube cancer and primary peritoneal cancer, available at: https://www.nccn.org/professionals/physician_gls/pdf/ovarian.pdf Referenced with permission from the NCCN Clinical Practice Guidelines in Oncology (NCCN Guidelines™) for Ovarian cancer V3.2025 – July 16, 2025. ©2025 National Comprehensive Cancer Network, Inc. All rights reserved. The NCCN Guidelines ™ and illustrations herein may not be reproduced in any form for any purpose without the express written permission of the NCCN. To view the most recent and complete version of the NCCN Guidelines™, go online to NCCN.org.
3. Salani R, Khanna N, Frimer M, Bristow RE, Chen LM. An update on post-treatment surveillance and diagnosis of recurrence in women with gynecologic malignancies: Society of Gynecologic Oncology (SGO) recommendations. *Gynecol Oncol*. 2017;146(1):3-10. doi:10.1016/j.ygyno.2017.03.022
4. Ganguly S, Gargy S, Basu A, et al. Multidisciplinary management of ovarian germ cell tumours-a single institutional study from India. *Ecancermedicalscience*. 2021;15:1290. Published 2021 Sep 14. doi:10.3332/ecancer.2021.1290
5. Al Harbi R, McNeish IA, El-Bahrawy M. Ovarian sex cord-stromal tumors: an update on clinical features, molecular changes, and management. *Int J Gynecol Cancer*. 2021;31(2):161-168. doi:10.1136/ijgc-2020-002018
6. Bourdel N, Huchon C, Abdel Wahab C, et al. Borderline ovarian tumors: Guidelines from the French national college of obstetricians and gynecologists (CNGOF). *Eur J Obstet Gynecol Reprod Biol.* 2021;256:492-501. doi:10.1016/j.ejogrb.2020.11.045
7. Ismail A, Choi S, Boussios S. Frontiers of Ovarian Carcinosarcoma. *Curr Treat Options Oncol*. 2023;24(12):1667-1682. doi:10.1007/s11864-023-01138-4
8. Conduit C, Lewin J, Weickhardt A, et al. Patterns of Relapse in Australian Patients With Clinical Stage 1 Testicular Cancer: Utility of the Australian and New Zealand Urogenital and Prostate Cancer Trials Group Surveillance Recommendations. *JCO Oncol Pract*. 2023;19(11):973-980. doi:10.1200/OP.23.00191
9. Dolci C, Ceppi L, Guerra L, et al. Role of 18 F-fluoro-2-deoxyglucose positron emission tomography/computed tomography (18F-FDG PET/CT) in malignant ovarian germ cell tumors: a single-center experience with long term follow-up. *Int J Gynecol Cancer*. 2019;29(8):1298-1303. doi:10.1136/ijgc-2019-000586
10. Aparicio J, Sánchez-Muñoz A, Ochenduszko S, et al. Treatment and Outcome of Patients with Stage IS Testicular Cancer: A Retrospective Study from the Spanish Germ Cell Cancer Group. *J Urol*. 2019;202(4):742-747. doi:10.1097/JU.0000000000000366
11. Hamilton RJ, Jewett MAS, Warde P, Hansen A. Optimal Management of High-risk Stage I Nonseminomatous Germ Cell Tumor: Surveillance is the Preferred Option. *Eur Urol Focus*. 2019;5(5):702-703. doi:10.1016/j.euf.2019.05.003
12. Stephenson A, Bass EB, Bixler BR, et al. Diagnosis and treatment of early-stage testicular cancer: AUA Guideline amendment 2023. *J Urol*. 2023;10.1097/JU.0000000000003694. doi:10.1097/JU.0000000000003694.
13. Harvey ML, Geldart TR, Duell R, Mead GM, Tung K. Routine computerised tomographic scans of the thorax in surveillance of stage I testicular non-seminomatous germ-cell cancer--a necessary risk? *Ann Oncol*. 2002;13:237-42.
14. Rizzo M, Ongaro L, Claps F, et al. Analysis of clinical utility of abdominopelvic computed tomography in the follow-up of Stage I seminoma: a single center evaluation. *Minerva Urol Nephrol*. 2021;73(1):84-89. doi:10.23736/S2724-6051.19.03562-8


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

15. Meyer CA, Conces DJ. Imaging of intrathoracic metastases of nonseminomatous germ cell tumors. *Chest Surg Clin N Am*. 2002;12:717-38.
16. Laukka M, Mannisto S, Beule A, Kouri M, Blomqvist C. Comparison between CT and MRI in detection of metastasis of the retroperitoneum in testicular germ cell tumors: a prospective trial. *Acta Oncol*. 2020;59:660-65.


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

Click Anywhere in the Header to Return to the Main Table of Contents



# Ovarian Cancer (ONC-21)

Guideline

Ovarian Cancer – General Considerations (ONC-21.0)
Screening for Ovarian Cancer (ONC-21.1)
Ovarian Cancer – Suspected/Diagnosis (ONC-21.2)
Ovarian Cancer – Initial Work-Up/Staging (ONC-21.3)
Ovarian Cancer – Restaging/Recurrence (ONC-21.4)
Ovarian Cancer – Surveillance (ONC-21.5)
References (ONC-21)


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

# Ovarian Cancer – General Considerations (ONC-21.0)

**ON.OC.0021.0.A**

**v2.0.2026**

- Ovarian cancers include: epithelial ovarian cancers, ovarian cancers of low malignant potential and mixed Müllerian tumors, primary peritoneal and fallopian tube cancers.
  - There are five main types of epithelial ovarian cancers:
    - High-grade serous carcinoma (HGSC) (70%)
    - Endometrioid carcinoma (EC) (10%)
    - Clear cell carcinoma (CCC) (10%)
    - Mucinous carcinoma (MC) (3%)
    - Low-grade serous carcinoma (LGSC) (<5%)
- Borderline tumors (formerly referred to as tumors of low malignant potential) usually have some feature of carcinoma when they recur.
- Fallopian tube and primary peritoneal are usually serous carcinoma.
- Germ cell tumors and sex cord stromal tumors (granulosa cell tumors), are imaged according to **Testicular, Ovarian and Extragonadal Germ Cell Cancer (ONC-20)**.


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

# Screening for Ovarian Cancer (ONC-21.1)

**ON.OC.0021.1.A**
**v2.0.2026**

| Indication | Medically Necessary Study |
|---|---|
| High-Risk Factors:<br>• Family history of BRCA 1 or BRCA 2 mutations<br>• Family history of ovarian cancer<br>• Hereditary ovarian cancer syndrome that includes ovarian, breast, and/or endometrial and gastrointestinal cancers [Lynch II syndrome] in multiple members of two to four generations<br>• Low parity<br>• Decreased fertility<br>• Delayed childbearing | • The use of advanced imaging for ovarian cancer screening is considered not medically necessary.<br>• Genetic counseling is recommended for women with an increased-risk family history. |
| Known BRCA 1 or BRCA 2 mutation | • Transvaginal ultrasound (CPT® 76830), combined with CA-125 for ovarian cancer screening is medically necessary annually starting at age 30, until risk-reducing salpingo-oophorectomy is performed. |

**Evidence Discussion**

According to ACR Appropriateness Criteria for ovarian cancer screening, any imaging in an average-risk individual is "usually not appropriate."[5]

There is much debate about the role of imaging in screening for ovarian cancer. This cancer has a low prevalence but is the leading cause of mortality in women in the United States. Average lifetime risk is 1.3%. There are factors that increase the risk such as family history, BRCA 1 or BRCA 2 mutations, nulliparity, lack of hormonal contraceptive use, and lack of breastfeeding. Genetic predisposition is associated with the highest increase in risk.

In individuals who are considered high-risk (personal or family history, genetic predisposition or elevated CA-125) ultrasound and color Doppler may be appropriate annual screening along with CA-125. Lu, et al. demonstrated a PPV 40% with specificity


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

of 99.9% using ROCA.[11] Studies showed that the risk for developing ovarian cancer increases with age beginning around age 30 years.[12]


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

# Ovarian Cancer – Suspected/Diagnosis (ONC-21.2)

**ON.OC.0021.2.A**

**v2.0.2026**

- See: **Complex Adnexal Masses (PV-5.3)** for imaging guidelines for evaluation of suspected ovarian malignancies.
- To differentiate the origin of pelvic masses that are not clearly of ovarian origin, see: **Suspected Adnexal Mass (PV-5.1)**.
- Germ cell tumors and sex cord stromal tumors (granulosa cell tumors), are imaged according to **Testicular, Ovarian and Extragonadal Germ Cell Cancer (ONC-20)**.

| Indication | Medically Necessary Imaging |
|---|---|
| • Pelvic signs or symptoms<br>• Palpable pelvic mass | • Transvaginal (TV) ultrasound imaging (CPT® 76830) and/or Pelvic ultrasound (CPT® 76856 or CPT® 76857) |
| • Ultrasound shows complex and/or solid adnexal mass suspicious for ovarian malignancy or<br>• Any suspicious signs/symptoms for ovarian malignancy (ascites, abdominal symptoms such as distension or tenderness, elevated CA-125, elevated LFTs, obstructive uropathy) | ANY of the following:<br>• MRI Pelvis without and with contrast (CPT® 72197)<br>◦ MRI Pelvis without contrast (CPT® 72195) if contrast is contraindicated<br>• CT Abdomen and Pelvis with contrast (CPT® 74177)<br>◦ MRI Abdomen and MRI Pelvis without and with contrast (CPT® 74183 and CPT® 72197) are medically necessary in lieu of CT for individuals with renal insufficiency or contrast allergy.<br>◦ CT Abdomen and Pelvis without and with contrast (CT Urogram – CPT® 74178) only for symptoms of obstructive uropathy* |

### Evidence Discussion

If there is a question about the pelvic mass evaluation by ultrasound, transvaginal or pelvic ultrasound using O-RADS or IOTA is medically necessary to clarify risk before surgery. Accurate diagnosis of adnexal pathology is imperative in order to limit invasive interventions for benign lesions and improve preoperative triage to a gynecologic oncologist for high-risk lesions.[16] In order to standardize reporting of adnexal lesions,


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

the American College of Radiology (ACR) has created the Ovarian-Adnexal Reporting and Data-System (O-RADS). A meta-analysis of 26 studies demonstrated that O-RADS has high sensitivity for detection of malignancy (95%).[16] A classification of O-RADS US Category 2 has an extremely low risk of malignancy (<1%), while a Category 5 has a high risk of malignancy (≥50%). For an indeterminate lesion on ultrasound or features concerning for malignancy, adjunct imaging with MRI is medically necessary to aid in preoperative triage. For individuals who have renal insufficiency and therefore are unable to undergo contrasted CT imaging of the abdomen and pelvis, the accepted substitute imaging is MRI with contrast.[1] This imaging will provide the necessary level of soft tissue detail that would not be achievable with a non-contrasted CT.


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

# Ovarian Cancer – Initial Work-Up/Staging (ONC-21.3)

**ON.OC.0021.3.A**
**v2.0.2026**

- Germ cell tumors and sex cord stromal tumors (granulosa cell tumors), are imaged according to Testicular, Ovarian and Extragonadal Germ Cell Cancer (ONC-20).

| Indication | Medically Necessary Imaging Study |
|---|---|
| Initial staging of all newly diagnosed ovarian cancer, if imaging has not yet been performed | • CT Abdomen and Pelvis with contrast (CPT® 74177)<br>◦ MRI Abdomen and MRI Pelvis without and with contrast (CPT® 74183 and CPT® 72197) in lieu of CT for individuals with renal insufficiency or contrast allergy<br>• CT Chest with contrast (CPT® 71260) or CT Chest without contrast (CPT® 71250) for:<br>◦ Abnormal signs/symptoms of pulmonary disease<br>◦ Abnormal chest x-ray<br>◦ Concern for metastatic disease (i.e., elevated tumor markers, abdominal symptoms) |
| ANY of the following:<br>• Primary peritoneal disease with biopsy-proven malignancy consistent with ovarian carcinoma<br>• Elevated tumor markers with negative or inconclusive CT imaging | ONE of the following:<br>• MRI Abdomen without and with contrast (CPT® 74183) and/or MRI Pelvis without and with contrast (CPT® 72197)<br>OR<br>• PET/CT (CPT® 78815) |
| If both CT and MRI are inconclusive | • PET/CT (CPT® 78815) |
| If CT, MRI, and PET/CT are inconclusive | • PET/MRI (CPT® 78813 and 76498) |


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

## Evidence Discussion

If advanced imaging was not already performed, it is necessary to image the abdomen and pelvis with CT. NCCN stated that advanced imaging may improve assessment of metastases, staging, and preoperative planning.[1] For individuals who have renal insufficiency and therefore are unable to undergo contrasted CT imaging of the abdomen and pelvis, the preferred substitute imaging is MRI with contrast. This imaging will provide the necessary level of soft tissue detail that would not be achievable with a non-contrasted CT. For those with primary peritoneal disease or inconclusive or conflicting CT imaging, NCCN stated "MRI has been shown to provide equivalent accuracy for staging and comparable accuracy for predicting peritoneal tumor volume, and can be useful if CT results are inconclusive".[1] Chest imaging via CT either with or without contrast is necessary for suspected pulmonary disease or if there is concern for metastatic disease. NCCN stated this imaging is helpful to detect pleural or pulmonary metastases, as well as pleural effusion, which may help with treatment planning.[1] PET is a helpful tool in evaluation of indeterminate lesions on other imaging as it is shown to have high accuracy for detection of metastases.[1]


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

# Ovarian Cancer – Restaging/Recurrence (ONC-21.4)

**ON.OC.0021.4.A**

**v2.0.2026**

- Germ cell tumors and sex cord stromal tumors (granulosa cell tumors), are imaged according to Testicular, Ovarian and Extragonadal Germ Cell Cancer (ONC-20).

| Indication | Medically Necessary Imaging Study |
|---|---|
| Completely resected or definitively treated with chemotherapy and normal(ized) tumor markers | • No advanced imaging is medically necessary |
| ANY of the following:<br>• Unresected disease<br>• Unknown preoperative markers<br>• Difficult or abnormal examination<br>• Elevated LFTs<br>• Elevated tumor markers<br>• Signs or symptoms of recurrence | • CT Abdomen and Pelvis with contrast (CPT® 74177)<br>◦ MRI Abdomen and MRI Pelvis without and with contrast (CPT® 74183 and CPT® 72197) in lieu of CT for individuals with renal insufficiency or contrast allergy.<br>• CT Chest with contrast (CPT® 71260) or CT Chest without contrast (CPT® 71250) for ANY of the following:<br>◦ Known prior thoracic disease<br>◦ New or worsening pulmonary symptoms<br>◦ New or worsening chest x-ray findings<br>◦ Rising tumor markers |
| Monitoring response to treatment (every 2 cycles, or ~every 6 to 8 weeks) | • CT Abdomen and Pelvis with contrast (CPT® 74177)<br>◦ MRI Abdomen and MRI Pelvis without and with contrast (CPT® 74183 and CPT® 72197) in lieu of CT for individuals with renal insufficiency or contrast allergy.<br>• CT Chest with contrast (CPT® 71260) or CT Chest without contrast (CPT® 71250) for ANY of the following:<br>◦ Known prior thoracic disease<br>◦ New or worsening pulmonary symptoms<br>◦ New or worsening chest x-ray findings |


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

| Indication | Medically Necessary Imaging Study |
|---|---|
| • CT negative or inconclusive and CA-125 continues to rise or elevated LFTs<br>• Conventional imaging failed to demonstrate tumor or if persistent radiographic mass with rising tumor markers | ONE of the following:<br>• MRI Abdomen and MRI Pelvis without and with contrast (CPT® 74183 and CPT® 72197)<br>OR<br>• PET/CT (CPT® 78815) |
| If both CT and MRI are inconclusive | • PET/CT (CPT® 78815) |
| If CT, MRI, and PET/CT are inconclusive | • PET/MRI (CPT® 78813 and 76498) |

**Evidence Discussion**

If disease was completely resected and normal CA-125 or other markers normal, then no imaging is medically necessary. If there any question or signs or symptoms of recurrence, then the appropriate imaging is similar to that of initial staging. To monitor response to treatment, CT is medically necessary every two cycles.

NCCN stated that advanced imaging may improve assessment of metastases and assist in staging.[1] For individuals who have renal insufficiency and therefore are unable to undergo contrasted CT imaging of the abdomen and pelvis, the preferred substitute imaging is MRI with contrast. This imaging will provide the necessary level of soft tissue detail that would not be achievable with a non-contrasted CT. NCCN stated "MRI has been shown to provide equivalent accuracy for staging and comparable accuracy for predicting peritoneal tumor volume, and can be useful if CT results are inconclusive".[1] Thus, MRI is a tool presented for use in the event that CT results are inconclusive or conflict with the clinical picture. Chest imaging via CT either with or without contrast is necessary for suspected pulmonary disease or if there is concern for metastatic disease. NCCN stated this imaging is helpful to detect pleural or pulmonary metastases, as well as pleural effusion, which may help with treatment planning.[1] PET/CT is a helpful tool in evaluation of indeterminate lesions on other imaging as it is shown to have high accuracy for detection of metastases.[1]


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

# Ovarian Cancer – Surveillance (ONC-21.5)

**ON.OC.0021.5.A**

**v2.0.2026**

- Germ cell tumors and sex cord stromal tumors (granulosa cell tumors), are imaged according to Testicular, Ovarian and Extragonadal Germ Cell Cancer (ONC-20).

| Indication | Medically Necessary Imaging Study |
|---|---|
| Stages I-III | • Advanced imaging is not medically necessary for surveillance |
| Measurable metastatic disease on maintenance therapy or being monitored off therapy | Every 3 months for up to 5 years after completion of active treatment:<br>• CT Abdomen and Pelvis with contrast (CPT® 74177)<br>◦ MRI Abdomen and MRI Pelvis without and with contrast (CPT® 74183 and CPT® 72197) in lieu of CT for individuals with renal insufficiency.<br>• CT with contrast of previously involved body areas<br>• CT Chest with contrast (CPT® 71260) or CT Chest without contrast (CPT® 71250) for known history of chest involvement |

### Evidence Discussion

For stages I to III, there is no need for advanced imaging if there are no signs or symptoms. If on maintenance or if there is measurable disease present, CT of the areas involved is medically necessary every three months for up to 5 years. For individuals who have renal insufficiency and therefore are unable to undergo contrasted CT imaging of the abdomen and pelvis, the preferred substitute imaging is MRI with contrast. This imaging will provide the necessary level of soft tissue detail that would not be achievable with a non-contrasted CT.[1]


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

# References (ONC-21)

**v2.0.2026**

1. Armstrong DK, Alvarex RD, Backes FJ, et al. National Comprehensive Cancer Network (NCCN) Guidelines Version 3.2025 – July 16, 2025. Ovarian Cancer Including Fallopian Tube Cancer and Primary Peritoneal Cancer available at: https://www.nccn.org/professionals/physician_gls/pdf/ovarian.pdf Referenced with permission from the NCCN Clinical Practice Guidelines in Oncology (NCCN Guidelines™) for Ovarian Cancer Including Fallopian Tube Cancer and Primary Peritoneal Cancer V3.2025 – July 16, 2025. ©2025 National Comprehensive Cancer Network, Inc. All rights reserved. The NCCN Guidelines™ and illustrations herein may not be reproduced in any form for any purpose without the express written permission of the NCCN. To view the most recent and complete version of the NCCN Guidelines™, go online to NCCN.org.
2. Daly MB, Pal T, AlHilli Z, et al. National Comprehensive Cancer Network (NCCN) Guidelines Version V2.2026 – October 10, 2025. Genetic/Familial High-Risk Assessment: Breast, Ovarian, and Pancreatic available at: https://www.nccn.org/professionals/physician_gls/pdf/genetics_bopp.pdf Referenced with permission from the NCCN Clinical Practice Guidelines in Oncology (NCCN Guidelines™) for Ovarian cancer V2.2026 – October 10, 2025. ©2025 National Comprehensive Cancer Network, Inc. All rights reserved. The NCCN Guidelines™ and illustrations herein may not be reproduced in any form for any purpose without the express written permission of the NCCN. To view the most recent and complete version of the NCCN Guidelines™, go online to NCCN.org.
3. US Preventive Services Task Force, Grossman DC, Curry SJ, et al. Screening for Ovarian Cancer: US Preventive Services Task Force Recommendation Statement. *JAMA*. 2018;319(6):588-594. doi:10.1001/jama.2017.21926
4. Bourdel N, Huchon C, Abdel Wahab C, et al. Borderline ovarian tumors: Guidelines from the French national college of obstetricians and gynecologists (CNGOF). *Eur J Obstet Gynecol Reprod Biol*. 2021;256:492-501. doi:10.1016/j.ejogrb.2020.11.045
5. Expert Panel on GYN and OB Imaging, Venkatesan AM, Kilcoyne A, et al. ACR Appropriateness Criteria® Ovarian Cancer Screening: 2024 Update. *J Am Coll Radiol*. 2025;22(5S):S359-S371. doi:10.1016/j.jacr.2025.02.016
6. Rosenthal AN, Fraser LSM, Phipott S. Evidence of stage shift in women diagnosed with ovarian cancer during phase II of the United Kingdom familial ovarian cancer screening study. *J Clin Oncol*. 2017;35(13):13:1411-1420. doi:10.1200/JCO.2016.69.9330.
7. Shinagare AB, O'Neill AC, Cheng S, et al. Advanced high-grade serous ovarian cancer: frequency and timing of thoracic metastases and the implications for chest imaging follow-up. *Radiology*. 2015;277(3):733-740. doi:10.1148/radiol.2015142467.
8. Delgado Bolton RC, Aide N, Colletti PM, et al. EANM guideline on the role of 2-[18F]FDG PET/CT in diagnosis, staging, prognostic value, therapy assessment and restaging of ovarian cancer, endorsed by the American College of Nuclear Medicine (ACNM), the Society of Nuclear Medicine and Molecular Imaging (SNMMI) and the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). *Eur J Nucl Med Mol Imaging*. 2021;48(10):3286-3302. doi:10.1007/s00259-021-05450-9
9. Engbersen MP, Van Driel W, Lambregts D, Lahaye M. The role of CT, PET-CT, and MRI in ovarian cancer. *Br J Radiol*. 2021;94(1125):20210117. doi:10.1259/bjr.20210117
10. Andriotti, RT, Timmerman, D, Strachowski, LM, et al, O-RADS US risk stratification and management system a concensus guideline from ACR ovarian-adnexal reporting and data system committee. *Radiology*. 2020; 294(1):168-185.
11. Lu KH, Skales S, Hernandez MA, et al. A 2 Stage ovarian cancer screening strategy using the Risk of Ovarian Cancer Algorithm (ROCA) identifies early-stage incident cancers and demonstrates high positive predictive values. *Cancer*. 2013;119(19) 3454-3461.
12. Kotsopoulos J, Gronwold J, Karlan B, et al. Age-specific ovarian cancer risks among women with a BRCA1 or BRCA2 mutation. *Gynecol Oncol*. 2018;150(1):85-91. doi:10.1016/j.ygyno.2018.05.011.
13. American College of Radiology Committee on O-RADS™ (Ovarian and Adnexal). O-RADS MRI Risk Score Governing Concepts. Revised May 2024.
14. American College of Radiology Committee on O-RADS™ (Ovarian and Adnexal). O-RADS Ultrasound Risk Score Governing Concepts. Revised November 2022.


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

15. Wang PS, Schoeck OG, Horrow MM. Benign-appearing incidental adnexal cysts at US, CT, and MRI: Putting the ACR, O-RADS, and SRU Guidelines all together. *Radiographics*. 2022;42(2):609-624. doi:10.1148/rg.210091.
16. Zhang Q, Dai X, Li W. Systematic review and meta-analysis of O-RADS ultrasound and O-RADS MRI for risk assessment of ovarian and adnexal lesions. *AJR Am J Roentgenol*. 2023;221(1):21-33. doi:10.2214/AJR.22.28396.


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

Click Anywhere in the Header to Return to the Main Table of Contents



# Uterine Cancer (ONC-22)

Guideline

Uterine Cancer – General Considerations (ONC-22.0)
Uterine Cancer – Suspected/Diagnosis (ONC-22.1)
Uterine Cancer – Initial Work-Up/Staging (ONC-22.2)
Uterine Cancer – Restaging/Recurrence (ONC-22.3)
Uterine Cancer – Surveillance (ONC-22.4)
Gestational Trophoblastic Neoplasia (GTN) (ONC-22.5)
References (ONC-22)


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

# Uterine Cancer – General Considerations (ONC-22.0)

**ON.UC.0022.0.A**

**v2.0.2026**

- Gestational trophoblastic neoplasia (GTN) – see: **Molar Pregnancy and Gestational Trophoblastic Neoplasia (GTN) (PV-16.1)** in the Pelvic Imaging Guidelines.
- Most common cell type is adenocarcinoma. Uterine sarcomas are also imaged according to this guideline.
- Staging of uterine cancer is primarily surgical. Advanced imaging is not routinely medically necessary pre-operatively for laparoscopic/minimally invasive surgery unless initial staging criteria are met. Pelvic and para-aortic lymphadenectomy can still be performed.

### Health Equity Considerations

Endometrial cancer develops in the endometrium in the lining of the uterus and is the most common gynecological malignancy in the United States. Risk factors include increasing age, hormone therapy, obesity, and family history/genetic predisposition.[9] According to the National Cancer Institute's Surveillance, Epidemiology, and End Results Program (SEER), in 2025, there were 69,120 estimated new cases and 13,860 estimated deaths due to endometrial cancer. In addition, SEER reports that non-Hispanic Black individuals have the highest rate of new cases of uterine cancer at 30.6 per 100,000 compared to 27.6 per 100,000 persons for non-Hispanic White individuals.[10] Factors that have impacted the rise in new uterine cancer cases overall include a decline in hysterectomy rates, lower use of estrogen plus progesterone hormonal therapy, and an increasing obesity rate.[11]

An annual increase in morality rates among non-Hispanic Black, Hispanic, and non-Hispanic Asian and Pacific Islander individuals was higher than in non-Hispanic White women (1.5%, 1.7%, 2.5%, and 1.0%, respectively) over the years 1999 to 2016. Non-Hispanic Black women experience uterine cancer mortality at a twofold greater rate than any other racial or ethnic group.[12] Rodriguez et al. noted non-Hispanic Black women had the lowest percentage of adherence to the National Comprehensive Cancer Network clinical guidelines.[13] Proposed factors leading to this increase in mortality rates among non-Hispanic Black women include structural racism and the inability to access and receive quality healthcare services, provider issues with bias and discrimination affecting clinical decision making, and individual issues like genetic differences, educational differences, and socioeconomic differences such as no or publicly funded insurance.[11] As the increasing rate of endometrial cancer continues, factors impacting


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

women, especially non-Hispanic Black women, need further investigation in the hopes of reducing disease incidence.


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

# Uterine Cancer – Suspected/Diagnosis (ONC-22.1)

**ON.UC.0022.1.A**

**v2.0.2026**

- See: **Abnormal Uterine Bleeding (PV-2.1)** in the Pelvic Imaging Guidelines for evaluation of suspected uterine malignancies.


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

# Uterine Cancer – Initial Work-Up/Staging (ONC-22.2)

**ON.UC.0022.2.A**
**v2.0.2026**

| Indication | Medically Necessary Imaging Study |
|---|---|
| ANY of the following:<br>• Extra-uterine disease suspected<br>• To assess local extent of tumor prior to fertility-sparing surgery for well-differentiated Stage IA (grade 1) uterine cancer<br>• Poor surgical candidate (due to medical comorbidities) considering medical therapy | • MRI Pelvis without and with contrast (CPT® 72197)<br>• Transvaginal ultrasound (CPT® 76830) if MRI is contraindicated<br>• Chest x-ray<br>◦ CT Chest with contrast (CPT® 71260) for:<br>▪ New or worsening pulmonary symptoms<br>▪ New or worsening chest x-ray findings<br>In addition, for surgical staging:<br>• Lymph system imaging (lymphoscintigraphy, CPT® 78195)<br>◦ SPECT/CT (CPT® 78830) if requested |
| ANY of the following:<br>• Abdominal symptoms or abnormal examination findings<br>• Elevated LFTs<br>• Other imaging studies suggest liver involvement | ONE of the following:<br>• CT Abdomen and Pelvis with contrast (CPT® 74177)<br>• CT Abdomen with contrast (CPT® 74160) |


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

| Indication | Medically Necessary Imaging Study |
|---|---|
| ANY of the following high-risk histologies:<br>• Papillary serous<br>• Clear cell<br>• High-grade/poorly differentiated endometrioid carcinoma<br>• Uterine sarcomas:<br>◦ Carcinosarcoma<br>◦ Soft tissue sarcoma of the uterus<br>◦ Leiomyosarcoma<br>◦ Rhabdomyosarcoma<br>◦ Undifferentiated sarcoma<br>◦ Endometrial stromal sarcoma | • CT Chest (CPT® 71260) and CT Abdomen and Pelvis (CPT® 74177) with contrast<br>• Lymph system imaging (lymphoscintigraphy, CPT® 78195)<br>◦ SPECT/CT (CPT® 78830) if requested |
| Tumors detected incidentally or incompletely staged surgically ***and*** ANY of the following high-risk features:<br>• Myoinvasion >50%<br>• Cervical stromal involvement<br>• Lymphovascular invasion<br>• Tumor >2cm | • CT Chest (CPT® 71260) and CT Abdomen and Pelvis (CPT® 74177) with contrast |
| Inconclusive findings on conventional imaging | • PET/CT scan (CPT® 78815) |

## Evidence Discussion

- The National Comprehensive Cancer Network guidelines (NCCN) for non-fertility sparing treatment recommended considering chest imaging with chest x-ray.[1] If an abnormality is seen on chest x-ray, or if there are symptoms of chest involvement, then chest CT is medically necessary. Both NCCN and the American College of Radiology noted that MRI of the pelvis is the preferred imaging modality when pretreatment assessment of local tumor extent is indicated due to suspected extra-uterine disease or prior to fertility sparing treatment.[1,6]
- Transvaginal ultrasound can be done if MRI is contraindicated or unavailable.[1]
- If distant metastatic disease is suspected based on abnormal physical examination findings, or for high-grade endometrioid carcinoma, serous, clear cell or


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

carcinosarcoma, cross-sectional imaging with CT Chest and CT Abdomen and Pelvis is medically necessary.[1]

- For incidental findings of endometrial cancer after hysterectomy or incompletely surgically staged with uterine risk factors (myoinvasion of over 50%, cervical stromal involvement or tumor larger than 2cm), consideration should be given to CT Chest/ Abdomen and Pelvis to evaluate for distant metastatic disease per NCCN guidelines.[1]
- FDG-PET/CT is medically necessary in select individuals if metastases is suspected and other cross-sectional imaging is inconclusive.[1]
- Although endometrial cancer (EC) is surgically staged, preoperative imaging can help tailor surgery and medical treatment in cases as outlined by NCCN and ACR.[1,6] MRI or transvaginal ultrasound is valuable to assess local tumor extent. CT and/or PET-CT is valuable to assess lymph node metastases and distant spread. Preoperative imaging may identify deep myometrial invasion, cervical stromal involvement and metastatic disease. Although these imaging methods may provide information about likely tumor stage, the reported accuracies for preoperative staging of endometrial cancer by conventional imaging have not yet been good enough to replace surgical staging.[8]
- MRI Pelvis has long been established as a valuable imaging method in the preoperative staging of endometrial cancer because it allows the most accurate evaluation of the extent of the pelvis tumor. A meta-analysis showed that the efficacy of contrast-enhanced MRI is significantly better than that of non-contrast MRI and US, and tended toward better results than CT, in evaluating the depth of myometrial invasion in individuals with EC.[6]
- Transvaginal ultrasound may be used if MRI is contraindicated. A study found this imaging modality to have a 79.5% sensitivity and an 89.6% specificity for detecting deep myometrial invasion. However, MRI showed greater accuracy than ultrasound and ultrasound is limited in the setting of concomitant benign disease.[6]
- CT Chest, Abdomen and Pelvis may be used for detection of lymph node metastases, if distant metastatic disease is suspected as per NCCN and ACR listed above.[1,6]
- FDG-PET/CT is medically necessary if distant metastatic disease is suspected and CT scans are inconclusive. A meta-analysis reported that the overall pooled sensitivity, specificity, and accuracy of using FDG-PET/CT for detection of lymph node metastasis in EC was 72.0%, 94.0%, and 88.0%, respectively.[6]


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

# Uterine Cancer – Restaging/Recurrence (ONC-22.3)

**ON.UC.0022.3.UOH**
**v2.0.2026**

| Indication | Medically Necessary Imaging Study |
|---|---|
| • Unresected disease<br>• Medically inoperable disease<br>• Incomplete surgical staging<br>• Difficult or abnormal examination<br>• Elevated LFTs or rising tumor markers<br>• Signs or symptoms of recurrence | • CT Chest (CPT® 71260) **and**<br>• CT Abdomen and Pelvis with contrast (CPT® 74177) |
| Monitoring response to chemotherapy (every 2 cycles, ~every 6-8 weeks) for:<br>• Unresected primary disease<br>• Metastatic disease | • CT Abdomen and Pelvis with contrast (CPT® 74177)<br>• CT Chest with contrast (CPT® 71260) for:<br>◦ Known prior thoracic disease<br>◦ New or worsening pulmonary symptoms<br>◦ New or worsening chest x-ray findings |
| ANY of the following:<br>• After fertility sparing treatment<br>• Inconclusive CT scan findings | • MRI Pelvis without and with contrast (CPT® 72197) |
| • Inconclusive findings on conventional imaging | • PET/CT (CPT® 78815) |

**Evidence Discussion**

- Recurrence rates for low- or intermediate-risk individuals with endometrial cancer are infrequent. A recent review of post-treatment surveillance and diagnosis of recurrence in women with gynecologic cancers sponsored by the Society of Gynecologic Oncology recommends that radiologic evaluation be used only to investigate suspicion of recurrent disease because of symptoms or physical exam and not for routine surveillance after treatment.[5]
- CT Chest, Abdomen, and Pelvis is useful for suspected recurrence of disease based on abnormal physical examination findings and/or new pelvis, abdominal or pulmonary symptoms.[1] A study reported that 45 asymptomatic individuals had


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

routine CT scans, and recurrence was diagnosed by CT in only 2 (4.4%), whereas 37 symptomatic women had CT scans for suspicion of recurrence, and it was confirmed by CT in 17 (46%).[6]

- MRI of the pelvis may be done after fertility sparing treatment for persistent endometrial carcinoma.[1] In individuals with persistent endometrial carcinoma after 6 months of failed hormonal therapy, pelvic MRI to exclude myoinvasion and nodal/ovarian metastasis is recommended before continuing fertility-sparing therapy.[1]
- FDG-PET/CT may give further clinically applicable information in cases where conventional imaging is inconclusive. As per the prior meta-analysis, the overall pooled sensitivity, specificity, and accuracy of using FDG-PET/CT for detection of lymph node metastasis in EC was 72.0%, 94.0%, and 88.0%, respectively.[6]


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

# Uterine Cancer – Surveillance (ONC-22.4)

**ON.UC.0022.4.A**
**v2.0.2026**

| Indication | Medically Necessary Imaging Study |
|---|---|
| Stage I-III of uterine carcinoma | Advanced imaging is not routinely medically necessary |
| Measurable metastatic disease on maintenance therapy or being monitored off therapy | Every 3 months for up to 5 years after completion of definitive treatment:<br>• CT Abdomen and Pelvis with contrast (CPT® 74177)<br>• CT with contrast of previously involved body areas |
| All stages of uterine sarcoma:<br>• Soft tissue sarcoma of the uterus<br>• Leiomyosarcoma<br>• Adenosarcoma<br>• Carcinosarcoma<br>• Rhabdomyosarcoma<br>• Undifferentiated sarcoma<br>• Endometrial stromal sarcoma | CT Chest (CPT® 71260) and CT Abdomen and Pelvis with contrast (CPT® 74177) every 3 months for 3 years, then every 6 months for 2 years, and then every 1-2 years until year 10 |

**Evidence Discussion**

- Advanced imaging is not medically necessary for surveillance for non-metastatic, asymptomatic disease in endometrial cancer. A review of post-treatment surveillance and diagnosis of recurrence in individuals with gynecologic cancers sponsored by the Society of Gynecologic Oncology recommended that radiologic evaluation be used only to investigate suspicion of recurrent disease because of symptoms or physical exam and not for routine surveillance after treatment.[5]
- Measurable metastatic disease can be followed with CT Abdomen and Pelvis and CT of previously involved body areas every 3 months for 5 years after treatment.
- For all stages of uterine sarcoma, CT Chest, Abdomen and Pelvis is medically necessary every 3 months for 3 years, every 6 months for 2 years, and then every 1-2 years until year 10.[1]


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

# Gestational Trophoblastic Neoplasia (GTN) (ONC-22.5)

**ON.UC.0022.5.A**

**v2.0.2026**

- The most common form of gestational trophoblastic disease (GTD) is hydatidiform mole (HM), a benign form, also known as molar pregnancy.
  - See: **Molar Pregnancy and GTN (PV-16.1)**
- Gestational trophoblastic neoplastic disorders including a malignant form of GTD, and can present as invasive mole, choriocarcinoma, placental site trophoblastic tumor (PSTT), or epithelioid trophoblastic tumor (ETT). GTN cells are malignant and can metastasize to other organs such as lungs, brain, bone and vagina. These tumors have a high likelihood of cure and treatment with methotrexate usually allows for fertility preservation.
- Surveillance is generally with serial monitoring of hCG levels, and advanced imaging is reserved for high-risk histologies where hCG levels may not be a reliable marker.

| Indication | Medically Necessary Imaging Study |
|---|---|
| Initial staging | • CT Chest with contrast (CPT® 71260)<br>• CT Abdomen and Pelvis with contrast (CPT® 74177) |
| EITHER of the following:<br>• Pulmonary metastases noted on CT scan<br>• Signs/symptoms of CNS involvement | • MRI Brain without and with contrast (CPT® 70553) |
| EITHER of the following:<br>• Monitoring response to systemic therapy (every 2 cycles, i.e., 6-8 weeks)<br>• Suspected progression | • CT Chest with contrast (CPT® 71260)<br>• CT Abdomen and Pelvis with contrast (CPT® 74177) |


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

| Indication | Medically Necessary Imaging Study |
|---|---|
| Surveillance for any of the following high risk histologies:<br>• Placental site trophoblastic tumor (PSTT)<br>• Epithelioid trophoblastic tumor (ETT) | Annually for 2 years:<br>• CT Chest with contrast (CPT® 71260)<br>• CT Abdomen and Pelvis with contrast (CPT® 74177) |

**Evidence Discussion**

- The most common form of GTD is hydatidiform mole (HM), also known as molar pregnancy. HMs are considered a benign, premalignant disease.[7]
- Initial determination of suspected HM is often made based on ultrasound findings in combination with clinical symptoms and hCG levels.[7]
- Gestational trophoblastic neoplastic disorders include a malignant form of GTD, and can present as invasive mole, choriocarcinoma, placental site trophoblastic tumor (PSTT), or epithelioid trophoblastic tumor (ETT). GTN cells are malignant and can metastasize to other organs such as lungs, brain, bone, and vagina.
- Initial staging of GTN includes a CT of chest and CT of abdomen and pelvis.
- If pulmonary metastases are noted on CT Chest or for signs or symptoms of central nervous system (CNS) involvement, MRI Brain is medically necessary to evaluate for metastatic disease. Rates of CNS metastases are low with post-molar GTN, but approximately 20% of individuals with choriocarcinoma have CNS involvement.[7]
- For monitoring response to treatment or for suspected progression CT Chest, Abdomen and Pelvis is performed.
- Post-treatment surveillance in general is done with monitoring of hCG levels in individuals with post-molar GTN or choriocarcinoma, where hCG is a reliable tumor marker.[7]
- Surveillance imaging for placental site or epithelioid trophoblastic tumor can be done with CT Chest, Abdomen, and Pelvis annually for 2 years. Post-treatment imaging is medically necessary for follow-up after treatment of PSTT and ETT, where hCG is a less reliable tumor marker.[7]


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

# References (ONC-22)

**v2.0.2026**

1. Abu-Rustum NR, Campos SM, Amarnath S, et al. National Comprehensive Cancer Network (NCCN) Guidelines Version 2.2026 – November 14, 2025. Uterine Neoplasms, available at: https://www.nccn.org/professionals/physician_gls/pdf/uterine.pdf Referenced with permission from the NCCN Clinical Practice Guidelines in Oncology (NCCN Guidelines™) for Uterine Neoplasms V2.2026 – November 14, 2025. ©2025 National Comprehensive Cancer Network, Inc. All rights reserved. The NCCN Guidelines™ and illustrations herein may not be reproduced in any form for any purpose without the express written permission of the NCCN. To view the most recent and complete version of the NCCN Guidelines™, go online to NCCN.org.
2. Toboni M, Kurnit K, Erickson B, Powell M, Secord AA, Fader AN. Updates and controversies in the management of uterine serous carcinoma and uterine carcinosarcoma. *Int J Gynecol Cancer*. 2025;35(3):101672. doi:10.1016/j.ijgc.2025.101672
3. Sherertz T, Jhingran A, Biagioli M, et al. Executive summary of the American Radium Society appropriate use criteria for management of uterine clear cell and serous carcinomas. *Int J Gynecol Cancer*. 2022;32(12):1549-1554. Published 2022 Dec 5. doi:10.1136/ijgc-2022-003673
4. Hamilton CA, Pothuri B, Arend RC, et al. Endometrial cancer: A society of gynecologic oncology evidence-based review and recommendations. *Gynecol Oncol.* 2021;160(3):817-826. doi:10.1016/j.ygyno.2020.12.021
5. Salani R, Khanna N, Frimer M, Bristow RE, Chen LM. An update on post-treatment surveillance and diagnosis of recurrence in women with gynecologic malignancies: Society of Gynecologic Oncology (SGO) recommendations. *Gynecol Oncol.* 2017;146(1):3-10. doi:10.1016/j.ygyno.2017.03.022
6. Expert Panel on GYN and OB Imaging, Reinhold C, Ueno Y, et al. ACR Appropriateness Criteria® Pretreatment Evaluation and Follow-Up of Endometrial Cancer. *J Am Coll Radiol*. 2020;17(11S):S472-S486. doi:10.1016/j.jacr.2020.09.001
7. Abu-Rustum NR, Campos SM, Amarnath S, et al. National Comprehensive Cancer Network (NCCN) Guidelines Version 2.2026 – November 21, 2025. Gestational Trophoblastic Neoplasia, available at: https://www.nccn.org/professionals/physician_gls/pdf/gtn.pdf. Referenced with permission from the NCCN Clinical Practice Guidelines in Oncology (NCCN Guidelines™ for Gestational Trophoblastic Neoplasia, V2.2026 November 21, 2025. ®2025 National Comprehensive Cancer Network, Inc. All rights reserved. The NCCN Guidelines™ and illustrations herein may not be reproduced in any form for any purpose without the express written permission of the NCCN. To view the most recent and complete version of the NCCN Guidelines™, go online to NCCN.org.
8. Sbarra M, Lupinelli M, Brook OR, Venkatesan AM, Nougaret S. Imaging of Endometrial Cancer. *Radiol Clin North Am.* 2023;61(4):609-625. doi:10.1016/j.rcl.2023.02.007
9. Endometrial Cancer Treatment (PDQ®). National Cancer Institute. https://www.cancer.gov/types/uterine/hp/endometrial-treatment-pdq#_73
10. Cancer Stat Facts: Uterine Cancer. National Cancer Institute Surveillance, Epidemiology, and End Results Program. https://seer.cancer.gov/statfacts/html/corp.html
11. Seay K, Katcher A, Hare M, Rahman H, Sison C, Goldberg GL, Frimer M. Racial disparities in the treatment of endometrial intraepithelial neoplasia in postmenopausal women. *Gynecol Oncol Rep*. 2024 May 26;54:101418. doi: 10.1016/j.gore.2024.101418
12. Somasegar S, Bashi A, Lang SM, Liao CI, Johnson C, Darcy KM, Tian C, Kapp DS, Chan JK. Trends in Uterine Cancer Mortality in the United States: A 50-Year Population-Based Analysis. *Obstet Gynecol.* 2023 Oct 1;142(4):978-986. doi: 10.1097/AOG.0000000000005321
13. Rodriguez VE, LeBrón AMW, Chang J, Bristow RE. Racial-Ethnic and Socioeconomic Disparities in Guideline-Adherent Treatment for Endometrial Cancer. *Obstet Gynecol*. 2021 Jul 1;138(1):21-31. doi: 10.1097/AOG.0000000000004424


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

Click Anywhere in the Header to Return to the Main Table of Contents



# Cervical Cancer (ONC-23)

Guideline

Cervical Cancer – General Considerations (ONC-23.0)
Cervical Cancer – Suspected/Diagnosis (ONC-23.1)
Cervical Cancer – Initial Work-Up/Staging (ONC-23.2)
Cervical Cancer – Restaging/Recurrence (ONC-23.3)
Cervical Cancer – Surveillance (ONC-23.4)
References (ONC-23)


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

# Cervical Cancer – General Considerations (ONC-23.0)

**ON.CV.0023.0.A**

**v2.0.2026**

- Primary histology for cervical cancer is squamous cell. Other, less common histologies are adenosquamous and adenocarcinoma. If biopsy is consistent with one of these less common histologies, it is necessary to clarify that tumor is not of primary uterine origin.
- If the primary histology is uterine in origin, follow imaging recommendations for uterine cancer, see: **Uterine Cancer (ONC-22)**.

## Health Equity Considerations

Cervical cancer screening and treatment improvements have led to the decrease in disease incidence by more than one-half since the mid-1970s. According to the National Cancer Institute, new cervical cancer cases are estimated to be 13,360 in 2025, and the estimated number of deaths is 4,320.[8] The United States Preventive Services Task Force (USPSTF) recommends screening for cervical cancer every 3 years with cervical cytology alone in women aged 21 to 29 years. For women aged 30 to 65 years, the USPSTF recommends screening every 3 years with cervical cytology alone, every 5 years with high-risk human papillomavirus (hrHPV) testing alone, or every 5 years with hrHPV testing in combination with cytology (cotesting).[9]

Treatment for cervical cancer at the early stage is effective with early detection and well-timed follow-up. Black women have the highest overall mortality rates and lowest 5-year relative survival, irrespective of subtype and stage.[10] Some of the basis of this data can be linked to the lack of timely and appropriate treatment after receiving abnormal screening.[11] Barriers to the compliance of Black women to screening or treatment are multi-factorial, including financial problems, comorbidities, beliefs, and transportation.[11,12] Insurance coverage is an important factor in accessing cervical cancer screening. According to the USPSTF Cervical Cancer Recommendation Statement (2018), "23.1% of women without health insurance and 25.5% of women with no regular health care clinician reported not receiving a Pap test in the past 5 years, compared with 11.4% of the general population. Insurance status may interact with other demographic factors, such as race/ethnicity and age, to increase disparities."[9] Efforts are needed to address the factors that hamper screening or treatment to improve overall mortality rates and 5-year relative survival in Black women.


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

# Cervical Cancer – Suspected/Diagnosis (ONC-23.1)

**ON.CV.0023.1.A**
**v2.0.2026**

| Indication | Medically Necessary Imaging Study |
|---|---|
| All | • Advanced imaging is not medically necessary prior to biopsy |


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

# Cervical Cancer – Initial Work-Up/ Staging (ONC-23.2)

**ON.CV.0023.2.A**
**v2.0.2026**

| Indication | Medically Necessary Imaging Study |
|---|---|
| All individuals with one of the following:<br>• Stage I-IVA<br>• Stage IVB amenable to local treatment | • MRI Pelvis without and with contrast (CPT® 72197) |
| Stage IB1-IB3, non-fertility sparing treatment | In addition to MRI Pelvis above, any ONE of the following combinations:<br>• PET/CT (CPT® 78815)<br>or<br>• CT Chest with contrast (CPT® 71260) and CT Abdomen and Pelvis with contrast (CPT® 74177)<br>or<br>• PET/MRI (CPT® 78813 and CPT® 76498) |
| ANY of the following:<br>• Stage 1B1-IB3, fertility-sparing treatment<br>• Stage II-IVA<br>• Any size cervical cancer incidentally found in a hysterectomy specimen | In addition to MRI Pelvis above, any ONE of the following combinations:<br>• PET/CT (CPT® 78815)<br>or<br>• CT Chest with contrast (CPT® 71260) and CT Abdomen and Pelvis with contrast (CPT® 74177)<br>or<br>• CT Chest without contrast (CPT® 71250) and CT Abdomen and Pelvis with contrast (CPT® 74177) |


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

| Indication | Medically Necessary Imaging Study |
|---|---|
| Small cell neuroendocrine carcinoma of the cervix (NECC) | MRI Brain without and with contrast (CPT® 70553) and any ONE of the following combinations:<br>• PET/CT (CPT® 78815)<br>or<br>• CT Chest with contrast (CPT® 71260) and CT Abdomen and Pelvis with contrast (CPT® 74177)<br>or<br>• CT Chest without contrast (CPT® 71250) and CT Abdomen and Pelvis with contrast (CPT® 74177) |
| Inconclusive findings on conventional imaging | • PET/CT (CPT® 78815) |

**Evidence Discussion**

- MRI Pelvis is recommended by NCCN in virtually all individuals, with exception of stage IVB not amenable to local treatment. MRI Pelvis imaging is used to assess local disease extent, to help with surgical treatment planning, and to help with any radiation treatment planning.[1]
- Systemic imaging is medically necessary to assess for lymphadenopathy and distant metastases. The goal of systemic imaging is to evaluate for metastatic disease. CT imaging of the chest, abdomen, and pelvis are useful; PET/CT is the recommended study of choice in higher stages of disease. NCCN stated of non-fertility-sparing approaches, "depending on their stage and disease bulk, individuals with stage IB or IIA tumors can be treated with surgery, RT, or concurrent chemoradiation. A combined PET/CT scan can be performed to rule out extra pelvic disease before deciding how to treat these individuals. Neck/chest/abdomen/pelvis/groin FDG-PET/CT is preferred to evaluate metastatic disease. A chest/abdomen/pelvis CT or FDG-PET/MRI can also be performed."[1]
- Meta-analyses have shown CT with intravenous (IV) contrast to have 43%-55% sensitivity and 71% specificity for parametrial invasion, and 41% sensitivity and 92% specificity for bladder invasion In comparison, MRI demonstrated 71% specificity (95% confidence interval [CI], 62%-79%) and 91% sensitivity (95% CI, 88%-93%) for parametrial invasion, and 84% sensitivity (95% CI, 57%-95%) and 95% specificity (95% CI, 87%-98%) for bladder invasion.
- Small cell neuroendocrine carcinoma of the cervix (NECC) is considered an aggressive form of cervical cancer. The NCCN-recommended studies are adapted


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

from their own guidelines on neuroendocrine tumors and non-small cell lung cancers.[1] Brain imaging is medically necessary in this cell type to evaluate for metastatic disease to the brain.

- PET/CT remains a useful tool for evaluation of inconclusive findings on conventional imaging.


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

# Cervical Cancer – Restaging/Recurrence (ONC-23.3)

**ON.CV.0023.3.A**
**v2.0.2026**

| Indication | Medically Necessary Imaging Study |
|---|---|
| Stage I treated with definitive surgery | • See: **Cervical Cancer – Surveillance (ONC-23.4)** |
| EITHER of the following:<br>• Stage IB3<br>• Stage I treated with post-operative adjuvant radiation or chemoradiation due to positive nodes, positive parametria, positive margins, or local cervical factors | • PET/CT (CPT® 78815) 3-6 months post-completion of therapy |
| Stage II-IV | ONE of the following within 3-6 months of completion of therapy:<br>• PET/CT (CPT® 78815)<br>or<br>• CT Chest (CPT® 71260) and CT Abdomen and Pelvis (CPT® 74177) with contrast) |
| Small cell NECC, treated with primary chemoradiation | ONE of the following after completion of therapy:<br>• PET/CT (CPT® 78815) and MRI Brain without and with contrast (CPT® 70553)<br>or<br>• CT Chest (CPT® 71260) and CT Abdomen and Pelvis (CPT® 74177) with contrast and MRI Brain without and with contrast (CPT® 70553) |
| Inconclusive findings on CT scan or PET/CT | MRI Pelvis without and with contrast (CPT® 72197) |


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

| Indication | Medically Necessary Imaging Study |
|---|---|
| Unresectable disease or metastatic disease on systemic treatment | Every 2 cycles of treatment (commonly every 6 to 8 weeks):<br>• CT Chest with contrast (CPT® 71260)<br>• CT Abdomen and Pelvis with contrast (CPT® 74177)<br>• CT with contrast of other involved or symptomatic areas |
| Inconclusive conventional imaging | • PET/CT (CPT® 78815) |
| Suspected or biopsy proven recurrence | EITHER of the following, not both:<br>• PET/CT (CPT® 78815)<br>OR<br>• CT Chest (CPT® 71260) and CT Abdomen and Pelvis with contrast (CPT® 74177) |

**Evidence Discussion**

- The main purpose of imaging after primary surgery is to determine whether distant metastases are present.[1] Thus, repeating systemic imaging for certain individuals in whom surgery was not definitive treatment is recommended.
- For unresectable or metastatic disease on systemic treatment, CT Chest/Abdomen/Pelvis every 2 cycles is medically necessary.
- PET/CT remains a useful tool for evaluation of inconclusive conventional imaging. MRI Pelvis, given its excellent resolution of soft-tissue imaging, is a recommended tool for evaluation of an inconclusive CT or PET/CT.[1]


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

# Cervical Cancer – Surveillance (ONC-23.4)

**ON.CV.0023.4.A**
**v2.0.2026**

| Indication | Medically Necessary Imaging Study |
|---|---|
| Stage I disease treated with fertility sparing approach | • MRI Pelvis without and with contrast (CPT® 72197) at 6 months after surgery and then annually for 2-3 years |
| Small cell NECC | Once, 3-6 months after completion of therapy:<br>• PET/CT (CPT® 78815)<br>Then, every 3 months for 1 year, then every 6 months:<br>• CT Chest (CPT® 71260) and CT Abdomen and Pelvis (CPT® 74177) with contrast and MRI Brain without and with contrast (CPT® 70553) |
| All other individuals | • No routine advanced imaging is medically necessary in asymptomatic individuals. |

**Evidence Discussion**

With stage I post fertility-sparing treatment, MRI Pelvis is supported by NCCN for surveillance imaging at 6 months post-operatively and then annually for 2-3 years. For small-cell NECC, NCCN supported PET/CT at completion of therapy and supported ongoing surveillance, but a timeframe is not provided. There are little data in the medical literature specific to this topic. It is therefore reasonable to follow the NCCN-recommended surveillance schedule for extrathoracic small-cell neuroendocrine tumors for small-cell NECC.


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

# References (ONC-23)

**v2.0.2026**

1. Abu-Rustum NR, Campos SM, Amarnath S, et al. National Comprehensive Cancer Network (NCCN) Guidelines Version 2.2026 – November 10, 2025. Cervical Cancer, available at: https://www.nccn.org/professionals/physician_gls/pdf/cervical.pdf. Referenced with permission from the NCCN Clinical Practice Guidelines in Oncology (NCCN Guidelines™) for Cervical Cancer V2.2026 – November 10, 2025. ©2025 National Comprehensive Cancer Network, Inc. All rights reserved. The NCCN Guidelines™ and illustrations herein may not be reproduced in any form for any purpose without the express written permission of the NCCN. To view the most recent and complete version of the NCCN Guidelines™, go online to NCCN.org.
2. Salani R, Khanna N, Frimer M, Bristow RE, Chen LM. An update on post-treatment surveillance and diagnosis of recurrence in women with gynecologic malignancies: Society of Gynecologic Oncology (SGO) recommendations. *Gynecol Oncol*. 2017;146(1):3-10. doi:10.1016/j.ygyno.2017.03.022
3. Zanagnolo V, Ming L, Gadducci A, et al. Surveillance procedures for patients with cervical carcinoma: a review of the literature. *Int J Gynecol Cancer.* 2009;19(3):194-201. doi:10.1111/IGC.0b013e3181a130f3.
4. Kim YJ, Yoo YJ, Jang JY, Kim YM, Kim YS. Follow-up strategies for patients with cervical cancer who achieved complete response after definitive chemoradiotherapy. *Int J Gynecol Cancer*. 2025;35(8):101933. doi:10.1016/j.ijgc.2025.101933
5. Mckinnish TR, Greenwade MM, Wilkinson-Ryan I, et al. Management and prognosis of cervical cancer patients treated with definitive radiation therapy who have partial metabolic response on post-therapy positron emission tomography. *Gynecol Oncol*. 2022;166(1):173-180. doi:10.1016/j.ygyno.2022.04.018
6. Stojiljkovic M, Sobic Saranovic D, Odalovic S, et al. FDG PET-CT as an important diagnostic tool and prognostic marker in suspected recurrent cervical carcinoma after radiotherapy: comparison with MRI. *Radiol Oncol.* 2022;56(4):453-460. Published 2022 Nov 2. doi:10.2478/raon-2022-0042
7. Zhou Z, Liu X, Hu K, Zhang F. The clinical value of PET and PET/CT in the diagnosis and management of suspected cervical cancer recurrence. *Nucl Med Commun*. 2018;39(2):97-102. doi:10.1097/MNM.0000000000000775
8. Siegel RL, Giaquinto AN, Jemal A. Cancer statistics, 2024. CA Cancer J Clin. 2024 Jan-Feb;74(1):12-49. doi: 10.3322/caac.21820. Erratum in: *CA Cancer J Clin*. 2024 Mar-Apr;74(2):203. doi: 10.3322/caac.21830
9. Melnikow J, Henderson JT, Burda BU, Senger CA, Durbin S, Weyrich MS. Screening for Cervical Cancer With High-Risk Human Papillomavirus Testing: Updated Evidence Report and Systematic Review for the US Preventive Services Task Force. *JAMA*. 2018 Aug 21;320(7):687-705. doi: 10.1001/jama.2018.10400
10. Cohen CM, Wentzensen N, Castle PE, Schiffman M, Zuna R, Arend RC, Clarke MA. Racial and Ethnic Disparities in Cervical Cancer Incidence, Survival, and Mortality by Histologic Subtype. *J Clin Oncol*. 2023 Feb 10;41(5):1059-1068. doi: 10.1200/JCO.22.01424
11. Tsui J, Llanos AA, Doose M, Rotter D, Stroup A. Determinants of Abnormal Cervical Cancer Screening Follow-Up And Invasive Cervical Cancer Among Uninsured and Underinsured Women in New Jersey. *J Health Care Poor Underserved*. 2019;30(2):680-701. doi: 10.1353/hpu.2019.0050
12. Katz ML, Young GS, Reiter PL, Battaglia TA, Wells KJ, Sanders M, Simon M, Dudley DJ, Patierno SR, Paskett ED. Barriers reported among patients with breast and cervical abnormalities in the patient navigation research program: impact on timely care. *Women's Health Issues*. 2014 Jan-Feb;24(1):e155-62. doi: 10.1016/j.whi.2013.10.010


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

Click Anywhere in the Header to Return to the Main Table of Contents



# Anal Cancer & Cancers of the External Genitalia (ONC-24)

Guideline

Anal Carcinoma – General Considerations (ONC-24.0)
Anal Carcinoma – Suspected/Diagnosis (ONC-24.1)
Anal Carcinoma – Initial Work-up/Staging (ONC-24.2)
Anal Carcinoma – Restaging/Recurrence (ONC-24.3)
Anal Carcinoma – Surveillance (ONC-24.4)
Cancers of External Genitalia – General Considerations (ONC-24.5)
Cancers of External Genitalia – Initial Work-Up/Staging (ONC-24.6)
Cancers of External Genitalia – Restaging/Recurrence (ONC-24.7)
Cancers of External Genitalia – Surveillance (ONC-24.8)
References (ONC-24)


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

# Anal Carcinoma – General Considerations (ONC-24.0)

**ON.AN.0024.0.A**

**v2.0.2026**

- Most are squamous cell carcinomas, although some transitional and cloacogenic carcinomas are seen.
- Adenocarcinoma of the anal canal is managed as rectal cancer according to **Colorectal and Small Bowel Cancer (ONC-16)**.
- Squamous cell carcinoma of the perianal region (up to 5cm radius from the anal verge) are imaged according to anal carcinoma guidelines.
- Bowen's disease and Paget's disease of the perianal and perigenital skin are considered non-invasive/in-situ conditions and do not routinely require advanced imaging. See: **Non-Melanoma Skin Cancers – Initial Work-up/Staging (ONC-5.6)**.


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

# Anal Carcinoma – Suspected/Diagnosis (ONC-24.1)

**ON.AN.0024.1.A**
**v2.0.2026**

| Indication | Medically Necessary Imaging Study |
|---|---|
| All | • No advanced imaging prior to biopsy |

### Evidence Discussion

Advanced imaging prior to biopsy is not medically necessary as most tumors are staged clinically by direct examination and microscopic confirmation (biopsy).[1]


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

# Anal Carcinoma – Initial Work-up/ Staging (ONC-24.2)

**ON.AN.0024.2.A**
**v2.0.2026**

| Indication | Medically Necessary Imaging Study |
|---|---|
| All individuals | • CT Chest with contrast (CPT® 71260) and<br>Any ONE of the following:<br>• CT Abdomen and Pelvis with contrast (CPT® 74177)<br>• CT Abdomen with contrast (CPT® 74160) and MRI Pelvis without and with contrast (CPT® 72197) |
| • Stage II-III Squamous Cell Carcinoma of the Anal Canal and no evidence of metastatic disease by conventional imaging<br>• Inconclusive findings on conventional imaging | • PET/CT (CPT® 78815) |

### Evidence Discussion

All individuals undergo CT Chest with contrast and either CT Abdomen and Pelvis with contrast or CT Abdomen with contrast and MRI Pelvis without/with contrast. CT allows information on whether there is other organ involvement or possible disease spread. PET/CT is medically necessary in stage II-III disease with no evidence of distant metastatic disease by conventional imaging or if conventional imaging is inconclusive. PET/CT is useful in assessing pelvic nodes and has been shown to change the nodal status/TNM stage in up to 41% of individuals. PET/CT does not replace a diagnostic CT in initial staging.[1,11]


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

# Anal Carcinoma – Restaging/Recurrence (ONC-24.3)

**ON.AN.0024.3.A**
**v2.0.2026**

| Indication | Medically Necessary Imaging Study |
|---|---|
| Stage I treated with complete surgical resection | • See: **Anal Carcinoma – Surveillance (ONC-24.4)** for surveillance guidelines |
| Stages I, II and III – post chemoradiation evaluation | Any ONE of the following:<br>• CT Abdomen and Pelvis with contrast (CPT® 74177)<br>• MRI Abdomen (CPT® 74183) and MRI Pelvis (CPT® 72197) without and with contrast |
| Metastatic (stage IV) disease | • CT Abdomen and Pelvis with contrast (CPT® 74177) every 2 cycles (generally 6 to 8 weeks) on treatment<br>• CT Chest with contrast (CPT® 71260) if chest x-ray is abnormal or if symptoms of chest involvement |
| • Difficult or abnormal examination<br>• Elevated LFTs<br>• Signs or symptoms of recurrence<br>• Biopsy proven recurrence | Preferably using same imaging studies as used in initial imaging:<br>• CT Chest (CPT® 71260) with contrast and<br>Any ONE of the following:<br>• CT Abdomen and Pelvis with contrast (CPT® 74177)<br>• MRI Abdomen (CPT® 74183) and MRI Pelvis (CPT® 72197) without and with contrast |
| Inconclusive findings on conventional imaging | • PET/CT (CPT® 78815) |

### Evidence Discussion

Due to low risk of recurrence, stage I treated with complete surgical resection would follow surveillance guidelines that do not recommend any routine imaging. For stages I, II, and III treated with chemoradiation, CT Abdomen and Pelvis, or MRI Abdomen and Pelvis should be obtained upon completion of therapy. Stage IV disease on treatment should undergo CT Abdomen and Pelvis every 2 cycles with imaging of the chest if chest x-ray is abnormal or symptoms develop. If recurrence is suspected, CT Chest


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

with either CT Abdomen and Pelvis or MRI Abdomen and Pelvis should be performed. NCCN stated that imaging for recurrence is preferred to mirror the same imaging studies as used in initial imaging. PET/CT is medically necessary for inconclusive findings on conventional imaging.[1]


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

# Anal Carcinoma – Surveillance (ONC-24.4)

**ON.AN.0024.4.A**
**v2.0.2026**

| Indication | Medically Necessary Imaging Study |
|---|---|
| Stage I | • Advanced imaging is not routinely medically necessary for surveillance |
| • Stage II<br>• Stage III<br>• Local recurrence treated definitively | • CT Chest (CPT® 71260) with contrast or CT Chest without contrast (CPT® 71250) annually for 3 years<br>• And ANY one of the following annually for three years:<br>◦ CT Abdomen and Pelvis with contrast (CPT® 74177)<br>◦ MRI Abdomen without and with contrast (CPT® 74183) and MRI Pelvis without and with contrast (CPT® 72197) |
| Stage IV – measurable metastatic disease on maintenance treatment or being observed off treatment | Every 3 months for up to 5 years after completion of all treatment:<br>• CT Chest (CPT® 71260) with contrast<br>• CT Abdomen and Pelvis with contrast (CPT® 74177) |

**Evidence Discussion**

For individuals with Stage II-III disease or had definitive treatment of a local recurrence, CT Chest with or without contrast plus either CT Abdomen and Pelvis with contrast or MRI Abdomen and Pelvis without/with contrast is medically necessary annually for 3 years. NCCN stated that FDG PET/CT is not indicated for surveillance of local recurrence treated definitively.[1]


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

# Cancers of External Genitalia – General Considerations (ONC-24.5)

**ON.AN.0024.5.A**

**v2.0.2026**

- These imaging guidelines are applicable for squamous cell carcinomas arising from the vulva, vagina, penis, urethra, and scrotum.


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

# Cancers of External Genitalia – Initial Work-Up/Staging (ONC-24.6)

**ON.AN.0024.6.A**
**v2.0.2026**

| Indication | Medically Necessary Imaging Study |
|---|---|
| Clinical node negative **vulvar** cancer with ANY of the following:<br>• Lesion >2cm<br>• Any size with stromal invasion >1mm | • For planned sentinel lymph node evaluation: Lymph system imaging (lymphoscintigraphy, CPT® 78195)<br>◦ SPECT/CT (CPT® 78830) if requested |
| For stage II or higher **vulvar** cancer or suspected metastatic vulvar cancer based on one of the following:<br>• Abnormal physical exam findings<br>• Bulky vulvar tumor (≥4cm or close to critical structures)<br>• Vaginal, urethral, or anal involvement<br>• Delay in presentation or treatment<br>• Pelvic, abdominal, or pulmonary symptoms | ONE of the following:<br>• CT Abdomen and Pelvis with contrast (CPT® 74177) OR<br>• CT Abdomen with contrast (CPT® 74160) and MRI Pelvis without and with contrast (CPT® 72197)<br>• CT Chest with contrast (CPT® 71260) is medically necessary only for:<br>◦ Signs/symptoms suggestive of chest involvement<br>◦ Abnormal findings on chest x-ray |


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

| Indication | Medically Necessary Imaging Study |
|---|---|
| **Vaginal** carcinoma | ONE of the following combinations:<br>• PET/CT (CPT® 78815) and MRI Pelvis without and with contrast (CPT® 72197) or<br>• CT Abdomen and Pelvis with contrast (CPT® 74177) and CT Chest with contrast (CPT® 71260) or<br>• CT Abdomen with contrast (CPT® 74160) and MRI Pelvis without and with contrast (CPT® 72197) and CT Chest with contrast (71260) |
| **Penile** carcinoma with ANY of the following:<br>• Non-palpable inguinal lymph nodes and intermediate or high-risk lesion (T1b or any T2 or greater)<br>• Palpable inguinal lymph nodes<br>• Difficult pelvic node assessment on physical exam | Any ONE of the following:<br>• CT Abdomen and Pelvis with contrast (CPT® 74177)<br>• MRI Abdomen (CPT® 74183) and MRI Pelvis (CPT® 72197) without and with contrast<br>• CT Abdomen with contrast (CPT® 74160) and MRI Pelvis without and with contrast (CPT® 72197)<br>• CT Chest with contrast (CPT® 71260) |
| • Inconclusive findings on conventional imaging<br>• Pelvic nodes enlarged but biopsy not technically feasible | • PET/CT (CPT® 78815) |

## Evidence Discussion

Lymphoscintigraphy is appropriate for the workup of vulvar cancer since the disease spreads through skin layer and into the lymph system. FIGO surgical staging is used after superficial removal of the lesion. If it is a large (>2cm) or stromal invasion (>1mm), then spread is evaluated with CT. CT imaging plays an important role in stage II or higher disease by helping to delineate the extent of tumor and assisting in treatment planning.[3] CT of the chest is valuable if there are signs or symptoms of chest involvement. In the evaluation of vaginal carcinoma, NCCN stated that PET/CT is the preferred imaging for evaluation of metastatic disease (conventional CT of the


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

chest, abdomen, and pelvis remains a recommended option). MRI Pelvis is medically necessary in addition to PET/CT or conventional CT for assessment of local disease extent.[14] For the initial workup of penile cancer, cross-sectional imaging with CT or MRI of the abdomen and pelvis are necessary for pelvic node evaluation in circumstances where there is greater chance of lymph node involvement, palpable lymph nodes, or when it is difficult to physically assess potential lymph node involvement.[2] Evaluation of inguinal lymph nodes "has been identified as the single most important prognostic indicator in determining long-term survival in individuals with invasive penile squamous cell carcinoma".[2] MRI can also provide information on depth of tumor invasion.[2] PET/CT remains a problem-solving tool for inconclusive conventional imaging. PET/CT has higher sensitivity for individuals with node-positive penile cancer than those without, thus it is used as a tool of lymph node assessment when biopsy is not technically feasible.[2]


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

# Cancers of External Genitalia – Restaging/Recurrence (ONC-24.7)

**ON.AN.0024.7.A**
**v2.0.2026**

| Indication | Medically Necessary Imaging Study |
|---|---|
| • Difficult or abnormal examination<br>• Elevated LFTs<br>• Signs or symptoms of recurrence<br>• Biopsy proven recurrence | • CT Chest with contrast (CPT® 71260)<br><br>And ANY one of the following:<br>• CT Abdomen and Pelvis with contrast (CPT® 74177)<br>• MRI Abdomen (CPT® 74183) and MRI Pelvis (CPT® 72197) without and with contrast |
| EITHER of the following:<br>• individuals receiving systemic treatment for measurable disease<br>• At the end of definitive therapy | Any ONE of the following, every 2 cycles (generally 6 to 8 weeks) during treatment at the end of planned chemotherapy treatment:<br>• CT Abdomen and Pelvis with contrast (CPT® 74177) or<br>• MRI Abdomen (CPT® 74183) and MRI Pelvis (CPT® 72197) without and with contrast or<br>• CT Abdomen with contrast (CPT® 74160) and MRI Pelvis (CPT® 72197)<br><br>AND<br>• CT Chest with contrast (CPT® 71260) |
| **Vaginal** primary tumor treated with upfront radiation therapy | • PET/CT (CPT® 78815) at least 12 weeks after completion of radiation therapy<br>◦ MRI Pelvis without and with contrast (CPT® 72197) is medically necessary if PET/CT not available (can be performed sooner than 12 weeks after completion of therapy)<br>◦ MRI Pelvis without and with contrast (CPT® 72197) is medically necessary for clarification of PET/CT findings |
| Vulvar carcinoma following definitive primary therapy with chemoradiation or surgery | 3-6 months after primary therapy:<br>• MRI Pelvis without and with contrast (CPT® 72197) |


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

| Indication | Medically Necessary Imaging Study |
|---|---|
| Inconclusive findings on conventional imaging | • PET/CT (CPT® 78815) |

### Evidence Discussion

Signs or symptoms of recurrence should be imaged with CT or MRI to evaluate for metastatic disease. Specifically for vaginal cancer, PET/CT is preferred to re-image three to four months after the completion of radiation therapy to determine response to treatment while avoiding false-positive from recent radiation. If PET/CT is inconclusive, NCCN stated that MRI is the preferred imaging for clarification.[14] For vulvar cancer, reassessment with MR imaging is necessary to assess response to treatment and re-evaluate lymph node involvement.[3] PET/CT can be used as a tool for evaluation of inconclusive conventional imaging.


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

# Cancers of External Genitalia – Surveillance (ONC-24.8)

**ON.AN.0024.8.A**
**v2.0.2026**

| Indication | Medically Necessary Imaging Study |
|---|---|
| • All stages of vulvar and vaginal cancers | • See: **ONC-24.7** for post-treatment imaging 3-6 months after completion of therapy. No additional routine advanced imaging for asymptomatic surveillance. |
| • Penile Cancer: stage I-IIIA | • CT Abdomen and Pelvis with contrast (CPT® 74177) every 6 months for 2 years, and then every 12 months for 2 years |
| • Penile cancer: stages IIIB-IV | • CT Chest with contrast (CPT® 71260) and CT Abdomen and Pelvis with contrast (CPT® 74177) every 3 months for one year, then every 6 months for 3 more years |

**Evidence Discussion**

If no symptoms or findings on recent physical examination, then advanced imaging is not medically necessary for all stages of vulvar and vaginal cancer.[3,14] For stage I-IIIA penile cancer, the NCCN supported CT Abdomen and Pelvis for surveillance, with chest imaging via radiograph only on the same schedule as CTs. For stages IIIB-IV penile cancer, chest CT is medically necessary for surveillance with more frequent CT Abdomen and Pelvis than in early stage disease.[2]


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

# References (ONC-24)

**v2.0.2026**

1. Benson III AB, Venook AP, Adam M, et al. National Comprehensive Cancer Network (NCCN) Guidelines Version 5.2025 – October 31, 2025. Anal Carcinoma, available at: https://www.nccn.org/professionals/physician_gls/pdf/anal.pdf. Referenced with permission from the NCCN Clinical Practice Guidelines in Oncology (NCCN Guidelines™) for Anal Carcinoma V5.2025 – October 31, 2025. ©2025 National Comprehensive Cancer Network, Inc. All rights reserved. The NCCN Guidelines™ and illustrations herein may not be reproduced in any form for any purpose without the express written permission of the NCCN. To view the most recent and complete version of the NCCN Guidelines™, go online to NCCN.org.
2. Flaig TW, Spiess PE, Abern M. National Comprehensive Cancer Network (NCCN) Guidelines Version 1.2026 – November 12, 2025. Penile Cancer, available at: https://www.nccn.org/professionals/physician_gls/ pdf/penile.pdf. Referenced with permission from the NCCN Clinical Practice Guidelines in Oncology (NCCN Guidelines™) for Penile Cancer V1.2026 – November 12, 2025. ©2025 National Comprehensive Cancer Network, Inc. All rights reserved. The NCCN Guidelines™ and illustrations herein may not be reproduced in any form for any purpose without the express written permission of the NCCN. To view the most recent and complete version of the NCCN Guidelines™, go online to NCCN.org.
3. Abu-Rustum NR, Campos SM, Arend R. et al. National Comprehensive Cancer Network (NCCN) Guidelines Version 2.2026 – January 6, 2026. Vulvar Cancer, available at: https://www.nccn.org/professionals/physician_gls/pdf/vulvar.pdf. Referenced with permission from the NCCN Clinical Practice Guidelines in Oncology (NCCN Guidelines™) for Vulvar Cancer V2.2026 – January 6, 2026. ©2026 National Comprehensive Cancer Network, Inc. All rights reserved. The NCCN Guidelines™ and illustrations herein may not be reproduced in any form for any purpose without the express written permission of the NCCN. To view the most recent and complete version of the NCCN Guidelines™, go online to NCCN.org.
4. Expert Panel on Gastrointestinal Imaging, Horvat N, Liu PS, et al. ACR Appropriateness Criteria® Staging and Follow-up of Anal Cancer. *J Am Coll Radiol*. 2025;22(5S):S396-S404. doi:10.1016/j.jacr.2025.02.018
5. Congedo A, Mallardi D, Danti G, De Muzio F, Granata V, Miele V. An Updated Review on Imaging and Staging of Anal Cancer-Not Just Rectal Cancer. *Tomography*. 2023;9(5):1694-1710. Published 2023 Sep 4. doi:10.3390/tomography9050135
6. Mirshahvalad SA, Mesci A, Murad V, et al. [18F]-FDG PET in anal canal cancer: a systematic review and meta-analysis. *Eur J Nucl Med Mol Imaging*. 2023;51(1):258-277. doi:10.1007/s00259-023-06393-z
7. Moncrieff M, Pywell S, Snelling A, et. al. Effectiveness of SPECT/CT imaging for sentinel node biopsy staging of primary cutaneous melanoma and patient outcomes. *Ann Surg Oncol*. 2022;29(2):767-775. doi:10.1245/s10434-021-10911-4.
8. Quartuccio N, Garau LM, Arnone A, et. al. Comparsion of 99mTc-labeled colloid SPECT/CT and planar lymphoscintigraphy in sentinel lymph node detection in patients with melanoma: a meta-analysis. *J Clin Med.* 2020;9(6):1680. doi:10.3390/jcm9061680.
9. Slim N, Passoni P, Incerti E, et al. Impact of sentinel lymph-node biopsy and FDG-PET in staging and radiation treatment of anal cancer patients. *Sci Rep*. 2020;10(1):14613. Published 2020 Sep 3. doi:10.1038/s41598-020-71577-8
10. Valvo F, Ciurlia E, Avuzzi B, et al. Cancer of the anal region. *Crit Rev Oncol Hematol*. 2019;135:115-127. doi:10.1016/j.critrevonc.2018.12.007
11. Olawaiye AB, Cuello MA, Rogers LJ. Cancer of the vulva: 2021 update. *Int J Gynaecol Obstet*. 2021;155 Suppl 1(Suppl 1):7-18. doi:10.1002/ijgo.13881
12. Rogers LJ. Management of Advanced Squamous Cell Carcinoma of the Vulva. *Cancers (Basel).* 2021;14(1):167. Published 2021 Dec 30. doi:10.3390/cancers14010167
13. Abu-Rustum NR, Campos SM, Yashar CM. National Comprehensive Cancer Network (NCCN) Guidelines Version 2.2026 – December 4, 2025. Vaginal Cancer. available at https://www.nccn.org/professionals/physician_gls/pdf/vaginal.pdf. Referenced with permission from the NCCN Clinical Practice Guidelines in Oncology (NCCN Guidelines™) for Vaginal Cancer V2.2026 – December 4, 2025. ©2025 National Comprehensive Cancer Network, Inc. All rights reserved. The NCCN Guidelines™ and illustrations herein may


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

not be reproduced in any form for any purpose without the express written permission of the NCCN. To view the most recent and complete version of the NCCN Guidelines™, go online to NCCN.org.


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

# Multiple Myeloma and Plasmacytomas (ONC-25)

## Guideline

Multiple Myeloma and Plasmacytomas – General Considerations (ONC-25.0)
Multiple Myeloma and Plasmacytomas –Suspected/Diagnosis (ONC-25.1)
Multiple Myeloma and Plasmacytomas – Initial Work-Up/Staging (ONC-25.2)
Multiple Myeloma and Plasmacytomas – Restaging/Recurrence (ONC-25.3)
Multiple Myeloma and Plasmacytomas – Surveillance (ONC-25.4)
References (ONC-25)


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

# Multiple Myeloma and Plasmacytomas – General Considerations (ONC-25.0)

**ON.MM.0025.0.A**

**v2.0.2026**

- Multiple myeloma (MM) is a neoplastic disorder characterized by the proliferation of a single clone of plasma cells derived from B cells which grows in the bone marrow and adjacent bone, producing skeletal destruction.
- Multiple myeloma group of disorders can be classified as below, which influence imaging modality of choice.

| Condition | Monoclonal protein | Bone marrow plasma cells | CRAB criteria** |
|---|---|---|---|
| Solitary Plasmacytoma (biopsy proven tumor containing plasma cells) | <3gm/dL | Absent | Absent |
| Monoclonal Gammopathy of Unknown Significance (MGUS) | <3gm/dL | <10% | Absent |
| Smoldering Myeloma (SMM) (stage I MM or asymptomatic MM) | ≥3gm/dL | 10% - 60% | Absent |
| Multiple Myeloma (MM) | ≥3gm/dL | ≥10% | Present |

**CRAB criteria = hypercalcemia, renal insufficiency, anemia, lytic bony lesions

- Diagnosis and monitoring of response to therapy is primarily with laboratory studies that include urine and serum monoclonal protein levels, serum-free light chain levels, LDH and beta-2 microglobulin. Routine advanced imaging to monitor response to treatment is not medically necessary.
- Rarely, (<5%), an individual may have nonsecretory myeloma, which does not produce measurable M-protein. These individuals require imaging as primary method to monitor disease.
- Other conditions that may present with monoclonal gammopathy include:
  - POEMS syndrome: Polyneuropathy, Organomegaly, Endocrinopathy, Monoclonal protein and Skin Changes – may also have sclerotic bone lesions and Castleman's disease. See: **Multiple Myeloma and Plasmacytomas – Initial Work-up/Staging (ONC-25.2)** for imaging recommendations.


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

- Waldenström's Macroglobulinemia: IgM monoclonal protein along with bone marrow infiltration of small lymphocytes. See: **Waldenström Macroglobulinemia or Lymphoplasmacytic Lymphoma (ONC-27.10)** for imaging recommendations.
- Systemic Light chain Amyloidosis: light chain monoclonal protein in serum or urine with clonal plasma cells in bone marrow, systemic involvement of the kidneys, liver, heart, gastrointestinal tract or peripheral nerves due to amyloid deposition. See: **Multiple Myeloma and Plasmacytomas – Initial Work-up/Staging (ONC-25.2)** and **Cardiac Amyloidosis (CD-3.8)**for imaging recommendations for systemic light chain amyloidosis.


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

Click Anywhere in the Header to Return to the Main Table of Contents



# Multiple Myeloma and Plasmacytomas – Suspected/Diagnosis (ONC-25.1)

**ON.MM.0025.1.A**
**v2.0.2026**

See: **Initial Work-up/Staging (ONC-25.2)**


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

# Multiple Myeloma and Plasmacytomas – Initial Work-Up/Staging (ONC-25.2)

**ON.MM.0025.2.A**
**v2.0.2026**

| Indication | Medically Necessary Imaging Study |
|---|---|
| Either of the following:<br>• Confirmed myeloma<br>• Myeloma suspected based on any of the following:<br>◦ Abnormal skeletal survey or other imaging<br>◦ Abnormal myeloma labs<br>◦ Signs/symptoms of multiple myeloma | EITHER of the following:<br>• Whole-body low-dose skeletal CT (CPT® 76497) or<br>• Whole-body FDG PET/CT (CPT® 78816) |
| Inconclusive findings on whole-body low-dose skeletal CT | • PET/CT (CPT® 78815 or CPT® 78816) |
| To discern smoldering myeloma from active myeloma and whole-body CT or PET are negative or inconclusive | ONE of the following:<br>• MRI Bone Marrow Blood Supply (CPT® 77084)<br>• Whole-body MRI (CPT® 76498)<br>• CT contrast as requested of a specific area to determine radiotherapy or surgical candidacy, or for suspected extra-osseous plasmacytoma |
| Initial work-up of suspected or known POEMS syndrome | • CT Chest with contrast (CPT® 71260) and<br>• CT Abdomen and Pelvis with contrast (CPT® 74177)<br>• Whole-body FDG PET/CT (CPT® 78816) for sclerotic bone lesions on other imaging |


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

| Indication | Medically Necessary Imaging Study |
|---|---|
| Initial work-up of suspected or known systemic light chain amyloidosis | • Whole-body low-dose skeletal CT (CPT® 76497) OR Whole-body FDG PET/CT (CPT® 78816)<br>• Additional imaging, base on suspected organ involvement:<br>◦ CT Chest with contrast (CPT® 71260)<br>◦ CT Abdomen and Pelvis with contrast (CPT® 74177)<br>For additional imaging related to cardiac involvement, see: **Cardiac Amyloidosis (CD-3.8)** |


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

# Multiple Myeloma and Plasmacytomas – Restaging/Recurrence (ONC-25.3)

**ON.MM.0025.3.A**
**v2.0.2026**

| Indication | Medically Necessary Imaging Study |
|---|---|
| Extra-osseous plasmacytoma response to initial therapy | Repeat imaging with ONE of the following, whichever modality was used at initial diagnosis:<br>• Whole-body low-dose skeletal CT scan (CPT® 76497)<br>• Whole-body FDG PET/CT (CPT® 78816)<br>• Whole-body MRI (CPT® 76498)<br>• CT of any previously involved area, contrast as requested<br>• MRI of any previously involved area, contrast as requested |
| Known spine involvement with new neurological signs/symptoms or worsening pain | • MRI Cervical (CPT® 72156), Thoracic (CPT® 72157), Lumbar spine (CPT® 72158) without and with contrast |
| Treatment response assessment<br>• After completion of primary therapy<br>• Non-secretory multiple myeloma<br>• To determine therapy response with inconclusive labs | Repeat imaging with ONE of the modalities below, whichever was used at initial diagnosis:<br>• Whole-body low-dose skeletal CT scan (CPT® 76497)<br>• Whole-body FDG PET/CT (CPT® 78816) |
| CAR-T cell therapy | Once before treatment and once 30-60 days after completion of treatment:<br>• PET/CT (CPT® 78815 or CPT® 78816) |


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

| Indication | Medically Necessary Imaging Study |
|---|---|
| ANY of the following:<br>• Suspected progression or relapse/recurrence<br>• Suspected progression of MGUS or SMM to a more malignant form | ONE of the following (using same modality as used at diagnosis):<br>• Whole-body low-dose skeletal CT (CPT® 76497)<br>• Whole-body FDG PET/CT (CPT® 78816)<br>• Whole-body MRI (CPT® 76498) |
| ANY of the following:<br>• Negative PET will allow change in management from active treatment to maintenance or surveillance.<br>• Inconclusive findings on conventional imaging<br>• Whole-body low-dose skeletal CT (CPT® 76497) is unfeasible and recurrence or progression is suspected | • PET/CT (CPT® 78815 or CPT® 78816) |
| To discern smoldering myeloma from active myeloma and whole-body CT or PET are negative or inconclusive | ONE of the following:<br>• MRI Bone Marrow Blood Supply (CPT® 77084)<br>• Whole-body MRI (CPT® 76498)<br>• MRI without contrast, or MRI without and with contrast for any previously involved bony area or symptomatic area (including whole spine for spinal symptoms) |
| Stem cell transplant recipients | ONE of the following, once before transplant and once within 30-100 days after transplant:<br>Imaging should use same modality as initial diagnosis.<br>• Whole-body low-dose skeletal CT scan (CPT® 76497)<br>• MRI Bone Marrow Blood Supply (CPT® 77084)<br>• Whole-body MRI (CPT® 76498)<br>• PET/CT (CPT® 78815 or CPT® 78816) |


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

# Multiple Myeloma and Plasmacytomas – Surveillance (ONC-25.4)

**ON.MM.0025.4.A**
**v2.0.2026**

| Indication | Medically Necessary Imaging Study |
|---|---|
| • Smoldering myeloma<br>• Multiple myeloma | ANY ONE of the following (using same imaging modality used at diagnosis) annually:<br>• Whole-body low-dose skeletal CT (CPT® 76497)<br>• MRI Bone Marrow Blood Supply (CPT® 77084)<br>• Whole-body MRI (CPT® 76498)<br>• Whole-body FDG PET/CT (CPT® 78816) |
| Solitary plasmacytomas | Any ONE of the following (using same imaging modality used at diagnosis) annually for 5 years:<br>• Whole-body low-dose skeletal CT (CPT® 76497)<br>• MRI Bone Marrow Blood Supply (CPT® 77084)<br>• Whole-body MRI (CPT® 76498)<br>• Whole-body FDG PET/CT (CPT® 78816) |

**Evidence Discussion**

- Bone disease is the most frequent feature of multiple myeloma (MM), occurring in approximately two-thirds of individuals at diagnosis and in nearly all individuals during their disease.[13] Imaging is a key part of the evaluation of all individuals with suspected MM and plays a very important role in the management of MM.[26] It is necessary for detection of lytic bone lesions, which represent a marker of disease-related end-organ damage and are traditionally used to diagnose MM and to establish the need for immediate therapy.[3]
- The detection of bone and bone marrow lesions is crucial in the investigation of multiple myeloma and often dictates the decision to start treatment. Cross-sectional imaging (i.e., CT, PET/CT, MRI) is preferred because these modalities are more sensitive than plain radiographs for the detection of most skeletal lesions in MM.
- Whole-body low-dose CT (WBLDCT) can be used as a baseline assessment of bone involvement. CT is quick, convenient, relatively sensitive, and cost-effective in this scenario. WBLDCT was introduced to detect osteolytic lesions in the whole skeleton, with high accuracy, no need for contrast agents, and twofold to threefold lower radiation dose exposure compared with standard CT.[17,18] Low-dose whole-


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

body CT has increased sensitivity compared with conventional skeletal survey in the detection of bone disease, which can reveal information leading to changes in therapy and disease management that could prevent or delay the onset of clinically significant morbidity and mortality as a result of skeletal-related events.[16]

- 18F-FDG PET/CT imaging could identify sites of extra-medullary disease (EMD), which represent an unfavorable prognostic feature, and it helps to accurately differentiate between solitary plasmacytoma (SP) and MM, as well as to predict the risk of early progression from smoldering MM (SMM) to active disease. This is more sensitive than CT for the detection of extra medullary disease. The combination of functional imaging with positron emission tomography (PET) plus morphological assessment with CT makes this technique the most effective in identifying potential sites of EMD.[19] The use of FGD PET/CT can also confirm a suspected diagnosis of solitary plasmacytoma and can distinguish between smoldering and active multiple myeloma. Thus, NCCN stated that FDG PET/CT is the preferred imaging for initial diagnostic workup.[1]
- Whole-body MRI can distinguish between smoldering and active multiple myeloma, acting as a problem-solving tool when PET/CT or whole-body CT is inconclusive.[1]
- MRI is the elective imaging technique to assess the degree of BM PC infiltration, even before bone destruction is present, owing to its ability to visualize large volumes of BM.[7] MRI is highly sensitive for the detection of bone and bone marrow focal lesions and predictive of progression. Unlike CT and PET/CT, MRI can detect focal bone lesions that are not yet lytic (i.e., without advanced cortical bone destruction). Up to half of individuals without other evidence of end-organ damage with normal plain films may demonstrate tumor-related lesions on MRI.[21,22]
- Whole-body diffusion weighted MRI (DW-MRI), also known as MRI Bone Marrow Blood Supply, is a non-contrast study that covers from the vertex to the heels. Diffusion-weighted magnetic resonance imaging (DWI or DW-MRI) is the use of specific MRI sequences as well as software that generates images from the resulting data that uses the diffusion of water molecules to generate contrast in MR images. This produces images where the contrast between tissues is based on differences in the motion of water at a cellular level. As cellularity in marrow increases secondary either to disease or increased hematopoietic tissue, the amount of free water increases. The capability of WB DW-MRI to demonstrate both focal and diffuse marrow infiltration throughout the whole skeleton makes this extremely useful as a subjective tool for monitoring disease status and assessment of response.[23]


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

# References (ONC-25)

**v2.0.2026**

1. Kumar SK, Callander NS, Adekola K, et al. National Comprehensive Cancer Network (NCCN) Guidelines Version 5.2026 – January 9, 2026. Mutliple Myeloma, available at: https://www.nccn.org/professionals/physician_gls/pdf/myeloma.pdf Referenced with permission from the NCCN Clinical Practice Guidelines in Oncology (NCCN Guidelines™) for Multiple Myeloma V5.2026 – January 9, 2026. ©2026 National Comprehensive Cancer Network, Inc. All rights reserved. The NCCN Guidelines™ and illustrations herein may not be reproduced in any form for any purpose without the express written permission of the NCCN. To view the most recent and complete version of the NCCN Guidelines™, go online to NCCN.org.
2. Hillengass J, Usmani S, Rajkumar SV, Durie BGM, Mateos M, Lonial S. International myeloma working group consensus recommendations on imaging in monoclonal plasma cell disorders. *The Lancet*. 2019:20(6):PE302-E312. doi:10.1016/S1470-2045(19)30309-2.
3. Werly A, Hampel M, Hielscher T, et al. Patterns of progression in a contemporary cohort of 447 patients with smoldering multiple myeloma. *Blood Cancer J*. 2024;14(1):176. Published 2024 Oct 14. doi:10.1038/s41408-024-01159-8
4. Dimopoulos M, Terpos E, Comenzo RL, et al. International myeloma working group consensus statement and guidelines regarding the current role of imaging techniques in the diagnosis and monitoring of multiple myeloma. *Leukemia*. 2009;23(9):1545-1556. doi:10.1038/leu.2009.89.
5. ACR Committee on Drugs and Contrast Media. ACR Manual on Contrast Media. Reston, VA: American College of Radiology; 2025.
6. Mulé S, Reizine E, Blanc-Durand P, et al. Whole-Body Functional MRI and PET/MRI in Multiple Myeloma. *Cancers (Basel)*. 2020;12(11):3155. Published 2020 Oct 27. doi:10.3390/cancers12113155
7. Dimopoulos MA, Hillengrass J, Usmani S, et al. Role of magnetic resonance imaging in the management of patients with multiple myeloma: a consensus statement. *J Clin Oncol*. 2015;33(6):657-664. doi:10.1200/JCO.2014.57.9961.
8. Dammacco F, Rubini G, Ferrari C, Vacca A, Racanelli V. 18F-FDG PET/CT: a review of diagnostic and prognostic features in multiple myeloma and related disorders. *Clin Exp Med*. 2015;15(1):1-18. doi:10.1007/s10238-014-0308-3.
9. Mesguich C, Hulin C, Latrabe V, Lascaux A, Bordenave L, Hindié E. 18 F-FDG PET/CT and MRI in the Management of Multiple Myeloma: A Comparative Review. *Front Nucl Med*. 2022;1:808627. Published 2022 Feb 22. doi:10.3389/fnume.2021.808627
10. Cowan AJ, Green DJ, Kwok M, et al. Diagnosis and Management of Multiple Myeloma: A Review. *JAMA*. 2022;327(5):464-477. doi:10.1001/jama.2022.0003
11. Westerland O, Amlani A, Kelly-Morland C, et. al. Comparison of the diagnostic performance and impact on management of 18F-FDG PET/CT and whole-body MRI in multiple myeloma. *Eur J Nucl ed Mol Imaging*. 2021. doi:10.1007/s00259-020-05182-2.
12. Terpos E, Zamagni E, Lentzsch S, et al. Treatment of multiple myeloma-related bone disease: recommendations from the Bone Working Group of the International Myeloma Working Group. *Lancet Oncol*. 2021;22(3):e119-e130. doi:10.1016/S1470-2045(20)30559-3
13. Terao T, Matsue K. Progress of modern imaging modalities in multiple myeloma. *Int J Hematol*. 2022;115(6):778-789. doi:10.1007/s12185-022-03360-6
14. Rajkumar SV. Multiple myeloma: 2024 update on diagnosis, risk-stratification, and management. *Am J Hematol*. 2024;99(9):1802-1824. doi:10.1002/ajh.27422
15. Hillengass J et al. Whole-body computed tomography versus conventional skeletal survey in patients with multiple myeloma: a study of the International Myeloma Working Group. *Blood Cancer J*. 2017;7(8):e599. doi:10.1038/bcj.2017.78.
16. Maggialetti N, Ferrari C, Nappi AG, et al. Is whole body low dose CT still necessary in the era of 18F-FDG PET/CT for the assessment of bone disease in multiple myeloma patients?. Hell J Nucl Med. 2020;23(3):264-271. doi:10.1967/s002449912206


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

17. Gundesen MT, Asmussen JT, Haukås E, et al. A prospective study of Skeletal survey versus Low-dose whole-body CT for Osteolytic lesions in Multiple Myeloma. Eur J Haematol. 2022;108(5):423-429. doi:10.1111/ejh.13749
18. Bezzi D, Ambrosini V, Nanni C. Clinical Value of FDG-PET/CT in Multiple Myeloma: An Update. *Semin Nucl Med.* 2023;53(3):352-370. doi:10.1053/j.semnuclmed.2022.10.008
19. Cavo M, et al. Role of 18F-FDG PET/CT in the diagnosis and management of multiple myeloma and other plasma cell disorders: a consensus statement by the International Myeloma Working Group. *Lancet Oncol.* 2017;18(4):e206-e217. doi:10.1016/S1470-2045(17)30189-4.
20. Tagliafico AS. Imaging in multiple myeloma: Computed tomography or magnetic resonance imaging?. *World J Radiol.* 2021;13(7):223-226. doi:10.4329/wjr.v13.i7.223
21. Cui S, Guo Y, Niu W, et al. The quantitative parameters based on marrow metabolism derived from synthetic MRI: A pilot study of prognostic value in participants with newly diagnosed multiple myeloma. *Cancer Med.* 2024;13(7):e7109. doi:10.1002/cam4.7109
22. Perillo T, Giorgio C, Fico A, et al. Review of whole-body magnetic resonance imaging in multiple myeloma. *Jpn J Radiol*. 2024;42(12):1381-1391. doi:10.1007/s11604-024-01635-y
23. Costachescu D, Ionita I, Borsi EC, et al. Whole-body diffusion-weighted magnetic resonance imaging and apparent diffusion coefficient values as prognostic factors in multiple myeloma. *Exp Ther Med*. 2021;22(2):827. doi:10.3892/etm.2021.10259
24. Han S, Woo S, Kim YI, Yoon DH, Ryu JS. Prognostic value of 18F-fluorodeoxyglucose positron emission tomography/computed tomography in newly diagnosed multiple myeloma: a systematic review and meta-analysis. *Eur Radiol*. 2021;31(1):152-162. doi:10.1007/s00330-020-07177-x
25. Li J, Zhang X, Qin C, et al. A prognostication system based on clinical parameters and [18F]-FDG PET/CT in patients with newly diagnosed multiple myeloma. *Eur J Nucl Med Mol Imaging*. 2023;50(6):1665-1670. doi:10.1007/s00259-022-06088-x
26. Moreau P, Attal M, Caillot D, et al. Prospective evaluation of magnetic resonance imaging and [(18)F]fluorodeoxyglucose positron emission tomography-computed tomography at diagnosis and before maintenance therapy in symptomatic patients with multiple myeloma included in the IFM/DFCI 2009 trial: Results of the IMAJEM study. *J Clin Oncol*. 2017; 35:2911-2918.


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

Click Anywhere in the Header to Return to the Main Table of Contents



# Leukemias, Myelodysplasia and Myeloproliferative Neoplasms (ONC-26)

Guideline

Leukemias, Myelodysplasia and Myeloproliferative Neoplasms – General Considerations (ONC-26.1)
Acute Leukemias (ONC-26.2)
Chronic Myeloid Leukemias, Myelodysplastic Syndrome and Myeloproliferative Disorders (ONC-26.3)
Chronic Lymphocytic Leukemia (CLL)/Small Lymphocytic Lymphoma (SLL) (ONC-26.4)
References (ONC-26)


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

# Leukemias, Myelodysplasia and Myeloproliferative Neoplasms – General Considerations (ONC-26.1)

**ON.LM.0026.1.A**

**v2.0.2026**

- Routine advanced imaging is not medically necessary for the evaluation and management of hairy cell leukemia in the absence of specific localizing clinical symptoms.[7,8]


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

# Acute Leukemias (ONC-26.2)

**ON.LM.0026.2.A**

**v2.0.2026**

- Imaging indications for acute lymphoblastic leukemia in adult individuals are identical to those for pediatric individuals. See: **Acute Lymphoblastic Leukemia (ALL) (PEDONC-3.2)** in the Pediatric and Special Populations Oncology Imaging Guidelines.
- Imaging indications for acute myeloid leukemia in adult individuals are identical to those for pediatric individuals. See: **Acute Myeloid Leukemia (AML) (PEDONC-3.3)** in the Pediatric and Special Populations Oncology Imaging Guidelines.


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

# Chronic Myeloid Leukemias, Myelodysplastic Syndrome and Myeloproliferative Disorders (ONC-26.3)

**ON.LM.0026.3.A**

**v2.0.2026**

- Routine advanced imaging is not medically necessary in the evaluation and management of chronic myeloid leukemias, myelodysplastic syndromes or myeloproliferative disorders in the absence of specific localizing clinical symptoms or clearance for hematopoietic stem cell transplantation.
- See: **Hematopoietic Stem Cell Transplantation (ONC-29)** for imaging guidelines related to transplant.
- For work-up of elevated blood counts, see: **Paraneoplastic Syndromes – General Considerations (ONC-30.3)**.

### Evidence Discussion

It is not routinely medically necessary to utilize advanced imaging for chronic myeloid leukemia, myelodysplastic syndromes, and myeloproliferative disorders. In the interest of safety such that infectious and iatrogenic complications are assessed in a timely manner, these guidelines provide flexibility for approval of advanced imaging for specific localizing symptoms, and a separate guideline section for imaging related to stem cell transplantation.[6,12,13]


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

# Chronic Lymphocytic Leukemia (CLL)/ Small Lymphocytic Lymphoma (SLL) (ONC-26.4)

**ON.LM.0026.4.A**

**v2.0.2026**

- PET imaging is not medically necessary in the evaluation of CLL/SLL with the exception of suspected Richter's transformation (see suspected transformation, below).
- CLL/SLL is monitored with serial laboratory studies. Routine advanced imaging is not medically necessary for monitoring treatment response or surveillance, except when initial studies reveal bulky disease involvement.
- Bulky disease is defined as lymph node mass >10cm or spleen >6cm below costal margin.

| Indication | Medically Necessary Imaging Study |
|---|---|
| Initial Staging/Diagnosis | • Routine advanced imaging is not medically necessary for initial evaluation of asymptomatic individuals |
| For ANY of the following:<br>• Bulky lymph node mass (>10cm)<br>• Splenomegaly >6cm below costal margin<br>• Presence of B symptoms<br>• Progressive anemia and thrombocytopenia<br>• Prior to planned systemic therapy | ANY or ALL of the following:<br>• CT Chest with contrast (CPT® 71260)<br>• CT Abdomen and Pelvis with contrast (CPT® 74177) |
| Treatment Response | • For individuals with bulky nodal disease at diagnosis, CT with contrast of previously involved area(s) every 2 cycles of therapy<br>• Routine imaging is not medically necessary for individuals without bulky nodal disease at diagnosis |


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

| Indication | Medically Necessary Imaging Study |
|---|---|
| End of Therapy Evaluation | • For individuals with bulky nodal disease at diagnosis, CT with contrast of previously involved area(s) |
| Suspected Progression | ANY or ALL of the following:<br>• CT Chest with contrast (CPT® 71260)<br>• CT Abdomen and Pelvis with contrast (CPT® 74177)<br>• CT with contrast of previously involved area(s) |
| Suspected transformation (Richter's) from a low-grade lymphoma to a more aggressive type based on one or more of the following:<br>• New B symptoms<br>• Rapidly growing lymph nodes<br>• Extranodal disease develops<br>• Significant recent rise in LDH above normal range | • PET/CT (CPT® 78815 or CPT® 78816) |
| Surveillance | For individuals with bulky nodal disease at diagnosis, every 6 months for two years, then annually:<br>• CT Chest with contrast (CPT® 71260)<br>• CT Abdomen and Pelvis with contrast (CPT® 74177)<br>• CT with contrast of previously involved area(s)<br>Routine imaging is not medically necessary for individuals without bulky nodal disease at diagnosis |

**Evidence Discussion**

Suspected/Diagnosis (whenever applicable)

- Diagnosis is by flow cytometry and biopsy. No imaging is medically necessary.[1]

Initial staging


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

- Routine advanced imaging for CLL/SLL is not medically necessary. However, in the interest of individual safety, to recognize mass effect and assess risk of tumor lysis syndrome prior to treatment, CT imaging of the chest, abdomen and pelvis are medically necessary. CT Neck may be added if there are neck symptoms, per general oncology guidelines.[1,12,13]

Restaging

- Routine imaging is not medically necessary unless there is bulky nodal disease, as noted in 'initial staging' section. For bulky nodal disease, treatment response imaging with CT is supported every 2 cycles or for signs and symptoms of disease progression.
- There are no data-supported benefits to routine monitoring with PET/CT, and PET/CT is significantly more radiation than CT alone. PET/CT is medically necessary only for signs and symptoms of Richter's transformation to high grade lymphoma, where the diagnosis can be made without invasive procedure using this modality.[1]

Surveillance

- There is no benefit to advanced imaging for surveillance of individuals without bulky nodal disease at diagnosis, and there is a risk of increased radiation exposure and invasive pursuit of incidental findings. In individuals with bulky nodal disease at diagnosis, flexibility is provided for surveillance imaging every 6 months for 2 years to assess for mass effect or progression.[131]


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

# References (ONC-26)

**v2.0.2026**

1. Wierda WG, Brown J, Abramson JS, et al. National Comprehensive Cancer Network (NCCN) Guidelines Version 2.2026 – December 22, 2025. Chronic Lymphocytic Leukemia/Small Lymphocytic Lymphoma, available at: https://www.nccn.org/professionals/physician_gls/pdf/cll.pdf Referenced with permission from the NCCN Clinical Practice Guidelines in Oncology (NCCN Guidelines™) for Chronic Lymphocytic Leukemia/Small Lymphocytic Lymphoma V2.2026 – December 22, 2025. ©2025 National Comprehensive Cancer Network, Inc. All rights reserved. The NCCN Guidelines™ and illustrations herein may not be reproduced in any form for any purpose without the express written permission of the NCCN. To view the most recent and complete version of the NCCN Guidelines™, go online to NCCN.org.
2. Hod K, Tova Y, Gold O, et al. The Pattern of Use of PET/CT Scans in the Clinical Management of Chronic Lymphocytic Leukemia. *Clin Lymphoma Myeloma Leuk*. 2021;21(8):558-563. doi:10.1016/j.clml.2021.04.003
3. Mauro FR, Chauvie S, Paoloni F, et al. Diagnostic and prognostic role of PET/CT in patients with chronic lymphocytic leukemia and progressive disease. *Leukemia*. 2015;29(6):1360-1365. doi:10.1038/leu.2015.21.
4. Hallek M. Chronic Lymphocytic Leukemia: 2025 Update on the Epidemiology, Pathogenesis, Diagnosis, and Therapy. *Am J Hematol*. 2025;100(3):450-480. doi:10.1002/ajh.27546
5. Patnaik MM, Tefferi A. Chronic Myelomonocytic leukemia: 2020 update on diagnosis, risk stratification and management. *Am J Hematol*. 2020;95(1):97-115. doi:10.1002/ajh.25684
6. American Society of Hematology. Ten Things Doctors and Patients Should Question: An Update from the Choosing Wisely Task Force. ASH Clinical News. Published August 2025.
7. National Cancer Institute. Hairy Cell Leukemia Treatment (PDQ®)–Health Professional Version. National Cancer Institute. Updated February 21, 2025.
8. Troussard X, Maître E, Paillassa J. Hairy cell leukemia 2024: Update on diagnosis, risk-stratification, and treatment-Annual updates in hematological malignancies. *Am J Hematol*. 2024;99(4):679-696. doi:10.1002/ajh.27240.
9. Inaba H, Teachey D, Annesley C , et al. National Comprehensive Cancer Network (NCCN) Guidelines Version 1.2026 – August 11, 2025. Pediatric Acute Lymphoblastic Leukemia, available at: https://www.nccn.org/professionals/physician_gls/pdf/ped_all.pdf Referenced with permission from the NCCN Clinical Practice Guidelines in Oncology (NCCN Guidelines™) for Pediatric Acute Lymphoblastic Leukemia V1.2026 – August 11, 2025. ©2025 National Comprehensive Cancer Network, Inc. All rights reserved. The NCCN Guidelines™ and illustrations herein may not be reproduced in any form for any purpose without the express written permission of the NCCN. To view the most recent and complete version of the NCCN Guidelines™, go online to NCCN.org.
10. Lauer M, Kernen E, Schwabe D, Lehrnbecher T, Porto L. The role of magnetic resonance imaging in the diagnosis of central nervous system involvement in children with acute lymphoblastic leukemia. *Pediatr Blood Cancer*. 2020;67(10):e28294. doi:10.1002/pbc.28294
11. Expert Panel on Musculoskeletal Imaging, Ha AS, Chang EY, et al. ACR Appropriateness Criteria® Osteonecrosis: 2022 Update. *J Am Coll Radiol*. 2022;19(11S):S409-S416. doi:10.1016/j.jacr.2022.09.009
12. Shah N, Bhatia R, Altman J, et al. National Comprehensive Cancer Network (NCCN) Guidelines Version 1.2026 – July 16, 2025. Chronic Myeloid Leukemia, available at: https://www.nccn.org/professionals/physician_gls/pdf/cml.pdf Referenced with permission from the NCCN Clinical Practice Guidelines in Oncology (NCCN Guidelines™) for Chronic Myeloid Leukemia V1.20264 – July 16, 2025. ©2025 National Comprehensive Cancer Network, Inc. All rights reserved. The NCCN Guidelines™ and illustrations herein may not be reproduced in any form for any purpose without the express written permission of the NCCN. To view the most recent and complete version of the NCCN Guidelines™, go online to NCCN.org.
13. Baden LR, Swaminathan S, Almyroudis NG, et al. National Comprehensive Cancer Network (NCCN) Guidelines Version 1.2025 – June 20, 2025. Prevention and Treatment of Cancer-Related Infections, available at: https://www.nccn.org/professionals/physician_gls/pdf/infections.pdf Referenced with permission from the NCCN Clinical Practice Guidelines in Oncology (NCCN Guidelines™) for Prevention and Treatment of Cancer-Related Infections V1.2025 – June 20, 2025. ©2025 National Comprehensive Cancer Network, Inc. All rights reserved. The NCCN Guidelines™ and illustrations herein may not be reproduced in any form for any purpose without


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

the express written permission of the NCCN. To view the most recent and complete version of the NCCN Guidelines™, go online to NCCN.org.

14. Pollyea DA, Assi R, Altman J, et al. National Comprehensive Cancer Network (NCCN) Guidelines Version 3.2026 – Nov 24,2025, 2025. Acute Myeloid Leukemia, available at: aml.pdf. Referenced with permission from the NCCN Clinical Practice Guidelines in Oncology (NCCN Guidelines™) for Acute Myeloid Leukemia V3.2026 – Nov 24, 2025. ©2025 National Comprehensive Cancer Network, Inc. All rights reserved. The NCCN Guidelines™ and illustrations herein may not be reproduced in any form for any purpose without the express written permission of the NCCN. To view the most recent and complete version of the NCCN Guidelines™, go online to NCCN.org.


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

Click Anywhere in the Header to Return to the Main Table of Contents



# Non-Hodgkin Lymphomas (ONC-27)

Guideline

Non-Hodgkin Lymphomas – General Considerations (ONC-27.1)
Diffuse Large B Cell Lymphoma (DLBCL) (ONC-27.2)
Follicular Lymphoma (ONC-27.3)
Marginal Zone Lymphomas (ONC-27.4)
Mantle Cell Lymphoma (ONC-27.5)
Burkitt's Lymphomas (ONC-27.6)
Lymphoblastic Lymphomas (ONC-27.7)
T Cell Lymphomas (ONC-27.8)
Post-Transplant Lymphoproliferative Disorders (ONC-27.9)
Waldenström Macroglobulinemia or Lymphoplasmacytic Lymphoma (ONC-27.10)
References (ONC-27)


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

# Non-Hodgkin Lymphomas – General Considerations (ONC-27.1)

**ON.NH.0027.1.A**
**v2.0.2026**

- Lymphoma is often suspected when individuals have any of the following:
  - Bulky lymphadenopathy (lymph node mass >10cm in size), hepatomegaly or splenomegaly
  - The presence of systemic symptoms (fever, drenching night sweats or unintended weight loss of >10%, called “B symptoms”)
- Individuals with AIDS-related lymphoma should be imaged according to the primary lymphoma histology.
- See: **Castleman’s Disease (unicentric and multicentric) (ONC-31.11)** for guidelines covering Castleman’s disease.
- See: **Chronic Lymphocytic Leukemia (CLL)/Small Lymphocytic Lymphoma (SLL) (ONC-26.4)** for guidelines covering Chronic Lymphocytic Leukemia (CLL)/ Small Lymphocytic Lymphoma (SLL).

| Indication | Medically Necessary Imaging Study |
|---|---|
| • Biopsy proven lymphoma, or<br>• Suspected lymphoma and any of the following:<br>◦ Bulky lymphadenopathy (LN mass >10cm)<br>◦ Hepatomegaly<br>◦ Splenomegaly<br>◦ B symptom: Unexplained fever, drenching night sweats, unintended weight loss >10% total body weight | • CT Chest (CPT® 71260) and CT Abdomen and Pelvis (CPT® 74177) with contrast<br>◦ MRI without and with contrast for individuals who cannot tolerate CT contrast due to allergy or impaired renal function |
| Signs or symptoms of disease involving the neck | • CT Neck with contrast (CPT® 70491) |
| Signs or symptoms suggesting CNS involvement with lymphoma. | • MRI Brain without and with contrast (CPT® 70553)<br>• See: **CNS Lymphoma (also known as Microglioma) (ONC-2.7)** |


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

| Indication | Medically Necessary Imaging Study |
|---|---|
| Known or suspected bone involvement with lymphoma | • MRI without and with contrast of symptomatic or previously involved bony areas<br>◦ Bone scan is inferior to MRI for evaluation of known or suspected bone involvement with lymphoma |
| Determine a more favorable site for biopsy when a relatively inaccessible site is contemplated | • PET/CT (CPT® 78815 or CPT® 78816)<br>◦ PET/CT is not medically necessary for all other indications prior to histological confirmation of lymphoma |
| CAR-T cell therapy | Once before treatment and once 30-60 days after completion of treatment:<br>• PET/CT (CPT® 78815 and CPT® 78816) |


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

# Diffuse Large B Cell Lymphoma (DLBCL) (ONC-27.2)

**ON.TO.0027.2.A**

**v2.0.2026**

- Grey zone lymphomas, primary mediastinal B cell lymphomas, Grade 3 (high) follicular lymphoma, double-hit or triple-hit lymphomas, and primary cutaneous diffuse large B cell lymphoma should also be imaged according to these guidelines.

| Indication | Medically Necessary Imaging Study |
|---|---|
| Initial Staging/ Diagnosis | ONE of the following:*<br>• PET/CT (CPT® 78815 or CPT® 78816)<br>OR<br>• CT Chest with contrast (CPT® 71260) and CT Abdomen and Pelvis with contrast (CPT® 74177)<br><br>*PET/CT and diagnostic CT are not medically necessary concurrently; however, if CT was performed prior to diagnosis, a PET/CT may be subsequently medically necessary. |
| Treatment response for all stage I, and stage II without extensive mesenteric disease | ANY of the following:<br>• CT with contrast of previously involved area(s) may be approved every 2 cycles (6-8 weeks) of therapy<br>• PET/CT (CPT® 78815 or CPT® 78816) after 3-4 cycles of chemotherapy (in lieu of CT or for inconclusive CT) |
| Treatment response for stage II WITH extensive mesenteric disease, and stages III-IV | ANY of the following:<br>• CT with contrast of previously involved area(s) may be approved every 2 cycles (6-8 weeks) of therapy<br>• PET/CT (CPT® 78815 or CPT® 78816) after 2-4 cycles of chemotherapy (in lieu of CT or for inconclusive CT) |
| End of Chemotherapy and/or Radiation Therapy Evaluation | ANY or ALL of the following:<br>• PET/CT (CPT® 78815 or CPT® 78816) at the end of chemotherapy and again at the end of radiation<br>• CT with contrast of previously involved area(s) |


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

| Indication | Medically Necessary Imaging Study |
|---|---|
| Suspected Recurrence | ANY or ALL of the following:<br>• CT Chest with contrast (CPT® 71260)<br>• CT Abdomen and Pelvis with contrast (CPT® 74177)<br>• CT with contrast of previously involved area(s)<br>• PET/CT can be considered in rare circumstances (e.g., bone involvement). |
| Biopsy-proven recurrence | • PET/CT (CPT® 78815 or CPT® 78816) |
| CAR-T cell therapy | Once before treatment and once 30-60 days after completion of treatment:<br>• PET/CT (CPT® 78815 or CPT® 78816) |
| Surveillance for ANY of the following:<br>• All stages of DLBCL<br>• Relapsed lymphoma<br>• Primary mediastinal large B cell lymphoma<br>• Primary cutaneous diffuse large B cell lymphoma | • Every 6 months for 2 years after completion of treatment:<br>◦ CT Chest with contrast (CPT® 71260)<br>◦ CT Abdomen and Pelvis with contrast (CPT® 74177)<br>◦ CT with contrast of previously involved area(s) |

**Evidence Discussion**

Initial Staging

- These guidelines for initial staging align with NCCN and support either PET/CT or diagnostic CTs. Greater than 97% of DLBCL are FDG-avid, though it is not known to be more accurate than CT for DLBCL at initial staging. However, baseline PET may be useful for comparison, as end of treatment remission assessment with PET/CT is more accurate than CT alone in DLBCL.20

Restaging

- CT is supported by NCCN every 2 cycles for restaging. PET/CT is supported by NCCN for interim restaging after 3-4 cycles of therapy and at the end of


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

chemotherapy and/or radiation for lower stage disease. For stage II with extensive mesenteric disease, stage III, and stage IV, NCCN supported PET/CT more frequently - after 2-4 cycles of therapy and at the end of therapy. PET/CT remains standard for remission assessment at end of therapy, where its accuracy is greater that CT alone for DLBCL .[1,14] Documentation of residual tissue at end of therapy is useful for monitoring for relapse, and as such diagnostic, contrast enhanced CT is medically necessary if requested in addition to PET at end of therapy .[1,14]

- FDG avidity is prognostic for relapsed/refractory DLBCL and may have a role in individual selection for CAR-T therapy and to assess response, so is medically necessary as a baseline before CAR-T and once 30-60 days after completion, to assess response and identify individuals who may be candidates for further salvage therapy .[1,14]

Surveillance

- The false-positive rate with PET scans for surveillance in various studies is 16%-20%, potentially leading to unnecessary investigations, radiation exposure, biopsies, expense, and anxiety.[3,13] Several small studies have failed to note an improvement in relapse detection with CT over clinical observation in DLBCL; however, there is no definitive standard for surveillance imaging with CT.[5,6] The majority of relapses occur in the first 2 years, and the NCCN supported CT imaging of involved areas and chest, abdomen, and pelvis every 6 months for the first two year. In the interest of individual- and provider-centricity, these guidelines align with the NCCN with respect to surveillance in DLBCL.[1]


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

# Follicular Lymphoma (ONC-27.3)

**ON.NH.0027.3.A**
**v2.0.2026**

- This section applies to follicular lymphomas with WHO grade of 1 (low) or 2 (intermediate) and primary cutaneous follicle center lymphoma. Grade 3 (high) follicular lymphomas should be imaged according to guidelines found in: **Diffuse Large B Cell Lymphoma (DLBCL) (ONC-27.2)**.

| Indication | Medically Necessary Imaging Study |
|---|---|
| Initial Staging/Diagnosis | EITHER of the following:<br>• CT Chest with contrast (CPT® 71260) and CT Abdomen and Pelvis with contrast (CPT® 74177)<br>OR<br>• PET/CT (CPT® 78815) |
| For ANY of the following, if PET/CT has not yet been performed:<br>• If radiation therapy is being considered for stage I or II disease<br>• CT results lead to a plan for systemic therapy | • PET/CT (CPT® 78815 or CPT® 78816) |
| Treatment Response | • CT with contrast of previously involved area(s) every 2 cycles of therapy |
| End of Therapy Evaluation | ONE of the following may be approved:<br>• PET/CT (CPT® 78815 or CPT® 78816)<br>OR<br>• CT Chest with contrast (CPT® 71260) and<br>• CT Abdomen and Pelvis with contrast (CPT® 74177)<br>• CT with contrast of previously involved area(s) |


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

| Indication | Medically Necessary Imaging Study |
|---|---|
| Suspected Recurrence | ANY or ALL of the following may be approved:<br>• CT Chest with contrast (CPT® 71260)<br>• CT Abdomen and Pelvis with contrast (CPT® 74177)<br>• CT with contrast of previously involved area(s) |
| Suspected transformation (Richter's) from a low grade lymphoma to a more aggressive type based on one or more of the following:<br>• New B symptoms<br>• Rapidly growing lymph nodes<br>• Extranodal disease develops<br>• Significant recent rise in LDH above normal range | • PET/CT (CPT® 78815 or CPT® 78816) |
| Surveillance for ANY of the following:<br>• After completion of active treatment<br>• On maintenance treatment<br>• Observation without any treatment | For all stages, every 6 months for two years, then annually:<br>• CT Chest with contrast (CPT® 71260)<br>• CT Abdomen and Pelvis with contrast (CPT® 74177)<br>• CT with contrast of previously involved area(s) |
| Surveillance of pediatric-type follicular lymphoma in adults | Routine advanced imaging is not medically necessary after complete response |

## Evidence Discussion

### Initial Staging

Diagnostic quality CT with contrast or PET/CT may be used for initial staging. Clinical stage is modified in only 15-20% of individuals with use of PET/CT and results in a change in treatment in only 8% of individuals.[1] A baseline PET/CT is useful for comparison for treatment response and to determine if further treatment intensification is necessary and is recommended if systemic therapy is planned. PET/CT is particularly important in the setting of localized disease with a plan for radiation therapy only to rule out any other systemic disease and to serve as a baseline for treatment response.[1,3,4,20]


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

### Restaging

PET/CT is of unclear utility for interim restaging, as interim PET/CT response shows no association with overall survival; thus, conventional CT is medically necessary.[21] PET/CT does identify individuals at risk of progression at end of induction therapy, where initial studies showed that 69% of individuals who were classified as not having complete remission on CT were re-classified as complete metabolic remission when staged with PET/CT at end of induction.[20] This increased sensitivity and specificity more accurately identifies individuals at risk of poor progression-free survival who may be candidates for consolidative therapy and prevents over and under-treatment. These results only apply to end of induction PET/CT.[1,4,20]

While PET/CT alone is not sufficient to diagnose transformation of follicular lymphoma to diffuse large B cell lymphoma, when clinical signs and symptoms and lab values suggest transformation, PET/CT can be useful to detect transformation. SUV >10 predicts aggressive lymphoma with 80% certainty and PPV increases at higher SUVs.[1,18] FDG avidity is also standard of care to select biopsy site in suspected transformation.[1,18]

### Surveillance

There are little data on the role of surveillance imaging in indolent lymphomas including follicular lymphoma. The majority of relapses occur within the first 2 years post completion of therapy, and these guidelines align with the NCCN support of CT no more than every 6 months in the first two years and no more than annually following. Given that indolent lymphoma is considered a chronic condition, there is no endpoint for this imaging if requested.[1] The exception is pediatric-type follicular lymphoma, for which there is no survival benefit with detection of recurrence via surveillance imaging vs clinical detection; surveillance imaging is not medically necessary in this population.[1,13] PET/CT surveillance is generally not medically necessary, due to a false positive rate as high as 20%, with no documented survival benefit, and increased radiation, invasive procedures, anxiety and cost.[13]


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

# Marginal Zone Lymphomas (ONC-27.4)

**ON.NH.0027.4.A**
**v2.0.2026**

- MALT lymphomas in any location and primary cutaneous marginal zone lymphoma should also be imaged according to these guidelines.
- Splenic Marginal Zone Lymphoma is diagnosed with splenomegaly, peripheral blood flow cytometry and bone marrow biopsy. Splenectomy is diagnostic and therapeutic. PET scan is not routinely medically necessary prior to splenectomy.

| Indication | Medically Necessary Imaging Study |
|---|---|
| Initial Staging/ Diagnosis | ANY or ALL of the following:<br>• CT Chest with contrast (CPT® 71260)<br>• CT Abdomen and Pelvis with contrast (CPT® 74177) |
| EITHER of the following:<br>• If radiation therapy is being considered for stage I or II disease<br>• If systemic therapy is planned | • PET/CT (CPT® 78815 or CPT® 78816) |
| Treatment Response | • CT with contrast of previously involved area(s) every 2 cycles of therapy |
| End of Therapy Evaluation | ONE of the following:<br>• CT with contrast of previously involved area(s)<br>• PET/CT (CPT® 78815 or CPT® 78816) |
| Suspected Recurrence | ANY or ALL of the following:<br>• CT Chest with contrast (CPT® 71260)<br>• CT Abdomen and Pelvis with contrast (CPT® 74177)<br>• CT with contrast of previously involved area(s) |


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

| Indication | Medically Necessary Imaging Study |
|---|---|
| Suspected recurrence and ANY of the following:<br>• Symptoms of end organ dysfunction<br>• Clinically significant or progressive cytopenias<br>• Bulky disease (single mass of ≥7cm or ≥3 or more nodal sites 3cm in diameter)<br>• Steady or rapid progression | In addition to the CT imaging above:<br>• PET/CT (CPT® 78815 or CPT® 78816) |
| Surveillance of all stages of nodal marginal zone lymphoma for any of the following:<br>• After completion of active treatment<br>• On maintenance treatment<br>• Observation without any treatment | Every 6 months for two years, then annually:<br>• CT Chest with contrast (CPT® 71260)<br>• CT Abdomen and Pelvis with contrast (CPT® 74177)<br>• CT with contrast of previously involved area(s) |
| Surveillance of all stages of extranodal marginal zone lymphoma | Advanced imaging is not routinely medically necessary for surveillance of asymptomatic individuals |

## Evidence Discussion

### Initial Staging

Diagnostic, contrasted CT of chest, abdomen and pelvis is medically necessary for all individuals to assess extent of disease. PET avidity of extranodal marginal zone lymphoma is unreliable, as only 50%-75% of these tumors are FDG avid.[4] A baseline


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

PET/CT is useful for comparison for treatment response and to determine if further treatment intensification is necessary, and so is medically necessary if systemic therapy is planned. PET/CT is particularly important in the setting of localized disease with a plan for RT only, to rule out any other systemic disease and to serve as a baseline for treatment response.[1,3,4]

**Restaging**

There is no clear role for PET in interim restaging of marginal zone lymphoma; CT is medically necessary every 2 cycles in alignment with NCCN. End of therapy PET/CT is medically necessary to identify individuals without a complete metabolic response who are candidates for extended therapy, to prevent over- or under- treatment.[1,4]

**Surveillance**

There are little data on the role of surveillance imaging in indolent lymphomas including marginal zone lymphoma. Extranodal marginal zone lymphoma typically remains localized, and asymptomatic surveillance with advanced imaging is not medically necessary.[19] The majority of relapses occur within the first 2 years post completion of therapy. These guidelines align with NCCN support of CT no more than every 6 months in the first two years and no more than annually following. Given that indolent lymphoma is considered a chronic condition, there is no endpoint for this imaging if requested.[1] PET/CT surveillance is not universally medically necessary, due to a false positive rate as high as 20%, with no documented survival benefit, and increased radiation, invasive procedures, anxiety, and cost.[13] However, PET/CT is a medically necessary imaging modality for specific circumstances of recurrence; NCCN supported PET/CT in recurrence when there are indications for treatment.[1]


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

Click Anywhere in the Header to Return to the Main Table of Contents



# Mantle Cell Lymphoma (ONC-27.5)

**ON.NH.0027.5.A**
**v2.0.2026**

| Indication | Medically Necessary Imaging Study |
|---|---|
| Initial Staging/Diagnosis | ONE of the following:<br>• CT Chest with contrast (CPT® 71260) and CT Abdomen and Pelvis with contrast (CPT® 74177)<br>OR<br>• PET/CT (CPT® 78815 or CPT® 78816) |
| Treatment Response | • CT with contrast of previously involved area(s) every 2 cycles of therapy<br>• PET/CT is not medically necessary for monitoring treatment response but can be considered in rare circumstances when CT did not show disease (e.g., bone). |
| End of Therapy Evaluation | ONE of the following:<br>• CT with contrast of previously involved area(s)<br>• PET/CT (CPT® 78815 or CPT® 78816) |
| Suspected Recurrence | ANY or ALL of the following:<br>• CT Chest with contrast (CPT® 71260)<br>• CT Abdomen and Pelvis with contrast (CPT® 74177)<br>• CT with contrast of previously involved area(s)<br>• PET/CT can be considered in rare circumstances (e.g., bone involvement). |
| Surveillance for all stages | Every 6 months for 2 years, and then annually:<br>• CT Chest with contrast (CPT® 71260)<br>• CT Abdomen and Pelvis with contrast (CPT® 74177)<br>• CT with contrast of previously involved area(s) |

## Evidence Discussion

### Initial Staging


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

Diagnostic CT with contrast or PET/CT is medically necessary. PET/CT is the preferred modality particularly when systemic therapy is planned in order to prevent under treatment.[1,20]

**Restaging**

Interim restaging with PET/CT has not been shown to change outcomes; thus, CT alone is medically necessary every two cycles unless the sites of disease are only visible on PET/CT. However, PET/CT is medically necessary at end of planned therapy as a lack of complete metabolic response may require maintenance treatment .[1]

**Surveillance**

Late relapses, as far as 15 years out, can occur with mantle cell lymphoma. The benefit of detection of with imaging vs clinical detection remains unclear, and some studies have shown no significant advantage in survival for relapses after first remission detected by surveillance imaging.[28] However, this is still an active point for discussion among treating providers, and the NCCN supported surveillance imaging with CT scan.[1,28] Given that most providers consider NCCN the standard of care, this guideline aligns with the more conservative NCCN recommended timeframe, to acknowledge this data while maintaining an individual- and provider-centric approach. Surveillance scanning with PET/CT has a positive predictive value of only 24% in this entity and is not medically necessary.[1,28]


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

# Burkitt's Lymphomas (ONC-27.6)

**ON.NH.0027.6.A**
**v2.0.2026**

| Indication | Medically Necessary Imaging Study |
|---|---|
| Initial Staging/Diagnosis | ANY or ALL of the following:<br>• PET/CT (CPT® 78815 or CPT® 78816)<br>• CT Chest with contrast (CPT® 71260)<br>• CT Abdomen and Pelvis with contrast (CPT® 74177) |
| Treatment Response | • CT with contrast of previously involved area(s) every 2 cycles of therapy<br>• PET/CT is not medically necessary for monitoring treatment response but can be considered in rare circumstances when CT did not show disease (e.g., bone). |
| End of Therapy Evaluation | ANY or ALL of the following:<br>• PET/CT (CPT® 78815 or CPT® 78816) at the end of chemotherapy and again at the end of radiation<br>• CT with contrast of previously involved area(s) |
| Suspected Recurrence | ANY or ALL of the following:<br>• CT Chest with contrast (CPT® 71260)<br>• CT Abdomen and Pelvis with contrast (CPT® 74177)<br>• CT with contrast of previously involved area(s)<br>• PET/CT can be considered in rare circumstances (e.g., bone involvement). |
| Surveillance | Every 6 months for 2 years after completion of treatment:<br>• CT Chest with contrast (CPT® 71260)<br>• CT Abdomen and Pelvis with contrast (CPT® 74177) |

## Evidence Discussion

### Initial Staging/Diagnosis

In alignment with NCCN, both diagnostic quality CT scan with contrast and PET/CT are medically necessary in Burkitt's Lymphoma. Diagnostic, contrasted CT is helpful


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

for clarifying node bulk (individual nodes vs. conglomerates), anatomic relationships of bulky disease, abdominal and Waldeyer's ring involvement, as well as abdominal visceral involvement, all of which are relevant to treatment decisions and emergency management in Burkitt's lymphoma. Baseline metabolic activity is useful for comparison at end of therapy, where FDG avidity defines treatment response.[1,3]

**Treatment Response**

CT alone (rather than PET/CT) should be used to assess response between cycles, as complete response is not defined until completion of upfront therapy regimen. At the end of all planned upfront therapy, a PET/CT is medically necessary, even in addition to diagnostic contrasted CTs. Metabolic response at this time point determines whether therapy can be considered complete or whether local therapy or intensification of treatment will be necessary.[1,3,4]

**Surveillance**

The role of surveillance in Burkitt's Lymphoma is somewhat controversial. Clinically evident symptoms of recurrence develop quickly in this aggressive entity, and recurrence is as likely to be diagnosed based on symptoms as by surveillance imaging in some studies. PET/CT surveillance of Burkitt's Lymphoma is widely discouraged as it increases false positive findings, radiation exposure, and does not improve outcomes .[4,13] NCCN is considered the standard for care in the U.S., and NCCN supported CT with contrast every 6 months for 2 years, with which these guidelines align for an individual- and provider-centric approach. Relapse after 2 years is rare, imaging after this point for asymptomatic surveillance has not been shown to improve outcomes.[1,13]


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

# Lymphoblastic Lymphomas (ONC-27.7)

**ON.NH.0027.7.A**

**v2.0.2026**

- Individuals with lymphoblastic lymphoma (even those with bulky nodal disease) are treated using the leukemia treatment plan appropriate to the cell type (B or T cell). Imaging indications in adult individuals are identical to those for pediatric individuals. See: **Acute Lymphoblastic Leukemia (ALL) (PEDONC-3.2)** in the Pediatric and Special Populations Oncology Imaging Guidelines.


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

Click Anywhere in the Header to Return to the Main Table of Contents



# T Cell Lymphomas (ONC-27.8)

**ON.NH.0027.8.A**
**v2.0.2026**

- Includes Peripheral T-Cell Lymphomas, Mycosis Fungoides/Sézary Syndrome, Anaplastic Large Cell Lymphoma (ALCL) including breast implant-associated ALCL, Angioimmunoblastic lymphoma, and Primary Cutaneous CD30+T Cell Lymphoproliferative Disorders

| Indication | Medically Necessary Imaging Study |
|---|---|
| Initial Staging/ Diagnosis | ANY or ALL of the following:<br>• PET/CT (CPT® 78815 or CPT® 78816)<br>• CT Chest with contrast (CPT® 71260)<br>• CT Abdomen and Pelvis with contrast (CPT® 74177) |
| T-cell lymphoma of nasal cavity, oropharynx, or nasopharynx | In addition to the imaging above:<br>• MRI Orbits, Face, and Neck without and with contrast (CPT® 70543) |
| Breast implant-associated ALCL | In addition to the above initial staging studies:<br>• Ultrasound Breast (CPT® 76641 or CPT® 76642)<br>◦ MRI Breast (CPT® 77049) for evaluation of inconclusive ultrasound findings |
| Treatment Response | Any ONE of the following after 3-4 cycles:<br>• PET/CT (CPT® 78815 or 78816)<br>or<br>• CT Chest with contrast (CPT® 71260), and<br>• CT Abdomen and Pelvis with contrast (CPT® 74177) and<br>• CT with contrast of previously involved area(s) |


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

| Indication | Medically Necessary Imaging Study |
|---|---|
| End of Therapy Evaluation | Any ONE of the following at the end of chemotherapy and again at the end of radiation therapy:<br>• PET/CT (CPT® 78815 or CPT® 78816)<br>or<br>• CT Chest with contrast (CPT® 71260), and<br>• CT Abdomen and Pelvis with contrast (CPT® 74177), and<br>• CT with contrast of previously involved area(s) |
| Suspected Recurrence | ANY or ALL of the following:<br>• CT Chest with contrast (CPT® 71260)<br>• CT Abdomen and Pelvis with contrast (CPT® 74177)<br>• CT with contrast of previously involved area(s)<br>• PET/CT can be considered in rare circumstances (e.g., bone involvement). |
| Surveillance, all stages | Every 6 months for 2 years, then annually for 5 years:<br>• CT Chest with contrast (CPT® 71260), CT Abdomen and Pelvis with contrast (CPT® 74177), and CT of previously involved areas<br>◦ PET/CT (CPT® 78815 or CPT® 78816) is medically necessary instead of CT for individuals with a history of extranodal disease that was not adequately imaged by conventional imaging |

## Evidence Discussion

### Initial Staging

FDG PET/CT fusion (PET with attenuation CT) is valuable for initial staging as individuals with T-cell lymphoma often have extranodal disease, which may be missed on body area specific diagnostic CTs. Noncontiguous nodes, Waldeyer ring, and GI/liver involvement is also common in T-cell lymphomas and may be difficult to distinguish on PET/CT fusion studies alone; thus, our guidelines support the use of diagnostic quality, contrasted CTs when requested to ensure correct staging and treatment stratification and prevent under- or over-treatment, in addition to PET/CT fusion imaging.[1,2,29]

### Treatment Response


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

Modality for restaging should be determined by which studies best illustrated disease at initial staging. PET/CT fusion imaging or body area specific diagnostic quality, contrasted CTs are generally adequate for comparison to initial staging to assess response[2] after 3-4 cycles and again at end of chemotherapy and at end of radiation. Imaging prior to 3-4 cycles may result in over- or under-treatment, and thus is not medically necessary.[1,2]

**Surveillance**

There is no evidence illustrating an overall survival advantage in detection of relapse from imaging vs. clinical detection, but data suggests better progression-free survival after second line treatment in individuals undergoing imaging surveillance.[13] Considering these perspectives and to align with NCCN, CT of viscera and all previously involved areas is medically necessary every 6 months for 2 years, then annually for 5 years.[2] PET/CT surveillance is not medically necessary as no survival improvement is noted with PET/CT surveillance, and it subjects individuals to increased radiation, increased costs, and increased risk of invasive procedures for incidental findings, as the false positive rate in this setting is as high as 20%.[13,20] CT is generally medically necessary for suspected recurrence as well, with PET reserved for biopsy-proven recurrence, by the same rationale.


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

# Post-Transplant Lymphoproliferative Disorders (ONC-27.9)

**ON.NH.0027.9.A**
**v2.0.2026**

- Post-transplant lymphoproliferative disorder (PTLD) or viral-associated lymphoproliferative disorder can rarely occur following solid organ or hematopoietic stem cell transplantation, or in primary immunodeficiency. When reduction of immunosuppression is unsuccessful, these are often treated with chemoimmunotherapy similar to high-grade NHL.
- This section applies to Monomorphic (B-cell type) PTLD and Polymorphic PTLD.
- For Hodgkin-lymphoma subtype of PTLD, see: **Hodgkin Lymphomas (ONC-28)** for imaging recommendations.

| Indication | Medically Necessary Imaging Study |
|---|---|
| Initial Staging/ Diagnosis | ANY or ALL of the following:<br>• PET/CT (CPT® 78815 or CPT® 78816)<br>• CT Chest with contrast (CPT® 71260)<br>• CT Abdomen and Pelvis with contrast (CPT® 74177) |
| Treatment Response | ANY or ALL of the following after 4 weeks of reducing immunosuppression or every 2 cycles (6-8 weeks) of chemo/ immunotherapy:<br>• CT Chest with contrast (CPT® 71260), and<br>• CT Abdomen and Pelvis with contrast (CPT® 74177), and<br>• CT with contrast of previously involved area(s) |
| End of Therapy Evaluation | ANY one of the following at the end of treatment:<br>• PET/CT (CPT® 78815 or CPT® 78816)<br>or<br>• CT Chest with contrast (CPT® 71260), and<br>• CT Abdomen and Pelvis with contrast (CPT® 74177), and<br>• CT with contrast of previously involved area(s) |
| Suspected recurrence | • CT Chest with contrast (CPT® 71260)<br>• CT Abdomen and Pelvis with contrast (CPT® 74177) |


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

| Indication | Medically Necessary Imaging Study |
|---|---|
| Surveillance | No advanced imaging for surveillance |

## Evidence Discussion

### Initial staging

FDG PET/CT fusion (PET with attenuation CT) is valuable for initial staging as individuals with PTLD often have extranodal and/or multi-site disease, which may be missed on body area specific diagnostic CTs. Individuals with single sites of disease may be managed with local treatment alone; thus, thorough assessment for systemic disease is essential to prevent under-treatment. Node bulk has prognostic value and is used for treatment stratification, and bulky masses vs noncontiguous nodes may be difficult to distinguish on PET/CT fusion studies alone. These guidelines thus support the use of diagnostic quality, contrasted CTs when requested in addition to PET/CT fusion imaging.[1,29]

### Restaging

Restaging with CT is medically necessary every 2 cycles of chemotherapy as is standard for most disease processes.[1] Median time to failure of reduction of immunosuppression as first line therapy, however, is only 45 days, so for individual safety, these guidelines support earlier restaging in this scenario as soon as 4 weeks after reduction of immunosuppression.[22] Changing therapy based on interim PET/CT alone is not medically necessary, and thus, our guidelines support CT alone for interim restaging, with biopsy for concerning findings.[1,3,4] These guidelines do support PET/CT at end of planned treatment to ensure a complete metabolic response.[1,3,4] Concurrent diagnostic CTs may be done in lieu of PET/CT if requested, but diagnostic CTs in addition to PET/CT fusion studies do not offer additional information in the setting of a complete metabolic response .[3,4]

### Surveillance

Advanced imaging surveillance is not medically necessary for PTLD.[1,13] Surveillance imaging has not been shown to improve outcomes for PTLD and it subjects individuals to increased radiation, increased costs, and increased risk of invasive procedures for incidental findings.[13] Surveillance is predominantly via EBV PCR.[1]


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

# Waldenström Macroglobulinemia or Lymphoplasmacytic Lymphoma (ONC-27.10)

**ON.NH.0027.10.A**
**v2.0.2026**

| Indication | Medically Necessary Imaging Study |
|---|---|
| Initial Staging/Diagnosis | ANY or ALL of the following:<br>• CT Chest with contrast (CPT® 71260)<br>• CT Abdomen and Pelvis with contrast (CPT® 74177)<br>• PET/CT (CPT® 78815 or CPT® 78816) |
| Treatment Response | • CT with contrast of previously involved area(s) every 2 cycles of therapy |
| End of Therapy Evaluation | • CT with contrast of previously involved area(s) |
| Suspected Recurrence | ANY or ALL of the following:<br>• CT Chest with contrast (CPT® 71260)<br>• CT Abdomen and Pelvis with contrast (CPT® 74177)<br>• CT with contrast of previously involved area(s) |
| Surveillance | No advanced imaging for surveillance |

## Evidence Discussion

### Initial Staging

NCCN supported contrasted CT of chest, abdomen, and pelvis.[14,17] PET/CT fusion is recommended equally with diagnostic CT by the NCCN.[14]

### Restaging

NCCN supported contrasted, diagnostic quality CTs every 2 cycles of chemotherapy and at end of treatment to determine response and prevent under-treatment. Diagnostic, contrasted CTs of chest, abdomen, pelvis and previously involved areas are medically necessary for suspected recurrence.[14,17] PET/CT is not consistently correlated with


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

monoclonal protein response, which is the primary means of monitoring this entity, and PET/CT is not recommended for restaging of this entity.[14,15,16]

**Surveillance**

Surveillance of lymphoplasmacytic lymphoma is based on laboratory monitoring of blood counts and chemistries, serum proteins, and immunoglobulins. There is no established role for imaging surveillance in this entity.[14,16]


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

# References (ONC-27)

**v2.0.2026**

1. Zelenetz AD, Gordon LI, Abramson JS, et al. National Comprehensive Cancer Network (NCCN) Guidelines Version 1.2026 – December 22, 2025. B-cell lymphomas, available at: https://www.nccn.org/professionals/physician_gls/pdf/B-CELL.pdf Referenced with permission from the NCCN Clinical Practice Guidelines in Oncology (NCCN Guidelines™) for B-cell lymphomas V1.2026 – December 22, 2025. ©2025 National Comprehensive Cancer Network, Inc. All rights reserved. The NCCN Guidelines™ and illustrations herein may not be reproduced in any form for any purpose without the express written permission of the NCCN. To view the most recent and complete version of the NCCN Guidelines™, go online to NCCN.org.
2. Horwitz SM, Ansell S, Ai WZ, et al. National Comprehensive Cancer Network (NCCN) Guidelines Version 1.2026 – December 9, 2025. T-cell lymphomas, available at: https://www.nccn.org/professionals/physician_gls/pdf/T-CELL.pdf Referenced with permission from the NCCN Clinical Practice Guidelines in Oncology (NCCN Guidelines™) for T-cell lymphomas V1.2026 – December 9, 2025. ©2025 National Comprehensive Cancer Network, Inc. All rights reserved. The NCCN Guidelines™ and illustrations herein may not be reproduced in any form for any purpose without the express written permission of the NCCN. To view the most recent and complete version of the NCCN Guidelines™, go online to NCCN.org.
3. Cheson BD, Fisher RI, Barrington SF, et al. Recommendations for initial evaluation, staging, and response assessment for Hodgkin and Non-Hodgkin lymphoma: the Lugano classification. *J Clin Oncol*. 2014;32(27):3059-3067. doi:10.1200/JCO.2013.54.8800.
4. Barrington SF, Mikhaeel NG, Kostakoglu L, et al. Role of imaging in the staging and response assessment of lymphoma: consensus of the International Conference on Malignant Lymphomas Imaging Working Group. *J Clin Oncol*. 2014;32(27):3048-3058. doi:10.1200/JCO.2013.53.5229.
5. Mascaró-Pol M, Díez-Feijoo R, Rodriguez-Sevilla JJ, et al. Evaluation of routine CT scans in the follow-up of diffuse large B-cell lymphomas. *Hematology*. 2021;26(1):709-715. doi:10.1080/16078454.2021.1975957
6. El-Galaly TC, Jakobsen LH, Hutchings M, et al. Routine imaging for diffuse Large B-Cell Lymphoma in first complete remission does not improve post-treatment survival: a Danish-Swedish population-based study. *J Clin Oncol*. 2015;33(34):3993-3998. doi:10.1200/JCO.2015.62.0229.
7. Suh KJ, Kim KH, Kim R, et al. Costs and clinical outcomes of patients with diffuse large B-cell lymphoma in first remission: role of PET/CT surveillance. *Korean J Intern Med*. 2019;34(4):894-901. doi:10.3904/kjim.2017.174
8. Mikhaeel NG, Cunningham D, Counsell N, et al. FDG-PET/CT after two cycles of R-CHOP in DLBCL predicts complete remission but has limited value in identifying patients with poor outcome - final result of a UK National Cancer Research Institute prospective study. *Br J Haematol*. 2021;192(3):504-513. doi:10.1111/bjh.16875
9. Mylam KJ, Nielsen AL, Pedersen LM, Hutchings M. Fluorine-18-fluorodeoxyglucose positron emission tomography in diffuse large B-cell lymphoma. *PET Clin*. 2014;9(4):443-455. doi:10.1016/j.cpet.2014.06.001.
10. Avivi I, Zilberlicht A, Dann EJ, et al. Strikingly high false positivity of surveillance FDG-PET/CT scanning among patients with diffuse large cell lymphoma in the rituximab era. *Am J Hematol*. 2013;88(5):400-405. doi:10.1002/ajh.23423.
11. Ulrich Dührsen, Stefan Müller, Bernd Hertenstein, et al. Positron emission tomography-guided therapy of aggressive non-Hodgkin lymphomas (PETAL): a multicenter, randomized phase III trial. *J Clin Oncol*. 2018;36(20):2024-2034. doi:10.1200/JCO.2017.76.8093.
12. Shah B, Mattison RJ, Abboud R, et al. National Comprehensive Cancer Network (NCCN) Guidelines Version 2.2025 – June 27, 2025. Acute Lymphoblastic Leukemia, available at: https://www.nccn.org/professionals/physician_gls/pdf/all.pdf Referenced with permission from the NCCN Clinical Practice Guidelines in Oncology (NCCN Guidelines™) for Acute Lymphoblastic Leukemia V2.2025 – June 27, 2025. ©2025 National Comprehensive Cancer Network, Inc. All rights reserved. The NCCN Guidelines™ and illustrations herein may not be reproduced in any form for any purpose without the express written permission of the NCCN. To view the most recent and complete version of the NCCN Guidelines™, go online to NCCN.org.
13. Lynch RC, Zelenetz AD, Armitage JO, Carson KR. Surveillance imaging for lymphoma: pros and cons. *Am Soc Clin Oncol Educ Book*. 2014:e388-95. doi:10.14694/EdBook_AM.2014.34.e388.
14. Kumar SK, Callander NS, Adekola K, et al. National Comprehensive Cancer Network (NCCN) Guidelines Version 1.2026 –June 24, 2025. Waldenstrom Macroglobulinemia/Lymphoplasmacytic Lymphoma, available


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

at: https://www.nccn.org/professionals/physician_gls/pdf/waldenstroms.pdf Referenced with permission from the NCCN Clinical Practice Guidelines in Oncology (NCCN Guidelines™) for Waldenstrom Macroglobulinemia/ Lymphoplasmacytic Lymphoma V1.2026 – June 24 2025. ©2025 National Comprehensive Cancer Network, Inc. All rights reserved. The NCCN Guidelines™ and illustrations herein may not be reproduced in any form for any purpose without the express written permission of the NCCN. To view the most recent and complete version of the NCCN Guidelines™, go online to NCCN.org.

15. Banwait R, O'Regan K, Campigotto F, et al. The role of 18F-FDG PET/CT imaging in Waldenstrom macroglobulinemia. *Am J Hematol*. 2011;86(7):567-72. doi:10.1002/ajh.22044.
16. Thomas R, Braschi-Amirfarzan M, Laferriere SL, Jagannathan JP. Imaging of Waldenström macroglobulinemia: a comprehensive review for the radiologist in the era of personalized medicine. *AJR Am J Roentgenol.* 2019;213(6):W248-W256. doi:10.2214/AJR.19.21493.
17. Dimopoulos MA, Kastritis E. How I treat Waldenström macroglobulinemia. *Blood*. 2019;134(23):2022-2035. doi:10.1182/blood.2019000725.
18. Noy A, Schöder H, Gönen M, et al. The majority of transformed lymphomas have high standardized uptake values (SUVs) on positron emission tomography (PET) scanning similar to diffuse large B-cell lymphoma (DLBCL). *Ann Oncol*. 2009;20(3):508-12. doi:10.1093/annonc/mdn657.
19. Zucca E, Arcaini L, Buske C, et al. Marginal zone lymphomas: ESMO clinical practice guidelines for diagnosis, treatment and follow-up. *Ann Oncol*. 2020;31(1):17-29. doi:10.1016/j.annonc.2019.10.010.
20. Barrington SF, Mikhaeel NG. PET scans for staging and restaging in diffuse large b-cell and follicular lymphomas. *Curr Hematol Malig Rep*. 2016;11(3):185-95. doi:10.1007/s11899-016-0318-1.
21. Dupuis J, Berriolo-Riedinger A, Julian A, et al. Impact of [18F]Fluorodeoxyglucose Positron Emission Tomography response evaluation in patients with high-tumor burden follicular lymphoma treated with immunochemotherapy: a prospective study from the Groupe d'Etudes des Lymphomes de l'Adulte and GOELAMS. *J Clin Oncol.* 2012;30:4317-4322.
22. Pan K, Franke AJ, Skelton WP 4th, et al. Reduction of immunosuppression for post-transplant lymphoproliferative disorder (PTLD): a single-center experience of allograft survival outcomes. *Leuk Lymphoma.* 2021;62(5):1123-1128. doi:10.1080/10428194.2020.1861266
23. Paquin AR, Oyogoa E, McMurry HS, et al. The diagnosis and management of suspected lymphoma in general practice. *Eur J Haematol*. 2023;110(1):3–13. doi:10.1111/ejh.13863.
24. Kühnl A, Cunningham D, Hutka M, et al. Rapid access clinic for unexplained lymphadenopathy and suspected malignancy: prospective analysis of 1000 patients. *BMC Hematol*. 2018;18:19. doi:10.1186/s12878-018-0109-0.
25. Bosch X, Coloma E, Donate C, et al. Evaluation of unexplained peripheral lymphadenopathy and suspected malignancy using a distinct quick diagnostic delivery model: prospective study of 372 patients. *Medicine (Baltimore)*. 2014;93(16):e95. doi:10.1097/MD.0000000000000095.
26. Nixon S, Bezverbnaya K, Maganti M, et al. Evaluation of lymphadenopathy and suspected lymphoma in a lymphoma rapid diagnosis clinic. *JCO Oncol Pract*. 2020;16(1):e29-e36. doi:10.1200/JOP.19.00202.
27. Tokola S, Kuitunen H, Turpeenniemi-Hujanen T, Kuittinen O. Interim and end-of-treatment PET-CT suffers from high false-positive rates in DLBCL: Biopsy is needed prior to treatment decisions. *Cancer Med*. 2021;10(9):3035-3044. doi:10.1002/cam4.3867.
28. Guidot DM, Switchenko JM, Nastoupil LJ, et al. Surveillance imaging in mantle cell lymphoma in first remission lacks clinical utility. *Leuk Lymphoma*. 2018;59(4):888-895. doi:10.1080/10428194.2017.1361032.
29. National Cancer Institute PDQ® Cancer Treatment Summary, Peripheral T-Cell Non-hodgkin Lymphoma Treatment –Health Professional Version. Peripheral T-Cell Non-Hodgkin Lymphoma Treatment (PDQ®) - NCI (cancer.gov).


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

Click Anywhere in the Header to Return to the Main Table of Contents



# Hodgkin Lymphoma (ONC-28)

## Guideline

Hodgkin Lymphoma – General Considerations (ONC-28.1)
Classical Hodgkin Lymphoma (ONC-28.2)
Nodular Lymphocyte – Predominant Hodgkin Lymphoma (ONC-28.3)
References (ONC-28)


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

# Hodgkin Lymphoma – General Considerations (ONC-28.1)

**ON.HL.0028.1.A**
**v2.0.2026**

- Lymphoma is often suspected when individuals have any of the following:
  - Bulky lymphadenopathy (lymph node mass >10cm in size), hepatomegaly or splenomegaly
  - The presence of systemic symptoms (fever, drenching night sweats or unintended weight loss of >10%, called “B symptoms”)
- Individuals with AIDS-related lymphoma should be imaged according to the primary lymphoma histology.
- The **Deauville Criteria** are internationally accepted criteria, which utilize a 5-point scoring system for the FDG avidity of a Hodgkin's lymphoma or Non-Hodgkin's lymphoma tumor mass as seen on FDG PET.
  - Score 1: No uptake above the background
  - Score 2: Uptake ≤mediastinum
  - Score 3: Uptake >mediastinum but ≤liver
  - Score 4: Uptake moderately increased compared to the liver at any site
  - Score 5: Uptake markedly increased compared to the liver at any site
  - Score X: New areas of uptake unlikely to be related to lymphoma

| Indication | Medically Necessary Imaging Study |
|---|---|
| • Biopsy proven lymphoma, or<br>• Suspected lymphoma and any one of the following:<br>◦ Bulky lymphadenopathy (LN mass >10cm)<br>◦ Hepatomegaly<br>◦ Splenomegaly<br>◦ B symptom: Unexplained fever, drenching night sweats, unintended weight loss >10% total body weight | • CT Chest (CPT® 71260) and CT Abdomen and Pelvis (CPT® 74177) with contrast<br>◦ MRI without and with contrast for individuals who cannot tolerate CT contrast due to allergy or impaired renal function |
| Signs or symptoms of disease involving the neck | • CT Neck with contrast (CPT® 70491) |


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

| Indication | Medically Necessary Imaging Study |
|---|---|
| Signs or symptoms suggesting CNS involvement with lymphoma | • MRI Brain without and with contrast (CPT® 70553)<br>• See: **CNS Lymphoma (also known as Microglioma) (ONC-2.7)** |
| Known or suspected bone involvement with lymphoma | • MRI without and with contrast of symptomatic or previously involved bony areas<br>◦ Bone scan is inferior to MRI for evaluation of known or suspected bone involvement with lymphoma |
| Determine a more favorable site for biopsy when a relatively inaccessible site is contemplated | • PET/CT (CPT® 78815 or CPT® 78816)<br>◦ PET/CT not medically necessary for all other indications prior to histological confirmation of lymphoma |
| CAR-T cell therapy | Once before treatment and once 30-60 days after completion of treatment:<br>• PET/CT (CPT® 78815 or CPT® 78816) |


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

# Classical Hodgkin Lymphoma (ONC-28.2)

**ON.HL.0028.2.A**

**v2.0.2026**

- This section applies to nodular sclerosis, mixed cellularity, lymphocyte-depleted and lymphocyte-rich subtypes of Hodgkin lymphoma.
- Pregnancy-specific considerations: US Abdomen (CPT® 76700) or MRI Abdomen without contrast (CPT® 74181) and MRI Pelvis without contrast (CPT® 72195) are medically necessary in lieu of PET/CT or CT imaging.
  - MRI Abdomen and MRI Pelvis may be performed after US Abdomen if staging is unclear on US.

| Indication | Medically Necessary Imaging Study |
|---|---|
| Initial Staging/Diagnosis | ANY or ALL of the following:<br>• PET/CT (CPT® 78815 or CPT® 78816)<br>• CT Neck with contrast (CPT® 70491)<br>• CT Chest with contrast (CPT® 71260)<br>• CT Abdomen and Pelvis with contrast (CPT® 74177) |
| Prior to initiation of therapy if one month or more has passed since previous PET/CT was performed | • PET/CT (CPT® 78815 or CPT® 78816) |
| Treatment Response | • PET/CT (CPT® 78815 or CPT® 78816) as frequently as every 2 cycles |
| End of Chemotherapy and/or Radiation Therapy Evaluation | • PET/CT (CPT® 78815 or CPT® 78816) at the end of chemotherapy and again at the end of radiation (at least 12 weeks after completion of radiation therapy) |


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

| Indication | Medically Necessary Imaging Study |
|---|---|
| Suspected or biopsy proven recurrence | ANY or ALL of the following:<br>• CT Neck with contrast (CPT® 70491)<br>• CT Chest with contrast (CPT® 71260)<br>• CT Abdomen and Pelvis with contrast (CPT® 74177)<br>• CT with contrast of previously involved area(s)<br>• PET/CT (CPT® 78815 or CPT® 78816) if suspected recurrence ≥3 months after completion of therapy |
| Surveillance | ANY or ALL of the following, every 6 months for 2 years after completion of therapy:<br>• CT Neck with contrast (CPT® 70491)<br>• CT Chest with contrast (CPT® 71260)<br>• CT Abdomen and Pelvis with contrast (CPT® 74177)<br>• CT with contrast of previously involved area(s)<br>In addition to the above studies:<br>• A single follow-up PET/CT at three months if end of therapy PET/CT shows Deauville 4 or 5 FDG avidity |


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

Click Anywhere in the Header to Return to the Main Table of Contents



# Nodular Lymphocyte – Predominant Hodgkin Lymphoma (ONC-28.3)

**ON.HL.0028.3.A**
**v2.0.2026**

| Indication | Medically Necessary Imaging Study |
|---|---|
| Initial Staging/Diagnosis | ANY or ALL of the following:<br>• PET/CT (CPT® 78815 or CPT® 78816)<br>• CT Neck with contrast (CPT® 70491)<br>• CT Chest with contrast (CPT® 71260)<br>• CT Abdomen and Pelvis with contrast (CPT® 74177) |
| Treatment Response | • CT with contrast of previously involved areas as frequently as every 2 cycles |
| End of Chemotherapy and/or Radiation Therapy Evaluation | • PET/CT (CPT® 78815 or CPT® 78816) at the end of chemotherapy and again at the end of radiation (at least 12 weeks after completion of radiation therapy) |
| Suspected Recurrence | ANY or ALL of the following:<br>• CT Neck with contrast (CPT® 70491)<br>• CT Chest with contrast (CPT® 71260)<br>• CT Abdomen and Pelvis with contrast (CPT® 74177)<br>• CT with contrast of previously involved area(s) |
| Biopsy proven recurrence | • PET/CT (CPT® 78815 or CPT® 78816) |


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

| Indication | Medically Necessary Imaging Study |
|---|---|
| Suspected transformation (Richter's) from a low-grade lymphoma to a more aggressive type based on one or more of the following:<br>• New B symptoms<br>• Rapidly growing lymph nodes<br>• Extranodal disease develops<br>• Significant recent rise in LDH above normal range | • PET/CT (CPT® 78815 or CPT® 78816) |
| Surveillance | ANY or ALL of the following every 6 months for 2 years after completion of therapy:<br>• CT Neck with contrast (CPT® 70491)<br>• CT Chest with contrast (CPT® 71260)<br>• CT Abdomen and Pelvis with contrast (CPT® 74177)<br>• CT with contrast of previously involved area(s)<br>In addition to the above studies:<br>• A single follow-up PET/CT at three months if end of therapy PET/CT shows Deauville 4 or 5 FDG avidity |

## Evidence Discussion

### Initial staging and Restaging

PET imaging is useful for staging, prognosis, and treatment stratification in all subtypes of Hodgkin Lymphoma. Staging with PET/CT rather than CT often confirms a higher stage of disease. While overall survival outcome is not clearly improved by staging/ restaging with PET/CT, stratification of treatment based on PET/CT benefits individuals by preventing over- and under-treatment. PET is thus medically necessary for initial staging, re-staging every 2 cycles, and at the end of therapy. False-positive rates are elevated in the weeks following radiation, reaching up to 20%. Decisions based on scans done in close proximity to radiation may result in over-treatment. Therefore, PET/ CT should not be performed until 12 weeks after completion of radiation.[1,2,11]

Diagnostic CT with contrast is medically necessary concurrently with PET/CT for initial staging as it may better differentiate nodal conglomerates from individual nodes in


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

close proximity, and node bulk is prognostic and also used for treatment stratification. However, performing diagnostic CTs concurrently with PET/CT at restaging does not provide a benefit, as FDG avidity is highly indicative of response in Hodgkin lymphoma, where CT alone may over- or under- estimate response. FDG avidity guides response assessment and informs subsequent treatment decisions. This includes intensifying therapy if PET avidity persists after 2-4 cycles, or omitting consolidative radiotherapy in cases of good response on PET/CT after 4 cycles for low-stage disease. A complete metabolic response (Deauville score of 3 or less) should be confirmed to determine the end of treatment. If the end-of-therapy PET/CT shows a Deauville score of 4-5, repeating the PET/CT 3 months later is medically necessary to confirm the metabolic status of residual masses and to prevent under-treatment.[1,2,11]

While PET/MRI shows high concordance with PET/CT at a decreased radiation dose, it is inferior for assessing disease in the lungs, more time-consuming, and more costly. Furthermore, it has not been established as a standard for treatment stratification in adult Hodgkin Lymphoma and is therefore not recommended over PET/CT.[6]

**Surveillance**

Surveillance imaging with PET/CT is not medically necessary, as the false-positive rate with PET scans in this context is greater than 20%, leading to unnecessary investigations, radiation exposure, biopsies, expense, and individual anxiety. In addition, no statistically significant difference in survival has been noted with CT surveillance imaging in Hodgkin Lymphoma, despite a statistically significant increase in radiation exposure and cost. However, given that many existing protocols still require surveillance imaging, the NCCN continued to support CT surveillance every 6 months in the first two years post therapy if requested. Given that NCCN is viewed as the standard of care in most U.S. oncology treatment centers, this guideline aligns with this current NCCN recommendation for an individual- and provider-centric approach.[1,2,4]


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

# References (ONC-28)

**v2.0.2026**

1. Hoppe RT, Advani RH, Ambinder RF, et al. National Comprehensive Cancer Network (NCCN) Guidelines Version 1.2026 – October 22,, 2025. Hodgkin Lymphoma, available at: https://www.nccn.org/professionals/physician_gls/pdf/hodgkins.pdf Referenced with permission from the NCCN Clinical Practice Guidelines in Oncology (NCCN Guidelines™) for Hodgkins Lymphoma V1.2026 – October 22, 2025. ©2025 National Comprehensive Cancer Network, Inc. All rights reserved. The NCCN Guidelines™ and illustrations herein may not be reproduced in any form for any purpose without the express written permission of the NCCN. To view the most recent and complete version of the NCCN Guidelines™, go online to NCCN.org.
2. Cheson BD, Fisher RI, Barrington SF, et al. Recommendations for initial evaluation, staging, and response assessment for Hodgkin and Non-Hodgkin lymphoma: the Lugano classification. *J Clin Oncol*. 2014;32(27):3059-3067. doi:10.1200/JCO.2013.54.8800.
3. Barrington SF, Mikhaeel NG, Kostakoglu L, et al. Role of imaging in the staging and response assessment of lymphoma: consensus of the International Conference on Malignant Lymphomas Imaging Working Group. *J Clin Oncol*. 2014;32(27):3048-3058. doi:10.1200/JCO.2013.53.5229.
4. Bastos Oreiro M, Martín R, Gomez P, et al. SEGHI Study: Defining the Best Surveillance Strategy in Hodgkin Lymphoma after First-Line Treatment. *Cancers (Basel)*. 2021;13(10):2412. Published 2021 May 17. doi:10.3390/cancers13102412
5. Ha CS, Hodgson DC, Advani R, et al. ACR appropriateness criteria follow-up of Hodgkin lymphoma. *J Am Coll Radiol*. 2014;11(11):1026-1033.e3. doi:10.1016/j.jacr.2014.07.038
6. Picardi M, Pugliese N, Cirillo, M et al. Advanced-stage Hodgkin lymphoma: US/Chest radiography for detection of relapse in patients in first complete remission—a randomized trial of routine surveillance imaging procedures. *Radiology*. 2014;272:262-274.
7. Tomarchio V, Rigacci L. Fluorodeoxyglucose-Positron Emission Tomography in Relapsed/Refractory Hodgkin Lymphoma: A Practical Approach. *Chemotherapy*. 2024;69(1):1-10. doi:10.1159/000533766
8. Yasenchak C, Liu N, Beeks A, et al. Real-World Use of Positron Emission Tomography-Computed Tomography and Reported Deauville Scores in Advanced-Stage Classic Hodgkin Lymphoma: A Community Oncology Practice Perspective. *JCO Oncol Pract*. 2023;19(10):860-870. doi:10.1200/OP.23.00021
9. Glober G, Gunther J, Fang P, et al. Imaging Surveillance of Limited-stage Classic Hodgkin Lymphoma Patients After PET-CT-documented First Remission. *Clin Lymphoma Myeloma Leuk*. 2020;20(8):533-541. doi:10.1016/j.clml.2020.02.008
10. Fuchs M, Goergen H, Kobe C, et al. Positron Emission tomography-guided treatment in early-stage favorable Hodgkin lymphoma: final results of the international, randomized phase III HD16 trial by the German Hodgkin study group. *J Clin Oncol*. 2019;37(31):2835-2845. doi:10.1200/JCO.19.00964.
11. Borchmann P, Plütschow A, Kobe C, et al. PET-guided omission of radiotherapy in early-stage unfavourable Hodgkin lymphoma (GHSG HD17): a multicentre, open-label, randomised, phase 3 trial. *Lancet Oncol*. 2021;22(2):223-234. doi:10.1016/S1470-2045(20)30601-X.


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

Click Anywhere in the Header to Return to the Main Table of Contents



# Hematopoietic Stem Cell Transplantation (ONC-29)

Guideline

General Considerations for Stem Cell Transplant (ONC-29.1)
Reference (ONC-29)


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

# General Considerations for Stem Cell Transplant (ONC-29.1)

**ON.HT.0029.1.A**
**v2.0.2026**

**Transplant Types:**

**Allogeneic ("allo"):** The donor and recipient are different people, and there are multiple types depending on the source of the stem cells and degree of match between donor and recipient. This is most commonly used in diseases originating in the hematopoietic system, such as leukemias and lymphomas, and bone marrow failure syndromes or metabolic disorders. Common types are:

- Matched sibling donor (MSD or MRD): Donor and recipient are full siblings and HLA-matched
- Matched unrelated donor (MUD): Donor and recipient are HLA matched but not related to each other
- Cord blood: Donor stem cells come from frozen umbilical cord blood not related to the recipient, sometimes from multiple different donors at once
- Haploidentical transplant (haplo): Donor is a half-HLA match to the recipient, usually a parent

**Autologous ("auto"):** The donor and recipient are the same person. The process involves delivery of high dose chemotherapy that is ablative to the bone marrow, followed by an infusion of one's own harvested stem cells.

Allogeneic HSCT results in a much greater degree of immunosuppression than autologous HSCT because of the need to allow the new immune system to chimerize with the recipient's body. Immune reconstitution commonly takes more than a year for individuals who receive allogeneic HSCT, and individuals remain at high-risk for invasive infections until that has occurred.

**Pre-Transplant Imaging in HSCT:**

- Pre-transplant imaging in HSCT generally takes place within 30 days prior to transplant and involves a reassessment of the individual's disease status as well as infectious disease clearance.


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

| Indication | Medically Necessary Imaging Study |
|---|---|
| Immediate pre-transplant period | • CT Chest with contrast (CPT® 71260) or CT Chest without contrast (CPT® 71250) for ANY of the following:<br>◦ Any individual prior to undergoing allogeneic transplant<br>◦ New findings on chest x-ray<br>◦ New/worsening signs/symptoms of chest involvement<br>• CT Sinus (CPT® 70486) for any clinical signs or symptoms<br>• CT of other body areas is not medically necessary without clinical signs or symptoms of involvement |
| Assess cardiac function | • Echocardiogram (CPT® 93306, CPT® 93307 or CPT® 93308)<br>◦ MUGA scan (CPT® 78472) in specific circumstances, see: **Oncologic Indications for Cancer Therapeutics-Related Cardiac Dysfunction (CTRCD) (CD-12.1)** in the Cardiac Imaging Guidelines |
| Assess pulmonary function | • Pulmonary function tests |
| Assess primary disease status | • See disease-specific guidelines for end of therapy response assessment |

**Post-Transplant Imaging in HSCT:**

- There are many common complications from HSCT, including infection, acute and chronic graft versus host disease (GVHD), hepatic sinusoidal obstruction syndrome, and restrictive lung disease, among others.
- Disease response generally takes place at ~Day +30 (autos and some allos) or ~Day +100 (allos) post-transplant.

| Indication | Medically Necessary Imaging Study |
|---|---|
| Assess known or suspected HSCT complications | • Site-specific imaging |


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

| Indication | Medically Necessary Imaging Study |
|---|---|
| Suspected hepatic GVHD (elevated liver enzymes) | • Abdominal US (CPT® 76700 or CPT® 76705) |
| Suspected Bronchiolitis Obliterans Syndrome (BOS) | • CT Chest without contrast (CPT® 71250) |
| Assess primary disease status post-transplant | • See disease-specific guidelines for end of therapy evaluation and surveillance |
| Individuals receiving tandem auto transplants (2-4 autos back-to-back, spaced 6 to 8 weeks apart) | • Guideline recommended imaging repeated after each transplant |

**Evidence Discussion**

**Pre-Transplant imaging in Hematopoietic Stem Cell Transplant (HSCT)**

This refers to imaging in the immediate pre-transplant period, approximately 30 days prior to anticipated HSCT. There is not a clear consensus for pre-transplant infectious screening with imaging, but a CT Chest and CT Sinus are medically necessary for any clinical signs and symptoms of respiratory or sinus infection. NCCN does not support CT imaging for infection screening in asymptomatic individuals.[1] There are no clear data to support pre-transplant sinus imaging in adults; extrapolation from pediatric data shows no change in pre-transplantation management nor prediction of post-transplant sinusitis based on pre-transplant imaging of asymptomatic individuals.[2,3] Screening for infection of abdomen and pelvis with advanced imaging is not medically necessary as it has not been shown to change management or outcomes yet increases cost and radiation exposure.[1,4] Echocardiogram is medically necessary prior to transplant conditioning for all individuals, to assure the safest possible dosing for cardiotoxic agents. MUGA scan is medically necessary to supplement echocardiogram in individuals with a previous low ejection fraction (LVEF <50%).[5]

**Post-Transplant imaging in HSCT**

Timing of post-transplant disease restaging varies by disease process. Generally, repeat imaging follows the disease-specific guidelines for end of therapy evaluation and surveillance. For individuals receiving tandem auto transplants, disease-specific imaging can be repeated after each transplant. Imaging for post-transplant complications maximizes safety and allows for early intervention.


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

# Reference (ONC-29)

**v2.0.2026**

1. Loren AW, Mielcarek M, Bolaños-Meade J, et. al. National Comprehensive Cancer Network (NCCN) Guidelines Version 3.2025 – September 24, 2025. Hematopoietic Cell Transplantation, available at: https://www. nccn.org/professionals/physician_gls/pdf/hct.pdf. Referenced with permission from the NCCN Clinical Practice Guidelines in Oncology (NCCN Guidelines®) for Hematopoietic Cell Transplantation V3.2025 – September 24, 2025 ©2025 National Comprehensive Cancer Network, Inc. All rights reserved. The NCCN Guidelines® and illustrations herein may not be reproduced in any form for any purpose without the express written permission of the NCCN. To view the most recent and complete version of the NCCN Guidelines®, go online to NCCN.org.
2. Harreld JH, Kaufman RA, Kang G, et al. Utility of pre-hematopoietic cell transplantation sinus CT screening in children and adolescents. *AJNR Am J Neuroradiol*. 2020;41(5):911-916. doi:10.3174/ajnr.A6509.
3. Chan SS, Coblentz A, Bhatia A, et al. Imaging of pediatric hematopoietic stem cell transplant recipients: A COG Diagnostic Imaging Committee/SPR Oncology Committee White Paper. *Pediatr Blood Cancer*. 2023;70 Suppl 4(Suppl 4):e30013. doi:10.1002/pbc.30013.
4. Kaste SC, Kaufman RA, Sunkara A, et al. Routine pre- and post-hematopoietic stem cell transplant computed tomography of the abdomen for detecting invasive fungal infection has limited value. *Biol Blood Marrow Transplant*. 2015;21(6):1132-5. doi:10.1016/j.bbmt.2015.02.023.
5. Plana JC, Galderisi M, Barac A, et al. Expert consensus for multimodality imaging evaluation of adult patients during and after cancer therapy: a report from the American Society of Echocardiography and the European Association of Cardiovascular Imaging. *European Heart Journal - Cardiovascular Imaging*. 2014;15(10):1063-1093. doi:10.1093/ehjci/jeu192.
6. Peña E, Souza CA, Escuissato DL, et al. Noninfectious pulmonary complications after hematopoietic stem cell transplantation: practical approach to imaging diagnosis. *Radiographics*. 2014;34(3):663-83. doi:10.1148/rg.343135080.
7. Alhomoud M, Chokr N, Gomez-Arteaga A, et a. Screening chest CT prior to allogenic hematopoietic stem cell trasplantation. *Transplant Cell Ther*. 2023;29(5):326.e1-326.e10. doi:10.1016/j.jtct.2023.01.029.
8. McQuinn D, Racki L, Venkre VP, et al. Full body screening computed tomography prior to allogeneic hematopoietic stem cell transplantation: a single institution experience from an academic center. *Blood*. 2023;142:378-379.


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

Click Anywhere in the Header to Return to the Main Table of Contents



# Medical Conditions with Cancer in the Differential Diagnosis (ONC-30)

Guideline

Fever of Unknown Origin (FUO) (ONC-30.1)
Unexplained Weight Loss (ONC-30.2)
Paraneoplastic Syndromes (ONC-30.3)
References (ONC-30)


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

# Fever of Unknown Origin (FUO) (ONC-30.1)

**ON.MC.0030.1.A**

**v2.0.2026**

- FUO is defined as a persistent fever ≥101°F and ≥3 weeks with unidentified cause.
- While fever is a classic "B" symptom of advanced lymphoma, a cancer-related fever presenting in isolation without any other signs or symptoms of neoplastic disease is rare.

| Indication | Medically Necessary Imaging Study |
|---|---|
| If physical examination, chest x-ray, and laboratory studies are non-diagnostic | • Echocardiogram (CPT® 93306)<br>• Abdominal ultrasound (CPT® 76700)<br>• MRI Brain without and with contrast (CPT® 70553) |
| Above studies (including PE/ENT exam, pelvic exam, and DRE with laboratory studies) have failed to demonstrate site of infection | • CT Chest (CPT® 71260) and CT Abdomen and Pelvis (CPT® 74177) with contrast<br>• Radiopharmaceutical localization of tumor or distribution of radiopharmaceutical agent(s): CPT® 78800, CPT® 78801, or CPT® 78802, CPT® 78804, CPT® 78803 or CPT® 78831 (SPECT), or CPT® 78830, or CPT® 78832 (SPECT/CT) |
| "B" symptoms | • See: **Non-Hodgkin Lymphomas (ONC-27)** |
| Any CNS sign/symptom accompanied by fever | • MRI Brain without and with contrast (CPT® 70553) |
| All individuals | • PET is not medically necessary in the work-up of individuals with FUO |

## Evidence Discussion

The widely accepted definition of "Fever of Unknown Origin" (FUO) is persistent fever of at least 101 degrees F for at least 3 weeks with unidentified cause. Most published recommendations are based on expert consensus rather than data. Malignancy accounts for 20%-30% of FUO in adults.[14,15] The remainder are infectious, inflammatory, and immune mediated. Physical exam, chest x-ray, and laboratory


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

findings including workup for specific infections should guide workup, and all routine age-based cancer screening should be complete. If these are negative, further workup may be medically necessary. Echocardiogram, abdominal ultrasound, and MRI Brain without and with contrast are medically necessary, with sensitivity rates of 80%-86%, as abdominal and pelvic abscess, endocarditis, and viral and bacterial CNS processes remain more common causes of fever than malignancy.[14,15,16,17] These modalities limit radiation exposure and are recommended as first line imaging in most algorithms.[14,15,16,17]

If the above workup has not demonstrated a source of infection, CT with contrast of the chest, abdomen and pelvis is medically necessary as second line imaging, with sensitivity of up to 90% and specificity up to 70% for determining the cause of fever.[14,15] Technitium-based scans are insensitive but highly specific (93%-94%), with the advantage of lower radiation exposure than CT, and are medically necessary to localize infectious or inflammatory foci.[14,18,21] MRI Brain without and with contrast is medically necessary for any CNS symptoms accompanied by fever, as supported by several FUO algorithms and as outlined in HD-14.1 CNS and Head Infection. B symptoms with concern for lymphoma also warrant CTs, with further details outlined in EviCore ONC-27.1. The utility of PET/CT in workup of FUO is emerging, but specificity is variable, ranging from 52%-85%.[16,17,19-22] At this time it is not medically necessary in the workup of FUO.


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

# Unexplained Weight Loss (ONC-30.2)

**ON.MC.0030.2.A**

**v2.0.2026**

- Unintentional weight loss is defined as loss of ≥10 lbs. or ≥5% of body weight over 6 months or less, without an identifiable reason.
- Initial workup for all individuals may include appropriate detailed history, physical exam, baseline laboratory studies (e.g., CBC, CMP, HgbA1c, ESR/CRP, infectious workup, stool hemoccult, endocrine evaluation to rule out thyroid, pituitary, or gonadal dysfunction, etc.), chest x-ray, age-appropriate cancer screening, and neurological evaluation to rule out depression/dementia.
- Additional workup is directed to evaluate specific signs, symptoms, red flags, or abnormalities detected on initial workup. See condition-specific imaging guidelines for additional details.
- PET is not medically necessary in the work-up of individuals with unexplained weight loss.
- Being on a GLP-1 does not preclude a workup for unexplained weight loss. If provider believes the individual's weight loss is not fully explained by the GLP-1, these guidelines should be used to guide imaging as for all other individuals.

| Indication | Medically Necessary Imaging Study |
|---|---|
| CNS symptoms or abnormal pituitary hormones | • MRI Brain or Sella Turcica without and with contrast (CPT® 70553) |
| Abnormal thyroid function | • Thyroid ultrasound (CPT® 76536) |
| Abnormal liver function | • Abdominal ultrasound (CPT® 76700) |
| Abnormal kidney function | • Ultrasound Kidney and Bladder (CPT® 76770 or CPT® 76775) |
| Suspected cardiac dysfunction | • Echocardiogram (CPT® 93306) |
| Non-smokers | • Chest x-ray<br>◦ CT Chest with contrast (CPT® 71260) to evaluate abnormalities on chest x-ray |
| Current or former smokers | • CT Chest with contrast (CPT® 71260) |


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

| Indication | Medically Necessary Imaging Study |
|---|---|
| Dysphagia or early satiety | See: **Dysphagia and Esophageal Disorders (NECK-3)** |
| GI bleeding | See: **GI Bleeding (AB-22)** |
| Abdominal pain without red flag signs | See: **Abdominal Pain (AB-2)** |
| Suspected pancreatic cancer in individuals aged ≥60 years with weight loss and at least one of the following[13]:<br>• Diarrhea<br>• Back pain<br>• Abdominal pain<br>• Nausea/vomiting<br>• Constipation<br>• New onset diabetes<br>• Abnormal labs (CA 19-9, LFTs)<br>• Non-diagnostic or negative abdominal ultrasound | Any ONE of the following:<br>• CT Abdomen with contrast (CPT® 74160)<br>• CT Abdomen and Pelvis with contrast (CPT® 74177)<br>• MRI Abdomen without and with contrast (CPT® 74183)<br>See also: **Epigastric Pain and Dyspepsia (AB-2.5)** |
| If all of the above do not identify cause of weight loss | Any of the following, if not previously performed:<br>• CT Chest (CPT® 71260)<br>• CT Abdomen and Pelvis (CPT® 74177) with contrast |

## Evidence Discussion

Gradual weight loss is a common occurrence in the elderly. Unintentional weight loss that is associated with an increased risk of morbidity and mortality is generally defined as a weight loss of 5% body weight over a period of 6-12 months.[23,26] Among individuals with unintentional weight loss, a minority are diagnosed with malignancy.[24,25] There is no unified published consensus or guideline to guide the workup for weight loss, but most publications recommend that the primary workup should be symptom-focused and include laboratory studies and age-appropriate cancer screening. Workup for particular symptoms or lab findings should be guided by condition-specific guidelines. Based on symptoms and lab findings, thyroid ultrasound, abdominal/renal ultrasounds, and/or echocardiogram are medically necessary. All individuals with CNS symptoms or abnormal pituitary hormones warrant an MRI. A chest x-ray is reasonable in all individuals.[23,26,27]


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

A negative baseline evaluation is reassuring, with at least one prospective study showing that no individuals with a negative baseline clinical and laboratory evaluation were found to have malignancy on subsequent studies.[23,27] However, other prospective studies do illustrate that underlying malignancy may be detected on advanced imaging, with the highest predictive value for lung, pancreatic, lymphomas, prostate and colorectal cancers.[24,25] Based on this, these guidelines support contrasted CT Chest as part of initial workup for all smokers with clinically significant weight loss. These guidelines also support CT or MRI Abdomen (or CT Abdomen and Pelvis) as part of initial workup for individuals age 60+ with clinically significant weight loss and additional signs and symptoms significantly associated with pancreatic cancer.[13] For all other individuals, if the individuals have clinically significant unintentional weight loss as defined in paragraph 1, and the initial baseline evaluations above are negative, CT with contrast of the chest, abdomen, and pelvis are medically necessary.[23,24,26]

No published algorithm routinely supports PET/CT in the evaluation of unexplained weight loss, and there are no prospective studies illustrating the sensitivity or specificity of PET in this scenario. There may be individuals who meet evidence-based criteria for PET/CT based on their specific signs, symptoms and findings, particularly in the lymphomas (refer to guidelines ONC-27, ONC-28, and ONC-1.4).


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

# Paraneoplastic Syndromes (ONC-30.3)

**ON.MC.0030.3.A**

**v2.0.2026**

- Paraneoplastic syndromes are metabolic and neuromuscular disturbances. These syndromes are not directly related to a tumor or to metastatic disease. There may be a lead time between initial finding of a possible paraneoplastic syndrome and appearance of the cancer with imaging. Limited studies suggest annual imaging for 2 years after diagnosis of possible paraneoplastic syndrome may detect cancer; however, the benefit after 2 years is not well documented.
- The following are the most common symptoms of paraneoplastic syndromes known to arise from various malignancies:
  - Hypertrophic Pulmonary Osteoarthropathy: Often presents as a constellation of rheumatoid-like polyarthritis, periostitis of long bones, and clubbing of fingers and toes
  - Amyloidosis
  - Hypercalcemia
  - Hypophosphatemia
  - Cushing's Syndrome
  - Somatostatinoma syndrome (vomiting, abdominal pain, diarrhea, cholelithiasis)
  - Syndrome of inappropriate antidiuretic hormone secretion (SIADH)
  - Polymyositis/dermatomyositis
  - Opsoclonus
  - Paraneoplastic sensory neuropathy
  - Subacute cerebellar degeneration
  - Eaton-Lambert syndrome (a myasthenia-like syndrome)
  - Second event of unprovoked thrombosis
  - Disseminated Intravascular Coagulation
  - Migratory thrombophlebitis
  - Polycythemia
  - Chronic leukocytosis and/or thrombocytosis
  - Elevated tumor markers (including but not limited to: CEA, CA 19-9, CA 27-9, CA 15-3, CA 125, inhibin A and B, AFP, unexplained HCG)
  - Cryptogenic stroke (see also: **HD-21.3)**
- See: **Muscle Disorders (PN-6)** in the Peripheral Nerve Disorders Imaging Guidelines.
- See: **Multiple Myeloma and Plasmacytomas (ONC-25)** for evaluation of possible multiple myeloma.


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

- See: **Abnormal Non-Invasive Prenatal Testing (NIPT) and Maternal Malignancy (PV-15.5)** in the Pelvis Imaging Guidelines for NIPT Paraneoplastic syndromes.

| Indication | Medically Necessary Imaging Study |
|---|---|
| Initial evaluation | • CT Chest (CPT® 71260) and CT Abdomen and Pelvis (CPT® 74177) with contrast |
| ANY of the following:<br>• Abnormality on conventional imaging difficult to biopsy<br>• Inconclusive conventional imaging<br>• Documented paraneoplastic antibody and conventional imaging fails to demonstrate primary site | • PET/CT (CPT® 78815 or CPT® 78816) |
| Subsequent evaluation for known paraneoplastic syndrome | • CT Chest (CPT® 71260) and CT Abdomen and Pelvis (CPT® 74177) with contrast every 6 months for 2 years after initial imaging for Lambert-Eaton Myasthenia syndrome<br>• CT Chest (CPT® 71260) and CT Abdomen and Pelvis (CPT® 74177) with contrast every 6 months for 4 years for all other paraneoplastic syndromes |
| Systemic mastocytosis | ANY ONE of the following:<br>• CT Abdomen and Pelvis (CPT® 74177) with contrast<br>• MRI Abdomen (CPT® 74183) and MRI Pelvis (CPT® 72197) without and with contrast<br>• PET/CT scan is not medically necessary for evaluation of mastocytosis |
| First episode of unprovoked DVT/VTE | • Imaging to evaluate for malignancy is not medically necessary |
| Second unprovoked DVT/PE | • Imaging may be considered in the setting of a negative work-up for inherited thrombophilia and antiphospholipid syndrome |


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

| Indication | Medically Necessary Imaging Study |
|---|---|
| Thyroid US is recommended for elevated CEA | |

**Evidence Discussion**

Cross-sectional imaging with contrasted CT of the chest, abdomen and pelvis is generally considered first-line to look for visceral malignancy in most paraneoplastic syndromes. While sensitivity varies widely (30%-82% across studies), specificity is reasonable (71%-100%).[33] PET/CT is medically necessary in individuals with documented paraneoplastic antibodies, inconclusive conventional imaging, or to assess for alternate biopsy sites when an abnormality is found on conventional imaging that is inaccessible for biopsy. The sensitivity and specificity of PET/CT is approximately 80% when used to evaluate individuals who had negative or unclear conventional imaging.[29] PET/CT is not medically necessary as first line imaging as PET may miss smaller tumors and has a false negative rate of approximately 20% in this setting .[33] While there is a lack of prospective data on monitoring paraneoplastic syndromes, it is known that these phenomena may precede detectable malignancy. In the interest of individual safety, these guidelines support repeat CT imaging every 6 months for 4 years; for Lambert-Eaton Syndrome, 2 years is sufficient as 96% of associated SCLC is detected in the first year, with later reports generally from an era of lesser quality CTs.[30,31,34]

Venous thromboembolism in the absence of a hypercoagulable risk factor may suggest occult malignancy. Blood testing, exam, and non-advanced imaging have been shown to be helpful in most cancers that present with a first unprovoked DVT, but other advanced imaging is not cost-effective without other symptoms suggesting malignancy in this setting. In the setting of a second unprovoked DVT, cross-sectional imaging with contrasted CT is medically necessary.[31,35,36]

Systemic mastocyctosis may also develop extramedullary involvement and end-organ dysfunction, particularly involving liver and spleen. CT or MRI of abdomen and pelvis are medically necessary in alignment with NCCN. There is no NCCN recommendation for PET/CT in systemic mastocytosis.


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

# References (ONC-30)

**v2.0.2026**

1. Cordeanu EM, Jambert L, Tousch J, et al. The Conundrum of Occult Cancer Screening in Venous Thromboembolism: Lessons from the REMOTEV Registry. *Medicina (Kaunas)*. 2022;58(7):913. Published 2022 Jul 9. doi:10.3390/medicina58070913
2. Daraghma M, Aswani Y, Jain S, et al. PET/CT and Paraneoplastic Syndromes: A Comprehensive Review. *Cancers (Basel)*. 2025;17(16):2637. Published 2025 Aug 13. doi:10.3390/cancers17162637
3. Harlos C, Metser U, Poon R, MacCrostie P, Mason W. 18 F-Fluorodeoxyglucose positron-emission tomography for the investigation of malignancy in patients with suspected paraneoplastic neurologic syndromes and negative or indeterminate conventional imaging: a retrospective analysis of the Ontario PET Access Program, with systematic review and meta-analysis. *Curr Oncol.* 2019;26(4):e458-e465. doi:10.3747/co.26.4583
4. Romano Gargarella E, Vocaturo F, Guarneri A, Calcagni ML, Leccisotti L. Role of 18F FDG-PET-CT in Fever and Inflammation of Unknown Origin. *J Clin Med*. 2025;14(16):5861. Published 2025 Aug 19. doi:10.3390/jcm14165861
5. Pelosof LC, Gerber DE. Paraneoplastic syndromes: an approach to diagnosis and treatment. *Mayo Clin Proc*. 2010;85(9):838-854. doi:10.4065/mcp.2010.0099.
6. Rao S, Kikano EG, Smith DA, Guler E, Tirumani SH, Ramaiya NH. Unintentional weight loss: what radiologists need to know and what clinicians want to know. *Abdom Radiol (NY).* 2021;46(5):2236-2250. doi:10.1007/s00261-020-02908-6
7. Titulaer MJ, Soffieti R, Dalmau J, et al. Screening of tumours in paraneoplastic syndromes: report of an EFNS task force. *Eur J Neurol.* 2011;18(1):19–e3. doi:10.1111/j.1468-1331.2010.03220.x.
8. Lancaster E. Paraneoplastic disorders. *Continuum (Minneap Minn)*. 2017;23(6, Neuro-oncology):1653-1679. doi:10.1212/CON.0000000000000542.
9. Gerds AT, Gotlib J, Abdelmessieh P, et al. National Comprehensive Cancer Network (NCCN) Guidelines Version 1.2025 – February 21, 2025. Systemic Mastocytosis, available at: https://www.nccn.org/professionals/physician_gls/pdf/mastocytosis.pdf. Referenced with permission from the NCCN Clinical Practice Guidelines in Oncology (NCCN Guidelines™) for Systemic Mastocytosis V1.2025 – February 21, 2025. ©2025 National Comprehensive Cancer Network, Inc. All rights reserved. The NCCN Guidelines™ and illustrations herein may not be reproduced in any form for any purpose without the express written permission of the NCCN. To view the most recent and complete version of the NCCN Guidelines™, go online to NCCN.org.
10. Xiao J, Poblete RA, Lerner A, et al. MRI in the Evaluation of Cryptogenic Stroke and Embolic Stroke of Undetermined Source. *Radiology*. 2024;311(1):e231934. doi:10.1148/radiol.231934
11. Sawada J, Katayama T, Kikuchi-Takeguchi S, et al. Clinical features and prognostic factors of patients with cancer-associated stroke. *Neurol Sci*. 2024;45(6):2747-2757. doi:10.1007/s10072-024-07332-y
12. Kamel H, Merkler AE, Iadecola C, Gupta A, Navi B. Tailoring the approach to embolic stroke of undetermined source: a review. *JAMA Neurol*. 2019;76(7):855-861. doi:10.1001/jamaneurol.2019.0591.
13. National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE). Suspected cancer: recognition and referral. NICE guideline [NG12]. Published June 23, 2015. Updated May 1, 2025.
14. David A, Quinlan JD. Fever of unknown origin in adults. *Am Fam Physician*. 2022;105(2):137-143.
15. Wright WF, Auwaerter PG. Fever and fever of unknown origin: review, recent advances, and lingering dogma. *Open Forum Infect Dis*. 2020;7(5):ofaa132. doi:10.1093/ofid/ofaa132.
16. Bae SW. Positron Emission Tomography with Computed Tomography in Evaluations of Classical Fever of Unknown Origin and Length of Hospitalization: A 10-Year Medical Record Review of a Tertiary Hospital. *Infect Chemother*. 2023;55(1):22-28. doi:10.3947/ic.2022.0082
17. Mulders-Manders CM, Kouijzer IJ, Janssen MJ, Oyen WJ, Simon A, Bleeker-Rovers CP. Optimal use of [18F]FDG-PET/CT in patients with fever or inflammation of unknown origin. *Q J Nucl Med Mol Imaging.* 2021;65(1):51-58. doi:10.23736/S1824-4785.19.03129-7
18. Haidar G, Singh N. Fever of Unknown Origin. *N Engl J Med*. 2022;386(5):463-477. doi:10.1056/NEJMra2111003
19. Minamimoto R. Optimal use of the FDG-PET/CT in the diagnostic process of fever of unknown origin (FUO): a comprehensive review. *Jpn J Radiol*. 2022;40(11):1121-1137. doi:10.1007/s11604-022-01306-w.


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

20. Palestro CJ, Brandon DC, Dibble EH, Keidar Z, Kwak JJ. FDG PET in evaluation of patients with fever of unknown origin: AJR expert panel narrative review. *AJR Am J Roentgenol*. 2023;221(2):151-162. doi:10.2214/AJR.22.28726.
21. Wright WF, Kandiah S, Brady R, Shulkin BL, Palestro CJ, Jain SK. Nuclear Medicine Imaging Tools in Fever of Unknown Origin: Time for a Revisit and Appropriate Use Criteria. *Clin Infect Dis.* 2024;78(5):1148-1153. doi:10.1093/cid/ciae115
22. Kan Y, Wang W, Liu J, Yang J, Wang Z. Contribution of 18F-FDG PET/CT in a case-mix of fever of unknown origin and inflammation of unknown origin: a meta-analysis. *Acta Radiol*. 2019;60(6):716-725. doi:10.1177/0284185118799512.
23. Gaddey HL, Holder KK. Unintentional Weight Loss in Older Adults. *Am Fam Physician*. 2021;104(1):34-40.
24. Nicholson BD, Hamilton W, O'Sullivan J, Aveyard P, Hobbs FR. Weight loss as a predictor of cancer in primary care: a systematic review and meta-analysis. *Br J Gen Pract*. 2018;68(670):e311-e322. doi: 10.3399/bjgp18X695801.
25. Bosch X, Monclús E, Escoda O, et al. Unintentional weight loss: Clinical characteristics and outcomes in a prospective cohort of 2677 patients. *PLoS One*. 2017;12(4):e0175125. doi:10.1371/journal.pone.0175125.
26. Durmuş NŞ, Can B, Tufan A. Unintentional Weight Loss in Adults 65 Years or Older: A Symptom of Physical and Psychiatric Etiologies. *J Nerv Ment Dis.* 2022;210(8):640-642. doi:10.1097/NMD.0000000000001517
27. Metalidis C, Knockaert DC, Bobbaers H, Vanderschueren S. Involuntary weight loss. Does a negative baseline evaluation provide adequate reassurance? *Eur J Intern Med*. 2008;19(5):345-9. doi:10.1016/j.ejim.2007.09.019.
28. National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE). Upper gastroinestinal tract cancers. In: Suspected cancer: recognition and referral. 2015. Updated May 1, 2025.
29. Harlos C, Metser U, Poon R, MacCrostie P, Mason W. 18 F-Fluorodeoxyglucose positron-emission tomography for the investigation of malignancy in patients with suspected paraneoplastic neurologic syndromes and negative or indeterminate conventional imaging: a retrospective analysis of the Ontario PET Access Program, with systematic review and meta-analysis. *Curr Oncol*. 2019;26(4):e458-e465. doi:10.3747/co.26.4583.
30. Badawy M, Revzin MV, Consul N, et al. Paraneoplastic syndromes from head to toe: pathophysiology, imaging features, and workup. *Radiographics*. 2023;43(3):e220085. doi:10.1148/rg.220085.
31. Sundermann B, Schröder JB, Warnecke T, et al. Imaging workup of suspected classical paraneoplastic neurological syndromes: a systematic review and retrospective analysis of 18F-FDG-PET-CT. Acad Radiol. 2017;24(10):1195–1202.
32. Sheikhbahaei S, Marcus CV, Fragomeni RS, Rowe SP, Javadi MS, Solnes LB. Whole-Body 18F-FDG PET and 18F-FDG PET/CT in patients with suspected paraneoplastic syndrome: a systematic review and meta-analysis of diagnostic accuracy. *J Nucl Med*. 2017;58(7):1031–1036.
33. Rutherford GC, Dineen RA, O'Connor A. Imaging in the investigation of paraneoplastic syndromes. *Clin Radiol*. 2007;62(11):1021–1035.


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

Click Anywhere in the Header to Return to the Main Table of Contents



# Metastatic Cancer, Carcinoma of Unknown Primary Site, and Other Types of Cancer (ONC-31)

Guideline

General Guidelines (ONC-31.0)
Lung Metastases (ONC-31.1)
Liver Metastases and Liver-Directed Therapies (ONC-31.2)
Brain Metastases (ONC-31.3)
Adrenal Gland Metastases (ONC-31.4)
Bone (Non-Vertebral) Metastases (ONC-31.5)
Spinal/Vertebral Metastases (ONC-31.6)
Carcinoma of Unknown Primary Site (ONC-31.7)
Extrathoracic Small Cell and Large Cell Neuroendocrine Tumors (ONC-31.8)
Primary Peritoneal Mesothelioma (ONC-31.9)
Kaposi's Sarcoma (ONC-31.10)
Castleman's Disease (Unicentric and Multicentric) (ONC-31.11)
References (ONC-31)


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

Click Anywhere in the Header to Return to the Main Table of Contents



# General Guidelines (ONC-31.0)

**ON.UP.0031.0.A**

**v2.0.2026**

- Guideline sections Lung Metastases (ONC-31.1) through Spinal Vertebral Metastases (ONC-31.6) are designed to supplement the disease-specific guidelines when the disease-specific guidelines do not provide guidance on the clinical scenario in question.
- These sections can also be used if the cancer type is rare and does not have its own diagnosis-specific imaging guidelines.
- These sections may also be used for lesions suspicious for cancer that do not have guidance in other disease-specific areas of the guidelines.


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

# Lung Metastases (ONC-31.1)

**ON.UP.0031.1.A**
**v2.0.2026**

| Indication | Medically Necessary Imaging Study |
|---|---|
| New or worsening signs or symptoms suggestive of metastatic lung involvement or new or worsening chest x-ray abnormality | • CT Chest with contrast (CPT® 71260)<br>• CT Chest without contrast (CPT® 71250) if there is a contraindication to CT contrast or only parenchymal lesions are being evaluated |
| Chest wall or brachial plexus involvement | • MRI Chest without and with contrast (CPT® 71552) |
| ONE of the following **and** no diagnosis-specific guideline regarding PET imaging:<br>• Lung nodule(s) ≥8mm<br>• Confirm solitary metastasis amenable to resection on conventional imaging | • PET/CT (CPT® 78815)<br>• When primary cancer known, PET request should be reviewed by primary cancer guideline |
| Previous or current malignancy and pulmonary nodule(s) that would reasonably metastasize to the lungs | • CT Chest with contrast (CPT® 71260) or CT Chest without contrast (CPT® 71250) at 3, 6, 12, and 24 months from the first study<br>• For subsolid nodules, ongoing surveillance after 24 months is medically necessary. Refer to **Incidental Pulmonary Nodules Detected on CT Images (CH-16.2)** for follow-up for subsolid nodules after the 24 month timeframe. |


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

| Indication | Medically Necessary Imaging Study |
|---|---|
| Suspected drug-induced or radiation-induced pulmonary toxicity | CT Chest with contrast (CPT® 71260) or CT Chest without contrast (CPT® 71250) for the following:<br>• Initial evaluation<br>• Repeat imaging at the timing of the discretion of the treating provider<br>◦ Worsening symptoms or PFTs<br>◦ Guide for steroid taper<br>◦ Baseline prior to re-exposure to offending agent |

**Evidence Discussion**

All individuals with a history of cancer who have new signs or symptoms suggestive of metastatic disease to the lung, or who have new or worsening findings on chest x-ray, warrant CT Chest. Contrast is preferable in most scenarios to include evaluation of soft tissue and nodes, but a non-contrast study may be approved if there is a contraindication to contrast or if only parenchymal lung lesions are being evaluated. CT with contrast (or without if for parenchymal lesion only) is medically necessary to follow up new lung nodules in individuals with a history of malignancy.[55] There is, however, no clear consensus on a timeline for this follow up across all malignancy types. Where guidance is not provided in the disease-specific guidelines, these guidelines suggest a follow up timeline of CT at 3, 6, 12, and 24 months from discovery of nodule, extrapolating from Fleischner and Lung-RADS data that a nodule stable >24 months is exceedingly unlikely to be malignant.[54,55] MRI with and without contrast is medically necessary for suspected malignant infiltration of the brachial plexus or chest wall infiltration, for better soft tissue delineation.[52,53]

PET/CT is generally addressed in the guidelines for each specific cancer. If no specific guidance is provided, PET/CT is medically necessary for lung nodules greater than or equal to 8mm.[54] In the interest of safety to prevent futile invasive procedures on individuals with occult metastatic disease, PET/CT is also medically necessary by these guidelines to confirm solitary metastasis on conventional imaging that may be amenable to curative-intent resection. PET/CT surveillance is not generally medically necessary due to high radiation exposure, financial toxicity, and excess radiation exposure.


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

# Liver Metastases and Liver-Directed Therapies (ONC-31.2)

**ON.UP.0031.2.A**

**v2.0.2026**

- Yitrium-90 Radioembolization (Y90-RE) is also known either as Selective Internal Radiation Therapy (SIRT) or trans-arterial radioembolization (TARE). Y90-RE is medically necessary for inoperable hepatocellular carcinoma and metastatic disease to the liver. Yitrium-90 resin or glass microsphere is injected into the hepatic vessel which supplies the tumor bed. This delivers high radiation dose to the tumor selectively.
- Yitrium-90 Radioembolization consists of three parts:

1. The pre-treatment planning angiogram with Technetium 99m macroaggregated albumin (Tc-MAA). The Tc-MAA acts as surrogate for biodistribution of application of Y-90. Planar or SPECT/CT are performed for calculation of lung shunt fraction and identification of extra hepatic uptake. The assessment of hepatopulmonary shunt is important in the determination eventual radiation dose. Presence of extra-hepatic uptake may preclude treatment or require coil embolization.
2. Yitrium-90 Radioembolization treatment is typically done 7-10 days after mapping.
3. Post-treatment imaging may be done to confirm tumor localization.

- Ablation of liver metastases or primary HCC may be performed utilizing chemical, chemotherapeutic, radiofrequency, or radioactive isotope. Regardless of the modality of ablation, PET is not medically necessary for assessing response to this mode of therapy.

| Indication | Medically Necessary Imaging Study |
|---|---|
| New or worsening signs or symptoms suggestive of metastatic liver involvement or new elevation in LFTs | • CT Abdomen with (CPT® 74160) or without and with (CPT® 74170) contrast |
| ANY of the following:<br>• Considering limited resection<br>• Inconclusive CT findings<br>• Inconclusive liver findings on PET/CT | • MRI Abdomen without and with contrast (CPT® 74183) |


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

| Indication | Medically Necessary Imaging Study |
|---|---|
| ONE of the following **and** no diagnosis-specific guideline regarding PET imaging:<br>• Confirm solitary metastasis amenable to resection on conventional imaging<br>• LFT's and/or tumor markers continue to rise and CT and MRI are negative | • PET/CT (CPT® 78815)<br>◦ When primary cancer known, PET request should be reviewed by primary cancer guideline |
| Monitoring of liver metastases that have been surgically resected | • Review according to primary cancer guideline |
| Evaluation of hepatic artery chemotherapy infusion or TACE (transarterial chemoembolization) | • CTA Abdomen (CPT® 74175) immediately prior to embolization<br>ONE of the following studies immediately prior to and one month post-embolization, if not previously done:<br>• CT Abdomen without and with contrast (CPT® 74170)<br>• MRI Abdomen without and with contrast (CPT® 74183) |


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

| Indication | Medically Necessary Imaging Study |
|---|---|
| Evaluation for hepatic artery radioembolization with Y-90 radioactive spheres (TheraSphere or SIR Spheres) for liver metastases or primary liver tumors | To assess hepatic vascular anatomy before the procedure, any ONE of the following:<br>• 3D Rendering (CPT® 76377) if conventional hepatic angiogram is being performed<br>• CTA Abdomen (CPT® 74175)<br><br>ONE of the following studies PRE-treatment based upon provider preference:<br>• Radiopharmaceutical Localization Limited Area (CPT® 78800 or CPT® 78801)<br>• SPECT or SPECT/CT (CPT® 78803, 78831, 78830, or 78832)<br>• CPT® 78835 may be approved as an add-on code with SPECT/CT codes only (CPT® 78803, 78831, 78830, or 78832) for calculation of lung shunt fraction if planar imaging (CPT® 78800 or CPT® 78801) not performed. Liver-lung shunt calculation is included in planar scans and does not require additional Lung Perfusion Scan<br><br>ONE of the following studies POST-treatment based upon provider preference:<br>• Radiopharmaceutical Localization Limited Area (CPT® 78800 or CPT® 78801)<br>• SPECT or SPECT/CT (CPT® 78803, 78831, 78830, or 78832) |
| Monitoring of ablated liver metastases or primary tumors | ONE of the following, immediately prior to ablation, 1 month post-ablation, then every 3 months for 2 years, and then every 6 months until year 5:<br>• CT Abdomen without and with contrast (CPT® 74170)<br>• MRI Abdomen without and with contrast (CPT® 74183) |

## Evidence Discussion

For individuals with known malignancy with new symptoms suggestive of metastatic liver involvement or increase in LFTs, these guidelines support CT of the abdomen


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

with contrast or without and with contrast as first line imaging. This helps differentiate vascular enhancement patterns, number of lesions, and associated abdominal findings. If the CT remains indeterminate, MRI without and with contrast is medically necessary as MRI enables better characterization of the internal features of the lesion.[56,57] For safety, MRI is also medically necessary if limited resection is being considered.

PET/CT is less specific than conventional imaging for liver lesions, and is not first line to clarify indeterminate liver findings on CT.[56] However, if LFTs or tumor markers continue to rise and CT and MRI are negative, PET/CT may be used as a problem-solving tool to look for occult metastatic disease.[56] In the interest of safety, if a curative-intent resection of a liver lesion is planned, PET/CT may be used to confirm the liver metastasis is solitary to prevent subjecting the individual to a futile resection.

Imaging is medically necessary to evaluate for hepatic artery chemotherapy infusion or transarterial chemoembolization (TACE). Either CT or or MRI with and without contrast may be used for this purpose, per provider preference based on individual tumor characteristics, per the logic noted in paragraph 1. These guidelines for imaging for radioembolization align with international working group TheraSphere Global Dosimetry Steering Committee (DSC) recommendations.[59] Vascular mapping is medically necessary prior to radioembolization with CTA abdomen (with 3D rendering if requested), as well as a single nuclear medicine liver planar study or SPECT/SPECT-CT study, based on provider preference and individual tumor characteristics.[59] Liver-lung shunt calculations can generally be calculated from pre-treatment scans and an addition lung perfusion scan is not generally medically necessary.[59] The nuclear imaging used pre-treatment is medically necessary once post-treatment, and cross-sectional imaging with CT or MRI to evaluate response is medically necessary 1 month post treatment.[59]

Monitoring of ablated liver tumors, metastatic or primary, is with cross sectional imaging with CT or MRI Abdomen, with and without contrast, per provider preference based on individual and tumor characteristics. In alignment with NCCN hepatocellular carcinoma surveillance recommendations, this guideline supports this imaging 1 month post ablation, every 3 months for 2 years, then every 6 months until year 5.[58] PET is not routinely medically necessary for follow up for ablated liver lesions, regardless of ablation modality.[58,60] The sensitivity of PET is only 65% in this setting, compared with 96% for MRI, and the positive and negative predictive values are also significantly superior for MRI vs PET.[60]


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

Click Anywhere in the Header to Return to the Main Table of Contents



# Brain Metastases (ONC-31.3)

**ON.UP.0031.3.UOH**
**v2.0.2026**

| Indication | Medically Necessary Imaging Study |
|---|---|
| Individual with cancer and signs or symptoms of CNS disease or known brain metastasis with new signs or symptoms. | • MRI Brain without and with contrast (CPT® 70553) |
| To determine candidacy for SRS, and a diagnostic thin-slice MRI Brain has not been performed in the preceding 30 days | • MRI Brain without and with contrast (CPT® 70553) |
| Stereotactic radiosurgery planning | • Unlisted MRI for treatment planning purposes (CPT® 76498) |
| Monitoring of brain metastases treated with surgery or radiation therapy | Post-treatment, then every 3 months for 1 year and every 4 months thereafter:<br>• MRI Brain without and with contrast (CPT® 70553)<br>***Individuals treated with stereotactic radiosurgery alone may have MRI Brain without and with contrast (CPT® 70553) immediately after stereotactic radiosurgery, then every 2 months for the first year, and then every 6 months thereafter |
| Brain metastases treated with radiation therapy, with recent MRI Brain indeterminate in distinguishing radiation necrosis vs. tumor progression | • MRI Perfusion imaging (CPT® 70553) |


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

| Indication | Medically Necessary Imaging Study |
|---|---|
| Brain metastases treated with radiation therapy, with recent MRI Brain and MR Perfusion studies both unable to distinguish radiation necrosis vs. tumor progression | • PET Metabolic Brain (CPT® 78608) |
| Any of the following:<br>• Solitary brain metastasis suspected in individual with prior diagnosis of cancer<br>• Brain metastases and no known primary tumor | • CT Chest (CPT® 71260) and CT Abdomen and Pelvis (CPT® 74177) with contrast<br>• Mammography for female individuals<br>• PET/CT (CPT® 78815 or CPT® 78816) for ANY of the following:<br>◦ Inconclusive conventional imaging<br>◦ Confirm either stable systemic disease or absence of other metastatic disease<br>◦ When primary cancer known, PET request should be reviewed by primary cancer guideline unless there is no diagnosis-specific guideline regarding PET imaging |
| Primary brain tumors | See: **Primary Central Nervous System Tumors (ONC-2)** |
| MR Spectroscopy (CPT® 76390) is not medically necessary for evaluation of metastatic brain cancer | |

**Evidence Discussion**

Brain metastases are the most common malignant intracranial tumors with an incidence 10-fold higher than primary central brain tumors. Common presenting signs and symptoms of brain metastases include headache, nausea, vomiting, focal neurologic deficits, and mental status changes. The most common cancer associated with brain metastases is lung cancer approaching 50% of the cases. Melanoma is associated with the highest incidence of brain metastases.

These guidelines support MRI Brain without and with contrast as the standard imaging modality for evaluation of an individual with suspected or known brain metastases. The post-treatment monitoring after surgery or radiation is based on NCCN guidelines. Specifically for stereotactic radiosurgery planning, a diagnostic MRI is not medically necessary and the MRI request is based on an unlisted procedure code. Advanced imaging with MR perfusion imaging is a problem-solving tool, complementing a standard


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

MRI Brain, to distinguish between radiation necrosis and tumor progression. PET Metabolic Brain imaging is a useful tool to distinguish between radiation necrosis and tumor progression with recent indeterminate MRI Brain and MR Perfusion study.

In individuals who present with brain metastases and no known primary tumor, an evaluation to define a primary cancer is medically necessary. Imaging studies that are medically necessary include CT Chest and CT Abdomen and Pelvis with contrast. Mammography is medically necessary for this staging in female individuals. PET/CT is medically necessary for inconclusive standard imaging, for evaluation of other metastatic disease or for staging if supported by primary cancer guideline. Biopsy or resection of a suspicious lesion is needed to establish a definitive diagnosis.


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

# Adrenal Gland Metastases (ONC-31.4)

**ON.UP.0031.4.A**
**v2.0.2026**

| Indication | Medically Necessary Imaging Study |
|---|---|
| Differentiate benign adrenal adenoma from metastatic disease | • See: **Adrenal Cortical Lesions (AB-16.1)** in the Abdomen Imaging Guidelines |
| Known cancer and no known systemic metastases:<br>• New adrenal mass<br>• Enlarging adrenal mass<br>• Inconclusive findings on recent CT | If not done previously, ANY of the following:<br>• CT Abdomen without contrast (CPT® 74150)<br>• CT Abdomen without and with contrast (CPT® 74170, adrenal protocol)<br>• MRI Abdomen without contrast (CPT® 74181)<br>• MRI Abdomen without and with contrast (CPT® 74183)<br>• CT-directed needle biopsy (CPT® 77012) |
| One of the following and no diagnosis-specific guideline regarding PET imaging:<br>• Biopsy is not feasible or is non-diagnostic<br>• Isolated metastasis on conventional imaging and individual is a candidate for aggressive surgical management | • PET/CT (CPT® 78815)<br>When primary cancer known, PET request should be reviewed by primary cancer guideline |
| Known extra-adrenal malignancy and undiagnosed adrenal mass being monitored off treatment | See: Phases of **Oncology Imaging and General Phase-Related Considerations (ONC-1.2)** |

### Evidence Discussion

In individuals with known extra-adrenal malignancy and no known systemic metastatic disease who have been found to have a new, enlarging or inconclusive adrenal mass on other imaging, a non-contrast CT adrenal protocol or CT Abdomen with and without


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

contrast adrenal protocol or an MRI Abdomen without or without and with contrast are all supported by ACR appropriateness criteria.[62] Non-contrast images allow for initial attenuation measurements, but contrast-enhanced images with imaging for washout characteristics can help differentiate adenomas from metastatic disease.[7,62] Non-contrast chemical shift MRI can help detect intracytoplasmic fat, providing insight into benign vs malignant characteristics, but post-contrast imaging adds further specificity for adenoma.[7,62] CT-directed needle biopsy may also be appropriate and is supported by the guidelines if requested.[7,62]

The utility of PET/CT varies with histology and type of radiotracer. Generally, the use of PET/CT for a given malignancy is addressed in the disease-specific guidelines. For lesions with no known history of malignancy, there is no primary evidence supporting the use of FDG PET-CT for initial evaluation.[62] In one study of 1,049 incidental adrenal masses in individuals with no known history of cancer, zero were malignant.[27] Mild SUV uptake can also be seen in benign adenomas, bringing the sensitivity of PET/CT to only 85% .[28,29,62] False-positive interpretations potentially result in unnecessary invasive procedures. When other adrenal-specific cross sectional imaging is suspicious for malignancy by size and other criteria, biopsy is preferred. If a biopsy is not feasible or non-diagnostic, PET/CT may show increased SUV uptake in malignant lesions and guide further decision making, and is supported by the ACR in this context.[7,62]


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

# Bone (Non-Vertebral) Metastases (ONC-31.5)

**ON.UP.0031.5.A**
**v2.0.2026**

- This guideline may be used for individuals with or without a history of malignancy, depending on the indications as listed below.

| Indication | Medically Necessary Imaging Study |
|---|---|
| Individuals ≥40 years of age with no history of malignancy who have a symptomatic bone lesion seen on x-ray and malignancy is suspected | EITHER of the following:<br>• CT Chest with contrast (CPT® 71260), CT Abdomen and Pelvis with contrast (CPT® 74177), and Bone scan (CPT® 78306)<br>OR<br>• FDG PET/CT (CPT® 78815 or CPT® 78816) |
| Individuals <40 years of age with a bone lesion on x-ray | See: **Lesion of Bone (MS-10.2)** |
| Suspected bone metastasis due to ANY of the following in an individual with a current or prior malignancy:<br>• Bone pain<br>• Rising tumor markers<br>• Elevated alkaline phosphatase | • Bone scan (CPT® 78306) supplemented by plain x-rays (see: **Nuclear Medicine (NM) Imaging in Oncology [ONC-1.3]** for additional bone scan codes) |
| ANY of the following:<br>• Bone scan is not feasible or readily available<br>• Bone scan is equivocal or indeterminate<br>• Continued suspicion despite negative/inconclusive bone scan or other imaging modalities<br>• Soft tissue component suspected on other imaging modalities<br>• Differentiate neoplastic disease from Paget's disease of the bone | EITHER of the following:<br>• MRI without and with contrast of the involved body site<br>• CT without or with contrast of the involved body site |


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

| Indication | Medically Necessary Imaging Study |
|---|---|
| Bone metastases suspected and **both** bone scan and either CT or MRI are inconclusive | • $^{18}$F-FDG-PET/CT (CPT® 78815 or CPT® 78816) |
| EITHER of the following:<br>• No prior cancer history with suspected bone metastatic disease or pathologic fracture on plain x-ray<br>• Adult individuals with a biopsy-proven carcinoma of unknown origin in a bone lesion | • See: **Carcinoma of Unknown Primary Site (ONC-31.7)** |

**Evidence Discussion**

Bone scan supplemented by plain x-ray is the generally the first-line modality for individuals with current or history of malignancy who have new bone pain, rising tumor markers or elevated alkaline phosphatase. Bone scan is 79%-86% sensitive and 81%-88% specific for metastatic lesions.[41,44] Bone scan allows rapid whole-skeletal evaluation to ensure additional bony disease is not missed by focusing on a single site of cross-sectional imaging. MRI is a useful problem-solving tool if there is continued suspicion for bony metastatic disease with a negative bone scan.[41,43] MRI is medically necessary when a soft tissue component is suspect to avoid understaging and undertreatment.[43] MRI is also the most specific study to supplement plain x-ray to differentiate Paget disease of bone from neoplastic disease.[45]

MRI is more accurate than CT or bone scan for the evaluation of malignant vertebral compression fractures and additionally can assess for cord compression, edema or leptomeningeal disease.[44] Individuals with known stage IV cancer with new back pain or any sings of neurologic compromise may be immediately evaluated by MRI of the whole spine without or without and with contrast.[44] MRI is also medically necessary for suspected leptomeningeal disease.[44] CT has the lower accuracy than MRI or bone scan in this setting and is only medically necessary when MRI is contraindicated.[44] New leptomeningeal disease should prompt an MRI of the brain for complete neuroaxis imaging.

Where imaging is suspicious for bony metastatic disease and a workup for multiple myeloma is negative, CT Chest, Abdomen, and Pelvis with contrast are medically necessary to look for a primary malignancy.[33]

The sensitivity and specificity of FDG PET-CT for bony metastatic disease varies with the malignancy. For example, for breast cancer, PET may be more sensitive (96% vs


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

76% for bone scan) but may be less specific (92% vs 95% for bone scan). However, for some cancers, sensitivity of PET is as low as 56%.[42,44] Given this variability, PET/CT is medically necessary as a problem-solving tool when both bone scan and MRI or CT are inconclusive. NCCN does support the use of FDG PET/CT specifically in individuals who 40 years of age or older and who have a symptomatic bone lesion with an abnormal x-ray.[63] These guidelines allow the flexibility of using FDG PET/CT in this specific scenario if it is desired in lieu of diagnostic CT and bone scan. NaF PET is considered investigational due to varying sensitivity and specificity.[46,47]


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

# Spinal/Vertebral Metastases (ONC-31.6)

**ON.UP.0031.6.A**
**v2.0.2026**

- Individuals with stage IV cancer with new onset back pain can forgo a bone scan (and plain films) in lieu of an MRI with and without contrast of the spine.

| Indication | Medically Necessary Imaging Study |
|---|---|
| Known cancer history and spinal cord compression suspected based on signs/ symptoms of neurological compromise, including, but not limited to:<br>• Unexpected, sudden loss of bowel or bladder control<br>• Sudden loss of ability to ambulate<br>• Complete loss of pinprick sensation corresponding to a specific vertebral level<br>• Loss of pain at a site that had previously been refractory to pain management | MRI Cervical (CPT® 72156), MRI Thoracic (CPT® 72157), and MRI Lumbar Spine (CPT® 72158) without and with contrast OR without contrast (CPT® 72141, CPT® 72146, or CPT® 72148)<br>• CT Cervical (CPT® 72126), CT Thoracic (CPT® 72129), and CT Lumbar (CPT® 72132) Spine if MRI is contraindicated |
| Individual with a known history of cancer and ANY of the following:<br>• Metastatic or stage IV cancer with new or worsening back pain<br>• Continued suspicion despite negative/ inconclusive bone scan or other imaging modalities<br>• Back pain and suspicion of spinal malignancy based on any one of the following:<br>◦ Night pain<br>◦ Age >70 years<br>◦ Uncontrolled or unintentional weight loss<br>◦ Pain unrelieved by change in position<br>◦ Severe or worsening spinal pain | ONE of the following:<br>• MRI of the relevant spinal level without contrast<br>• MRI of the relevant spinal level without and with contrast<br>• CT of the relevant spinal level without contrast<br>• CT Myelogram of the relevant spinal level |


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

| Indication | Medically Necessary Imaging Study |
|---|---|
| Monitoring untreated vertebral metastases | One of the following, every 3 months for 1 year:<br>• MRI without and with contrast of the involved spinal level<br>• CT without or with contrast of the involved spinal level<br>**Imaging beyond 1 year is based on any new clinical signs/symptoms |
| Monitoring metastases within the spine treated with surgery and/or radiation therapy | One of the following, once within 3 months post-treatment, and then every 3 months for 1 year:<br>• MRI without and with contrast of the involved spinal level<br>• CT without or with contrast of the involved spinal level<br>**Imaging beyond 1 year is based on any new clinical signs/symptoms |


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

| Indication | Medically Necessary Imaging Study |
|---|---|
| Leptomeningeal involvement with cancer | Suspected:<br>• MRI Brain without and with contrast (CPT® 70553) and MRI Cervical (CPT® 72156), Thoracic (CPT® 72157), and Lumbar spine (CPT® 72158) without and with contrast<br>• CT Cervical (CPT® 72127), Thoracic (CPT® 72130), and Lumbar Spine (CPT® 72133) without and with contrast is medically necessary if MRI is contraindicated or not readily available<br><br>On active treatment:<br>• MRI Brain without and with contrast (CPT® 70553) and MRI Cervical (CPT® 72156), Thoracic (CPT® 72157), and Lumbar spine (CPT® 72158) without and with contrast every 2 cycles<br>• CT without or with contrast of the involved spinal level if MRI is contraindicated<br><br>Once treatment completed:<br>• Routine advanced imaging not medically necessary for surveillance in asymptomatic individuals |

## Evidence Discussion

The incidence of malignant cord compression varies with cancer type but is rarely the first sign of systemic cancer. Back pain is the most common presenting symptoms and is reported in 80%-95% of individuals. Pain is often refractory to traditional pain medications. Sensory and motor deficits occur in 35%-75% of individuals, and acute bowel/bladder dysfunction are other red flags for cord compression. Up to 35% of individuals have multiple levels of compression, which may be non-contiguous, and as such where symptoms as above suggest cord compression in an individual with a history of malignancy, imaging of the whole spine is medically necessary. MRI with and without contrast has a sensitivity and specificity of 93% and 97%, respectively. ACR Appropriateness Criteria® stated CT Myelogram 'may be appropriate' in this setting, may be faster to obtain, and may be necessary to plan surgical intervention; thus, it is also supported by these guidelines for suspected malignant cord compression.[24,25,26]


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

Some individuals will present with more localized symptoms suggestive of localized nerve root involvement but not consistent with the above symptoms of cord compression. Unilateral symptoms suggest a lower motor neuron lesion. Other symptoms suggestive of nerve root involvement are night pain, refractory pain, and pain unrelieved by a change in position. Elderly individuals with a cancer history are also at higher risk for nerve root involvement. Unintentional weight loss without other localizing symptoms may also suggest nerve root involvement. In individuals with a history of malignancy with any of the above, MRI without and with contrast of the involved spinal level of symptoms is medically necessary. CT is less sensitive than MRI in this setting and is medically necessary only when MRI is contraindicated.[24,25,26]


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

# Carcinoma of Unknown Primary Site (ONC-31.7)

**ON.UP.0031.7.UOH**
**v2.0.2026**

**General Considerations**

- Defined as carcinoma found in a lymph node or in an organ known not to be the primary for that cell type (e.g., adenocarcinoma arising in the brain or in a neck lymph node).
- This guideline also applies to a pathologic fracture that is clearly due to metastatic neoplastic disease in an individual without a previous cancer history.
- Detailed history and physical examination including pelvic and rectal exams and laboratory tests to be performed before advanced imaging.
- Individuals presenting with a thoracic squamous cell carcinoma described as metastatic appearing on chest imaging, or in lymph nodes above the clavicle, should undergo a detailed head and neck examination by a clinician skilled in laryngeal and pharyngeal examinations, especially in smokers.
- Individuals with suspected unknown primary based on only suspicious lytic bone lesions should be considered for serum protein electrophoresis (SPEP, urine protein electrophoresis (UPEP), and serum free light chains prior to consideration of extensive imaging.

| Indication | Medically Necessary Imaging Study |
|---|---|
| Carcinoma found in a lymph node or in an organ known not to be primary | • CT Chest (CPT® 71260) and CT Abdomen and Pelvis with contrast (CPT® 74177)<br>• CT Neck with contrast (CPT® 70491) if cervical or supraclavicular involvement<br>• CT with contrast or MRI without and with contrast of any other symptomatic site<br>• For female individuals:<br>◦ Diagnostic (not screening) mammogram and full pelvic exam<br>◦ MRI Breasts Bilateral (CPT® 77049) if pathology consistent with breast primary and mammogram is inconclusive |


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

| Indication | Medically Necessary Imaging Study |
|---|---|
| Sebaceous carcinoma of the skin (can be associated with underlying primary malignancy) | • CT Chest (CPT® 71260) and CT Abdomen and Pelvis with contrast (CPT® 74177)<br>• CT Neck with contrast (CPT® 70491) if cervical or supraclavicular involvement<br>• CT with contrast or MRI without and with contrast of any other symptomatic site |
| Axillary adenocarcinoma | • Diagnostic (not screening) mammogram and full pelvic exam<br>• MRI Breasts Bilateral (CPT® 77049) if pathology consistent with breast primary and mammogram is inconclusive<br>• If the above are non-diagnostic for primary site:<br>◦ CT Neck (CPT® 70491), CT Chest (CPT® 71260), and CT Abdomen (CPT® 74160) with contrast<br>◦ CT with contrast or MRI without and with contrast of any other symptomatic site |
| EITHER of the following:<br>• Carcinoma found within a bone lesion<br>• Unexplained pathologic fracture | • CT Chest (CPT® 71260) and CT Abdomen and Pelvis with contrast (CPT® 74177)<br>• Bone Scan (CPT® 78306) (see: **Nuclear Medicine (NM) Imaging in Oncology (ONC-1.3)** for additional bone scan codes)<br>• CT with contrast or MRI without and with contrast of any symptomatic site |
| ANY of the following:<br>• Above studies have failed to demonstrate site of primary<br>• CT scans reveal isolated metastatic disease for which definitive curative therapy is planned | • PET/CT (CPT® 78815 or CPT® 78816) |
| Post-treatment surveillance | • Follow-up with CT Chest (CPT® 71260), CT Abdomen and Pelvis (CPT® 74177), and CT of any other involved areas every 6-12 months for 5 years |


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

## Evidence Discussion

Carcinoma of unknown primary site (CUP) is defined as carcinoma found in a lymph node or in an organ known not to be the primary for that cell type (e.g., adenocarcinoma arising in the brain or in a neck lymph node). This guideline also applies to a pathologic fracture that is clearly due to metastatic neoplastic disease in an individual without a previous cancer history. Individuals with suspected unknown primary based on only suspicious lytic bone lesions should be considered for serum protein electrophoresis (SPEP), urine protein electrophoresis (UPEP), and serum free light chains prior to consideration of extensive imaging.

CUP generally occurs in older adults, the majority 6-75 years, and accounts for 2-9% of all tumors. Median survival is poor, at 3-10 months. Twenty percent of individuals fall into a more favorable risk group with median survival >1 year, and imaging may help identify this group.[1,30] The primary step in workup of CUP, before advanced imaging, is a detailed history and physical examination including pelvic and rectal exams and laboratory tests, including basic CBC/Chemistries/LFTs but also tumor markers, immunohistochemistry, and PSA (for men over 40). Endoscopy should also be considered if pathology suggests a GI primary. CT of the chest, abdomen, and pelvis with contrast is medically necessary for all individuals where primary site is not suggested on physical and lab evaluation, in alignment with NCCN and the European Society of Medical Oncology (ESMO).[1,30] CT Neck may be included if cervical or supraclavicular involvement, as well as CT or MRI for other symptomatic sites or abnormal sites on physical, with the choice of modality driven by body site of interest. If the site of carcinoma is a bone lesion that is not consistent with multiple myeloma, a bone scan should be added to the workup. Morphology on bone scan can help determine the primary site, where lytic lesions are most suggestive of myeloma, renal cell, GI and melanoma, and blastic lesions most commonly occur with prostate cancer and GI carcinoid. Other morphologic features such as location and expansile nature can also help guide workup and treatment toward a particular primary site.[33] PET/CT has not been shown to be superior to bone scan for this purpose, and in fact may be less sensitive than bone scan for lesions <1cm.[1,33]

It is essential that female individuals have a diagnostic (not screening) mammogram and full pelvic exam. If pathology is consistent with breast cancer from axillary node or other metastatic site, but mammogram is inconclusive, a bilateral breast MRI with and without contrast is medically necessary, as MRI may identify the breast as the primary site in approximately half of the individuals presenting with axillary adenocarcinoma metastases.[1,32] If a primary site is still not found, CT Neck, Chest, Abdomen, and Pelvis are medically necessary.

These guidelines align with NCCN and support PET/CT as a problem-solving tool to look for a primary site of disease when the studies described above still do not reveal a primary site.[1] PET is of intermediate specificity in this setting and large randomized trials


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

are lacking.[1] A meta-analysis on the use of PET/CT in individuals with CUP found that primary tumors were detected in 37% of 433 individuals across 11 studies, with pooled sensitivity and specificity of 84%.[1,31] In addition, if CT scans reveal oligometastatic disease and definitive curative therapy is planned, the absence of other sites of disease may be confirmed with PET/CT to prevent over- or under-treatment.[1,30]

Subsequent imaging and surveillance should follow the guideline for each primary site, once a likely primary has been established. NCCN stated follow-up should be with history and physical with subsequent diagnostic testing based on symptoms. In 20%-50% of individuals, the primary site remains unidentified even after postmortem examination, thus continued imaging is low-yield and may contribute to the significant distress associated with the uncertainty of this condition.[1,30] There is no data-driven algorithm for imaging surveillance when the primary site of disease remains undiscovered.[1]


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

# Extrathoracic Small Cell and Large Cell Neuroendocrine Tumors (ONC-31.8)

**ON.UP.0031.8.A**

**v2.0.2026**

- All poorly-differentiated or high-grade, small cell and large cell neuroendocrine tumors arising outside the lungs or of unknown primary origin are imaged according to these guidelines.
- For intrathoracic poorly differentiated neuroendocrine cancer, see: **Small Cell Lung Cancer (ONC-7)**

| Indication | Medically Necessary Imaging Study |
|---|---|
| Initial staging | ONE of the following combinations:<br>• CT Chest (CPT® 71260) and CT Abdomen and Pelvis (CPT® 74177) with contrast<br>• CT Chest with contrast (CPT® 71260) and MRI Abdomen without and with contrast (CPT® 74183) and MRI Pelvis without and with contrast (CPT® 72197) |
| Inconclusive findings on conventional imaging studies | • PET/CT (CPT® 78815) |
| ANY of the following:<br>• Poorly differentiated neuroendocrine cancers of the head or neck<br>• Signs or symptoms of CNS involvement | • MRI Brain without and with contrast (CPT® 70553) |
| Restaging during treatment | ONE of the following combinations, every 2 cycles:<br>• CT Chest (CPT® 71260) and CT Abdomen and Pelvis (CPT® 74177) and CT of any known sites of disease with contrast<br>• CT Chest with contrast (CPT® 71260) and MRI Abdomen without and with contrast (CPT® 74183) and MRI Pelvis without and with contrast (CPT® 72197) and CT with contrast of any known sites of disease |


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

| Indication | Medically Necessary Imaging Study |
|---|---|
| Suspected Recurrence | ANY or ALL of the following are medically necessary:<br>• CT Chest (CPT® 71260) and CT Abdomen and Pelvis (CPT® 74177) with contrast or CT Chest with contrast (CPT® 71260) and MRI Abdomen without and with contrast (CPT® 74183) and MRI Pelvis without and with contrast (CPT® 72197)<br>• MRI Brain without and with contrast (CPT® 70553)<br>• Bone scan (CPT® 78306) (See: **Nuclear Medicine (NM) Imaging in Oncology (ONC-1.3)** for additional bone scan codes)<br>• PET imaging is generally **not** medically necessary but can be considered for rare circumstances. |
| Surveillance | ONE of the following combinations every 3 months for 1 year, then every 6 months:<br>• CT Chest (CPT® 71260) and CT Abdomen and Pelvis (CPT® 74177)<br>• CT Chest with contrast (CPT® 71260) and MRI Abdomen without and with contrast (CPT® 74183) and MRI Pelvis without and with contrast (CPT® 72197) |

**Evidence Discussion**

Poorly differentiated/high-grade neuroendocrine tumors (NET) may occur anywhere in the body and exhibit more aggressive behavior than other neuroendocrine tumors. When these tumors occur in the lung, they are managed like small cell lung cancer and the small-cell lung cancer guidelines apply. This section refers to extrathoracic, poorly-differentiated or high-grade NETs.

Initial Staging

Initial staging with contrasted CT of the chest, abdomen and pelvis is medically necessary, with sensitivity and specificity ranging from 82%-100% .[9,51] Metastatic disease, particularly to the liver, is common with this entity within this setting .[48,49] MRI is equally supported by NCCN for imaging of the abdomen and pelvis. Given the undifferentiated nature of these tumors, dotatate PET/CT is not routinely medically necessary as they do not consistently have somatostatin receptors, with some studies showing this modality missing 50% of tumors.[49] Sensitivity and specificity of FDG-PET/CT is superior to somatostatin-receptor based imaging for undifferentiated tumors, but is still widely variable and is not medically necessary for first line imaging but may be used as a problem-solving tool when conventional imaging is inconclusive.[9,50] Poorly


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

differentiated NETs do have a propensity for CNS involvement, and MRI Brain with and without contrast is medically necessary for initial staging with head and neck primary site or for any signs and symptoms suggestive of CNS involvement .[9,49] Suspected bony metastatic disease may be evaluated using guideline **ONC-31.5**.

Restaging and Suspected Recurrence

In alignment with NCCN, conventional imaging may be repeated every 2 cycles of treatment. In the case of suspected recurrence, CT Chest, Abdomen, and Pelvis with contrast are medically necessary as well as MRI Brain and Bone scan, in alignment with NCCN.[9] FDG PET/CT is not routinely medically necessary in this setting for the reasons cited in the section on initial staging but may be utilized in rare circumstances in the interest of safety.

Surveillance

Guidelines support conventional imaging studies every 3 months for the first year, then every 6 months for 4 additional years, then annually indefinitely due to the long term-risk of recurrence in this entity.[9,48]


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

# Primary Peritoneal Mesothelioma (ONC-31.9)

**ON.UP.0031.9.A**
**v2.0.2026**

| Indication | Medically Necessary Imaging Study |
|---|---|
| Initial staging | • CT Chest (CPT® 71260) and CT Abdomen and Pelvis (CPT® 74177) with contrast<br>• PET/CT (CPT® 78815) if there is no evidence of metastatic disease or conventional imaging is inconclusive |
| Recurrence/ Restaging | • If there is known prior disease, CT Chest (CPT® 71260) and CT Abdomen and Pelvis (CPT® 74177) with contrast<br>• PET for inconclusive finding on conventional imaging |
| Surveillance | • CT Abdomen and Pelvis with contrast (CPT® 74177) every 3-6 months for 5 years, then annually until year 10 |

**Evidence Discussion**

Contrasted CT of chest, abdomen and pelvis is essential to assess the degree of dissemination, verify that peritoneal disease is not metastatic from another primary site, evaluate lymphadenopathy, and to identify metastatic disease. For primary peritoneal mesothelioma, most individuals present with advanced locoregional disease.[35] Spread into pleural space and local lymph nodes are the primary sites of metastatic disease, with more distant/diffuse metastatic disease much less common.[35,36] Sensitivity of CT is superior to MRI for this entity. As with other malignancies, if CT shows a liver lesion indeterminate for metastatic disease, MRI may be used for further assessment per guideline section ONC-31.2. The sensitivity of PET-CT for malignant peritoneal mesothelioma ranges from 58%-100%, so it is not a primary imaging tool for staging. However, PET/CT may detect small peritoneal implants that are missed on CT and alter management.[34] PET/CT is medically necessary when no metastatic disease is detected on conventional imaging to ensure individuals are not under-staged.

Contrasted CT of the abdomen and pelvis are medically necessary for restaging, as sensitivity of CT is superior to MRI for this disease process. Given that progression to chest disease is rare, CT Chest is medically necessary for restaging only if there is known disease in the chest or if new chest symptoms develop. Given the widely variable sensitivity of PET/CT for peritoneal mesothelioma, it is medically necessary only for inconclusive findings on conventional imaging.[35]


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

NCCN guidelines and outcome data supported contrasted CT of the Chest/Abdomen/ Pelvis every 3 months for 2 years then annually until year 10.[34,35] Frequent imaging is medically necessary only within the first two years as 68% of recurrences occur within the first 2 years, then annual imaging moving forward.[35]


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

# Kaposi's Sarcoma (ONC-31.10)

**ON.UP.0031.10.A**
**v2.0.2026**

| Indication | Medically Necessary Imaging Study |
|---|---|
| Kaposi's Sarcoma | • Advanced imaging is not medically necessary since disease is generally localized to skin.<br>• CT Chest (CPT® 71260) and CT Abdomen and Pelvis (CPT® 74177) with contrast at initial diagnosis. If initial scans are negative then future imaging would be based on signs or symptoms. |

**Evidence Discussion**

Most Kaposi Sarcoma (KS) is most often confined to skin; however, it can sometimes be found in viscera, particularly in HIV-associated disease. To prevent under-staging and to assess the need for systemic therapy, CT of the Chest, Abdomen, and Pelvis with contrast are medically necessary at initial diagnosis.[61]

Routine advanced imaging is not medically necessary if there is no visceral disease at diagnosis, but restaging CTs may be approved for individuals with visceral disease on systemic therapy per the timeframes offered in ONC-1.2. Contrasted CTs may also be approved to evaluate areas with specific signs and symptoms of new involvement.[61]

There are no data or expert consensus that support routine surveillance imaging for Kaposi's Sarcoma.[61]


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

# Castleman's Disease (Unicentric and Multicentric) (ONC-31.11)

**ON.UP.0031.11.A**
**v2.0.2026**

| Indication | Medically Necessary Imaging Study |
|---|---|
| Initial staging | • Either CT Chest (CPT® 71260) and CT Abdomen and Pelvis (CPT® 74177) with contrast **or** PET/CT (CPT® 78815)<br>• CT Neck with contrast (CPT® 70491) if cervical or supraclavicular involvement<br>• If CT scans were utilized initially and suggested unicentric disease, and surgical resection is being considered, PET/CT (CPT® 78815) can be approved to confirm unicentric disease<br>• If unicentric disease is surgically removed, proceed to surveillance section |
| Restaging:<br>• Multicentric disease or surgically unresected unicentric disease on chemotherapy | ONE of the following every 2 cycles:<br>• CT Chest (CPT® 71260) and CT Abdomen and Pelvis (CPT® 74177) with contrast<br>• PET/CT (CPT® 78815) |
| ANY of the following:<br>• Suspected recurrence<br>• Recurrent B symptoms<br>• Rising LDH/IL-6/ VEGF levels | ONE of the following:<br>• CT Chest (CPT® 71260) and CT Abdomen and Pelvis (CPT® 74177) with contrast<br>• PET/CT (CPT® 78815) |
| Surveillance | • CT with contrast of involved areas no more than every 6 months up to 5 years |

## Evidence Discussion

### Initial Staging


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

PET/CT fusion is medically necessary for initial staging of Castleman's Disease.[37] PET/CT not only assesses for multicentric disease, but the SUV can be used to determine Castleman's disease vs frank lymphoma.[39] Diagnostic, contrasted CTs of the chest, abdomen, pelvis, as well as neck (if suspected neck disease) may be substituted for PET/CT, but diagnostic CT is not generally medically necessary concurrently with PET.[37] However, if diagnostic CTs were utilized initially and surgical resection is being considered, these guidelines allow a PET/CT to be done subsequently in the interest of safety, to confirm unicentric disease and prevent under-staging.

**Restaging/Recurrence**

Unicentric disease that is surgically resected is considered to be in surveillance and imaging follows surveillance guidelines. For multicentric disease (MCD) or unresected unicentric disease on chemotherapy, disease may be monitored every 2 cycles with contrasted CT of the chest, abdomen and pelvis or PET/CT fusion studies, in alignment with NCCN. The same imaging is medically necessary for suspected recurrence or labs concerning for development of POEMS-associated MCD or HHV-8 MCD, as these entities are rapidly aggressive[38,39] Concurrent contrasted diagnostic CTs with PET/CT fusion studies do not generally change management and as such are not medically necessary, nor are concurrent scans suggested by NCCN or international consensus recommendations.[37-40]

**Surveillance**

There are no clear consensus guidelines for imaging surveillance of Castleman's Disease. In the interest of safety, given a multitude of curative treatment options for recurrent disease, these guidelines support surveillance imaging with CT with contrast of involved body areas no more than every 6 months up to 5 years. PET/CT is not medically necessary for surveillance in alignment with ASCO Choosing Wisely campaign.


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

# References (ONC-31)

**v2.0.2026**

1. Stevenson MM, Bowles DW, Ettinger DS, et al. National Comprehensive Cancer Network (NCCN) Guidelines Version 1.2026 – October 21, 2025. Occult Primary (Cancer of Unknown Primary [CUP]), available at: https://www.nccn.org/professionals/physician_gls/pdf/occult.pdf Referenced with permission from the NCCN Clinical Practice Guidelines in Oncology (NCCN Guidelines™) for Occult Primary V1.2026 – October 21, 2025 ©2025 National Comprehensive Cancer Network, Inc. All rights reserved. The NCCN Guidelines™ and illustrations herein may not be reproduced in any form for any purpose without the express written permission of the NCCN. To view the most recent and complete version of the NCCN Guidelines™, go online to NCCN.org.
2. Nabors BL, Portnow J, Baehring J, et al. National Comprehensive Cancer Network (NCCN) Guidelines Version 2.2025 – August 28, 2025. Central Nervous System Cancers, available at: https://www.nccn.org/professionals/physician_gls/pdf/cns.pdf Referenced with permission from the NCCN Clinical Practice Guidelines in Oncology (NCCN Guidelines™) for CNS Cancer V2.2025 – August 28, 2025. ©2025 National Comprehensive Cancer Network, Inc. All rights reserved. The NCCN Guidelines™ and illustrations herein may not be reproduced in any form for any purpose without the express written permission of the NCCN. To view the most recent and complete version of the NCCN Guidelines™, go online to NCCN.org.
3. Zelenetz AD, Gordon LI, Abramson JS, et al, National Comprehensive Cancer Network (NCCN) Guidelines Version 1.2026 – December 22, 2025. B-cell lymphomas, available at: https://www.nccn.org/professionals/physician_gls/pdf/B-CELL.pdf Referenced with permission from the NCCN Clinical Practice Guidelines in Oncology (NCCN Guidelines™) for B-cell lymphomas V1.2026 – December 22, 2025. ©2025 National Comprehensive Cancer Network, Inc. All rights reserved. The NCCN Guidelines™ and illustrations herein may not be reproduced in any form for any purpose without the express written permission of the NCCN. To view the most recent and complete version of the NCCN Guidelines™, go online to NCCN.org.
4. Expert Panel on Urological Imaging, Mody RN, Remer EM, et al. ACR Appropriateness Criteria® Adrenal Mass Evaluation: 2021 Update. *J Am Coll Radiol*. 2021;18(11S):S251-S267. doi:10.1016/j.jacr.2021.08.010
5. Woo S, Becker AS, Do RKG, Schöder H, Hricak H, Alberto Vargas H. Impact of 18F-Fluorodeoxyglucose positron emission tomography on management of cancer of unknown primary: systematic review and meta-analysis. *Eur J Cancer.* 2021;159:60-77. doi:10.1016/j.ejca.2021.09.031
6. Szujo S, Sira L, Bajnok L, et al. The impact of post-radioiodine therapy SPECT/CT on early risk stratification in differentiated thyroid cancer; a bi-institutional study. *Oncotarget*. 2017;8(45):79825-79834. Published 2017 Aug 1. doi:10.18632/oncotarget.19781
7. Mayo-Smith WW, Song JH, Boland GL, et al. Management of incidental adrenal masses: a white paper of the ACR Incidental Findings Committee. *J Am Coll Radiol*. 2017;14(8):1038-1044. doi:10.1016/j.jacr.2017.05.001.
8. Vaidya A, Hamrahian A, Bancos I, Fleseriu M, Ghayee HK. The evaluation of incidentally discovered adrenal masses. *Endocrine Practice*. 2019:25(2);178-192. doi: 10.4158/DSCR-2018-0565.
9. Bergsland E, Rose JB, Benson III AB, et al. National Comprehensive Cancer Network (NCCN) Guidelines Version 3.2025 – October 1, 2025. Neuroendocrine and Adrenal Tumors, available at: https://www.nccn.org/professionals/physician_gls/pdf/neuroendocrine.pdf Referenced with permission from the NCCN Clinical Practice Guidelines in Oncology (NCCN Guidelines™) for Neuroendocrine and Adrenal Tumors V3.2025 – October 1, 2025. ©2025 National Comprehensive Cancer Network, Inc. All rights reserved. The NCCN Guidelines™ and illustrations herein may not be reproduced in any form for any purpose without the express written permission of the NCCN. To view the most recent and complete version of the NCCN Guidelines™, go online to NCCN.org.
10. Furuse M, Nonoguchi N, Yamada K, et. al. Radiological diagnosis of brain radiation necrosis after cranial irradiation for brain tumor: a systematic review. *Radiat Oncol*. 2019;14(28). doi:10.1186/s13014-019-1228-x.
11. Chao ST, Berkowitz A, Harris EER, et al. ACR-ARS Practice Parameter for the Performance of Stereotactic Body Radiation Therapy. *Am J Clin Oncol*. Published online June 23, 2025. doi:10.1097/COC.0000000000001224
12. Soffietti R, Abacioglu U, Baumert B, et. al. Diagnosis and treatment of brain metastases from solid tumors: guidelines from the European Assocation of Neuro-Oncology (EANO). *Neuro-Oncology*. 2017;19(2):162-174. doi:10.1093/neuonc/now241.


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

13. Mehrabian H, Detsky J, Soliman H, Sahgal A, Stanisz GJ. Advanced magnetic resonance imaging techniques in management of brain metastases. *Front Oncol*. 2019;9(440). doi:10.3389/fonc.2019.00440.
14. Murthy R, Nunez R, Szklaruk J, et. al. Yttrium-90 microsphere therapy for hepatic malignancy: devices, indications, technical considerations and potential complications. *RadioGraphics*. 2005;25:S41–S55. doi:10.1148/rg.25si055515.
15. Sutanto H, Adytia GJ, Elisa E, Maimunah U. Advances in transarterial chemoembolization for hepatocellular carcinoma: Integration with systemic therapies and emerging treatment strategies. *Cancer Pathog Ther.* 2025;4(1):1-13. Published 2025 Apr 17. doi:10.1016/j.cpt.2025.04.004
16. Hong K, Akinwande O, Bodei L, et al. ACR-ABS-ACNM-ASTRO-SIR-SNMMI practice parameter for selective internal radiation therapy or radioembolization for treatment of liver malignancies. *Brachytherapy*. 2021;20(3):497-511. doi:10.1016/j.brachy.2021.01.006
17. Lopez B, Mahvash A, Lam MGEH, Kappadath SC. Calculation of lung mean dose and quantification of error for $^{90}$Y-microsphere radioembolization using $^{99m}$Tc-MAA SPECT/CT and diagnostic chest CT. *Med Phys*. 2019;46(9):3929-3940.
18. Villalobos A, Soliman MM, Majdalany BS, et al. Yttrium-90 Radioembolization Dosimetry: What trainees need to know. *Semin Intervent Radiol*. 2020;37(5):543-554.
19. Torkian P, Ragulojan R, J Woodhead G, et al. Lung shunt fraction quantification methods in radioembolization: What you need to know. *Br J Radiol*. 2022;95(1139):20220470.
20. Graves SA, Bageac A, Crowley JR, Merlino DAM. Reimbursement Approaches for Radiopharmaceutical Dosimetry: Current Status and Future Opportunities. *J Nucl Med*. 2021;62(Suppl 3):48S-59S.
21. Brenner AW, Patel AJ. Review of current principles of the diagnosis and management of brain metastases. *Front Oncol*. 2022;12:857622.
22. Mitchell DK, Kwon HJ et al. Brain metastases: an update on multi-disciplinary approach of clinical management *Neurochirurgie*. 2022;68(1): 69–85. doi:10.1016/j.neuchi.2021.04.001.
23. PDQ® Adult Treatment Editorial Board. PDQ Kaposi Sarcoma Treatment. Bethesda, MD: National Cancer Institute. Updated 05/07/2025.
24. Lawton AJ, Lee KA, Cheville AL, et al. Assessment and management of patients with metastatic spinal cord compression: a multidisciplinary review. *J Clin Oncol*. 2019;37(1):61-71. doi:10.1200/JCO.2018.78.1211.
25. Agarwal V, Shah LM, Parsons MS, et al. ACR Appropriateness Criteria® Myelopathy: 2021 Update. *J Am Coll Radiol*. 2021;18(5S):S73-S82. doi:10.1016/j.jacr.2021.01.020.
26. Juliano AF, Policeni B, Agarwal V, et al. ACR Appropriateness Criteria® Ataxia. *J Am Coll Radiol*. 2019;16(5S):S44-S56. doi:10.1016/j.jacr.2019.02.021.
27. Corwin MT, Badawy M, Caoili EM, et al. Incidental Adrenal Nodules in Patients Without Known Malignancy: Prevalence of Malignancy and Utility of Washout CT for Characterization-A Multiinstitutional Study. *AJR Am J Roentgenol*. 2022;219(5):804-812. doi:10.2214/AJR.22.27901
28. Romanisio M, Daffara T, Pitino R, et al. [18F]FDG-PET/CT in adrenal lesions: diagnostic performance in different clinical settings. *Endocrine*. 2025;87(1):325-333. doi:10.1007/s12020-024-04042-5
29. He X, Caoili EM, Avram AM, Miller BS, Else T. 18F-FDG-PET/CT Evaluation of Indeterminate Adrenal Masses in Noncancer Patients. *J Clin Endocrinol Metab*. 2021;106(5):1448-1459. doi:10.1210/clinem/dgab005
30. Krämer A, Bochtler T, Pauli C, et al. Cancer of unknown primary: ESMO clinical practice guideline for diagnosis, treatment and follow-up. *Ann Oncol*. 2023;34(3):228-246. doi:10.1016/j.annonc.2022.11.013.
31. Sivakumaran T, Cardin A, Callahan J, et al. Evaluating the Utility of 18F-FDG PET/CT in Cancer of Unknown Primary. *J Nucl Med*. 2024;65(10):1557-1563. Published 2024 Oct 1. doi:10.2967/jnumed.123.267274
32. Bansal GJ, Purchase D, Wray M. Routine use of both mammography and MRI surveillance in patients with previous 'mammogram occult' breast cancer: experience from a tertiary centre. *Postgrad Med J.* 2022;98(1155):18-23. doi:10.1136/postgradmedj-2020-138571
33. Ren Y, Qian S, Xu G, Cai Z, Zhang N, Wang Z. Predicting survival of patients with bone metastasis of unknown origin. *Front Endocrinol (Lausanne)*. 2023;14:1193318. Published 2023 Nov 6. doi:10.3389/fendo.2023.1193318
34. Ettinger DS, Wood DE, Stevenson J, et al. National Comprehensive Cancer Network (NCCN) Guidelines Version 2.2026 – October 3, 2025. Mesothelioma: Peritoneal, available at: https://www.nccn.org/professionals/physician_gls/pdf/meso_peritoneal.pdf Referenced with permission from the NCCN Clinical Practice Guidelines in Oncology (NCCN Guidelines™) for Mesothelioma: Peritoneal V2.2026 – October 3, 2025. ©2025 National Comprehensive Cancer Network, Inc. All rights reserved. The NCCN Guidelines™ and illustrations herein may


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

not be reproduced in any form for any purpose without the express written permission of the NCCN. To view the most recent and complete version of the NCCN Guidelines™, go online to NCCN.org.

35. Ma J, Zhang S. Prognostic factors of malignant peritoneal mesothelioma: a retrospective study of 52 female patients. *World J Surg Oncol.* 2022;20(1):219. Published 2022 Jun 29. doi:10.1186/s12957-022-02688-x
36. Acs M, Gerken M, Gajic I, Mayr M, Zustin J, Piso P. Ten-year single-center experience with treatment of primary diffuse malignant peritoneal mesothelioma (DMPM) by cytoreductive surgery (CRS) and hyperthermic intraperitoneal chemotherapy (HIPEC). *Langenbecks Arch Surg.* 2022;407(7):3057-3067. doi:10.1007/s00423-022-02594-6
37. Zelenetz AD, Fayad LE, Mayur N. National Comprehensive Cancer Network (NCCN) Guidelines Version 1.2026 – November 24, 2025. Castleman Disease, available at: https://www.nccn.org/professionals/physician_gls/pdf/castleman.pdf Referenced with permission from the NCCN Clinical Practice Guidelines in Oncology (NCCN Guidelines™) for Castleman Disease V1.2026 – November 24, 2025. ©2025 National Comprehensive Cancer Network, Inc. All rights reserved. The NCCN Guidelines™ and illustrations herein may not be reproduced in any form for any purpose without the express written permission of the NCCN. To view the most recent and complete version of the NCCN Guidelines™, go online to NCCN.org.
38. Hoffmann C, Hentrich M, Tiemann M, et al. Recent advances in Castleman disease. *Oncol Res Treat*. 2022;45(11):693-704. doi:10.1159/000526640.
39. Dispenzieri A, Fajgenbaum DC. Overview of Castleman disease. *Blood*. 2020;135(16):1353-1364. doi:10.1182/blood.2019000931.
40. Van Rhee F, Voorhees P, Dispenzieri A,et al. International, evidence-based consensus treatment guidelines for idiopathic multicentric Castleman disease. *Blood*. 2018;132(20):2115-2124. doi:10.1182/blood-2018-07-862334.
41. Yang HL, Liu T, Wang XM, Xu Y, Deng SM. Diagnosis of bone metastases: a meta-analysis comparing $^{18}$FDG PET, CT, MRI and bone scintigraphy. *Eur Radiol*. 2011;21(12):2604-17. doi:10.1007/s00330-011-2221-4.
42. Qu X, Huang X, Yan W, Wu L, Dai K. A meta-analysis of $^{18}$FDG-PET-CT, $^{18}$FDG-PET, MRI and bone scintigraphy for diagnosis of bone metastases in patients with lung cancer. *Eur J Radiol*. 2012;81(5):1007-15. doi:10.1016/j.ejrad.2011.01.126.
43. Di Primio G, Boyd GJ, Fung CI, et al. Recommendations for the management of incidental musculoskeletal findings on MRI and CT. *Can Assoc Radiol J*. 2023;74(3):514-525. doi:10.1177/08465371231152151.
44. Liu T, Wang S, Liu H, et al. Detection of vertebral metastases: a meta-analysis comparing MRI, CT, PET, BS and BS with SPECT. *J Cancer Res Clin Oncol*. 2017;143(3):457-465. doi:10.1007/s00432-016-2288-z.
45. Lombardi AF, Aihara AY, Fernandes ADRC, Cardoso FN. Imaging of Paget's disease of bone. *Radiol Clin North Am*. 2022;60(4):561-573. doi:10.1016/j.rcl.2022.02.005.
46. Zhang-Yin J, Panagiotidis E. Role of 18F-NaF PET/CT in bone metastases. *Q J Nucl Med Mol Imaging*. 2023;67(4):249-258. doi:10.23736/S1824-4785.23.03534-3.
47. Ahmed N, Sadeq A, Marafi F, Gnanasegaran G, Usmani S. Therapy-induced bone changes in oncology imaging with 18F-sodium fluoride (NaF) PET-CT. *Ann Nucl Med*. 2022;36(4):329-339. doi:10.1007/s12149-022-01730-y.
48. Walter T, Tougeron D, Baudin E, et al. Poorly differentiated gastro-entero-pancreatic neuroendocrine carcinomas: Are they really heterogeneous? Insights from the FFCD-GTE national cohort. *Eur J Cancer*. 2017;79:158-165. doi:10.1016/j.ejca.2017.04.009.
49. NCI PDQ Gastrointestinal neuroendocrine tumors treatment. Gastrointestinal Neuroendocrine Tumors (PDQ®) - NCI (cancer.gov).
50. Kaewput C, Vinjamuri S. Role of Combined 68Ga DOTA-Peptides and 18F FDG PET/CT in the Evaluation of Gastroenteropancreatic Neuroendocrine Neoplasms. *Diagnostics (Basel)*. 2022;12(2):280. doi:10.3390/diagnostics12020280.
51. Półtorak-Szymczak G, Budlewski T, Furmanek MI, et al. Radiological Imaging of gastro-entero-pancreatic neuroendocrine tumors. The review of current literature emphasizing the diagnostic value of chosen imaging methods. *Front Oncol*. 2021;11:670233. doi:10.3389/fonc.2021.670233.
52. Szaro P, McGrath A, Ciszek B, Geijer M. Magnetic resonance imaging of the brachial plexus. Part 1: Anatomical considerations, magnetic resonance techniques, and non-traumatic lesions. *Eur J Radiol Open*. 2021;9:100392. doi:10.1016/j.ejro.2021.100392.
53. Szaro P, Geijer M, Ciszek B, McGrath A. Magnetic resonance imaging of the brachial plexus. Part 2: Traumatic injuries. *Eur J Radiol Open*. 2022;9:100397. doi:10.1016/j.ejro.2022.100397.


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

54. MacMahon H, Naidich DP, Goo JM, et al. Guidelines for Management of Incidental Pulmonary Nodules Detected on CT Images: From the Fleischner Society 2017. *Radiology*. 2017;284(1):228-243. doi:10.1148/radiol.2017161659.
55. Christensen J, Prosper AE, Wu CC, et al. ACR Lung-RADS v2022: Assessment Categories and Management Recommendations. *Chest*. 2024;165(3):738-753. doi:10.1016/j.chest.2023.10.028.
56. Gore RM, Pickhardt PJ, Mortele KJ, et al. Management of incidental liver lesions on CT: A white paper of the ACR incidental findings committee. *J Am Coll Radiol.* 2017;14(11):1429-1437. doi:10.1016/j.jacr.2017.07.018.
57. Maino C, Vernuccio F, Cannella R, et al. Liver metastases: The role of magnetic resonance imaging. *World J Gastroenterol*. 2023;29(36):5180-5197. doi:10.3748/wjg.v29.i36.5180.
58. Benson AB, D'Angelica MI, Abrams T, et al. National Comprehensive Cancer Network (NCCN) Guidelines Version 2.2025—October 22, 2025, Hepatocellular Carcinoma, available at: https://www.nccn.org/professionals/physician_gls/pdf/hcc.pdf, Referenced with permission from the NCCN Clinical Practice Guidelines in Oncology (NCCN Guidelines™) for Hepatocellular Carcinoma V2.2025 October 22, 2025. ©2025 National Comprehensive Cancer Network, Inc. All rights reserved. The NCCN Guidelines™ and illustrations herein may not be reproduced in any form for any purpose without the express written permission of the NCCN. To view the most recent and complete version of the NCCN Guidelines™, go online to NCCN.org.
59. Salem R, Padia SA, Lam M, et al. Clinical, dosimetric, and reporting considerations for Y-90 glass microspheres in hepatocellular carcinoma: updated 2022 recommendations from an international multidisciplinary working group. *Eur J Nucl Med Mol Imaging*. 2023;50(2):328-343. doi:10.1007/s00259-022-05956-w.
60. Barabasch A, Heinzel A, Bruners P, Kraemer NA, Kuhl CK. Diffusion-weighted MRI Is Superior to PET/CT in Predicting Survival of Patients Undergoing 90Y Radioembolization of Hepatic Metastases. *Radiology.* 2018;288(3):764-773. doi:10.1148/radiol.2018170408
61. Reid A, Suneja G, Alexiev B, et al. National Comprehensive Cancer Network (NCCN) Guidelines Version 2.2026—September 16, 2025, Kaposi Sarcoma, available at: https://www.nccn.org/professionals/physician_gls/pdf/kaposi.pdf, Referenced with permission from the NCCN Clinical Practice Guidelines in Oncology (NCCN Guidelines™) for Hepatocellular Carcinoma V2.2026 September 16, 2025. ©2025 National Comprehensive Cancer Network, Inc. All rights reserved. The NCCN Guidelines™ and illustrations herein may not be reproduced in any form for any purpose without the express written permission of the NCCN. To view the most recent and complete version of the NCCN Guidelines™, go online to NCCN.org.
62. Mody RN, Remer EM, Nikolaidis P, et al. ACR Appropriateness Criteria® Adrenal Mass Evaluation: 2021 Update. *J Am Coll Radiol*. 2021;18(11S):S251-S267. doi:10.1016/j.jacr.2021.08.010.
63. Biermann JS, Hirbe A, Ahlawat S, et al. National Comprehensive Cancer Network (NCCN) Guidelines Version 2.2026– December 19, 2025. Bone Cancer, available at: https://www.nccn.org/professionals/physician_gls/pdf/bone.pdf Referenced with permission from the NCCN Clinical Practice Guidelines in Oncology (NCCN Guidelines™) for Bone Cancer V2.2026 – December 19, 2025 ©2025 National Comprehensive Cancer Network, Inc. All rights reserved. The NCCN Guidelines™ and illustrations herein may not be reproduced in any form for any purpose without the express written permission of the NCCN. To view the most recent and complete version of the NCCN Guidelines™, go online to NCCN.org.
64. Ruysscher D, Wauters E, Jendrossek V, et al. Diagnosis and treatment of radiation induced pneumonitis in patients with lung cancer: An ESTRO clinical practice guideline. *Radiother Oncol*. 2025;207:110837. doi:10.1016/j.radonc.2025.110837
65. Delaunay M, Cadranel J, Lusque A, et al. Immune-checkpoint inhibitors associated with interstitial lung disease in cancer patients. *Eur Respir J*. 2017;50(2):1700050. Published 2017 Aug 10. doi:10.1183/13993003.00050-2017
66. Tiu BC, Zubiri L, Iheke J, et al. Real-world incidence and impact of pneumonitis in patients with lung cancer treated with immune checkpoint inhibitors: a multi-institutional cohort study. *J Immunother Cancer.* 2022;10(6):e004670. doi:10.1136/jitc-2022-004670


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

Click Anywhere in the Header to Return to the Main Table of Contents



# Policy History and Instructions for Use

Guideline

Policy History and Instructions for Use


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.

# Policy History and Instructions for Use

## Policy History and Instructions for Use

**v2.0.2026**

### Instructions for Use

This Medical Policy provides assistance in interpreting United HealthCare Services, Inc. standard benefit plans. When deciding coverage, the federal, state (Ohio Administrative Code [OAC]) or contractual requirements for benefit plan coverage must be referenced as the terms of the federal, state (OAC) or contractual requirements for benefit plan coverage may differ from the standard benefit plan. In the event of a conflict, the federal, state (OAC) or contractual requirements for benefit plan coverage govern.

Before using this policy, please check the federal, state (OAC) or contractual requirements for benefit plan coverage. United HealthCare Services, Inc. reserves the right to modify its Policies and Guidelines as necessary. This Medical Policy is provided for informational purposes. It does not constitute medical advice.

United HealthCare Services, Inc. uses InterQual® for the primary medical/surgical criteria, and the American Society of Addiction Medicine (ASAM) for substance use, in administering health benefits. If InterQual® does not have applicable criteria, United HealthCare Services, Inc. may also use United HealthCare Services, Inc.'s Medical Policies, Coverage Determination Guidelines, and/or Utilization Review Guidelines that have been approved by the Ohio Department for Medicaid Services. The United HealthCare Services, Inc.'s Medical Policies, Coverage Determination Guidelines, and Utilization Review Guidelines are intended to be used in connection with the independent professional medical judgment of a qualified health care provider and do not constitute the practice of medicine or medical advice.

### Policy History/Revision Information

| Date | Summary of Changes |
|---|---|
| 02/01/2024 | Annual evidence-based updates |
| 07/01/2024 | Interim evidence-based updates |
| 05/01/2025 | Annual evidence-based updates |
| 11/06/2025 | Annual evidence-based updates |
| 05/07/2026 | Interim evidence-based updates |


Proprietary Information of United Healthcare. Copyright © 2026 United Healthcare Services, Inc.