



## PROVIDER NOTICE

### Use of MRI for Patients with Low Back Pain

Patients often present with a complaint of low back pain without a history of acute trauma, cancer or suspicion of cancer, neurological symptoms or other acute problem. As you know, for 90% of these patients, back pain will resolve in 4 to 6 weeks with conservative home self-care, which includes limited bed rest, early ambulation, postural advice, gentle stretching, use of ice/heat, anti-inflammatory and analgesic medications.\*

MRI is generally not useful as a diagnostic tool during acute low back pain unless potential surgery, cancer, or infection are considerations (red flag indications).

To ensure that Health Plus is in compliance with HEDIS criteria on the use of imaging, when you call to request an MRI for a member with low back pain without radiculopathy or other "red flag" indications, the clinical staff are going to ask for a patient's history including the date of the initial complaint and the treatment given prior to the request for the MRI.

**The clinical staff cannot approve an MRI and the case must be referred to the Medical Director if there is *no documented history of a failed 6 week course of conservative care.***

As always, our Provider Care Center is available to answer any questions at:  
1-800-450-8753.

Thank you for your consideration of this important matter.

\* Source: The National Guideline Clearinghouse ([www.guideline.gov](http://www.guideline.gov)), a public resource for evidence based clinical practice guidelines review. Criteria: The Washington State Department of Labor and Industries Criteria for MRI of the lumbar spine (2002 Aug 1).