

National Coverage Determination (NCD)

Blood Counts

190.15 Links in PDF documents are not guaranteed to work. To follow a web link, please use the MCD Website.

Tracking Information

Publication Number

100-3

Manual Section Number

190.15

Manual Section Title

Blood Counts

Version Number

1

Effective Date of this Version

11/25/2002

Implementation Date

01/01/2003

Description Information

Benefit Category

Diagnostic Laboratory Tests

Please Note: This may not be an exhaustive list of all applicable Medicare benefit categories for this item or service.

Item/Service Description

Blood counts are used to evaluate and diagnose diseases relating to abnormalities of the blood or bone marrow. These include primary disorders such as anemia, leukemia, polycythemia, thrombocytosis and thrombocytopenia. Many other conditions secondarily affect the blood or bone marrow, including reaction to inflammation and infections, coagulopathies, neoplasms and exposure to toxic substances. Many treatments and therapies affect the blood or bone marrow, and blood counts may be used to monitor treatment effects.

The complete blood count (CBC) includes a hemogram and differential white blood count (WBC). The hemogram includes enumeration of red blood cells, white blood cells, and platelets, as well as the determination of hemoglobin, hematocrit, and indices.

The symptoms of hematological disorders are often nonspecific, and are commonly encountered in patients who may or may not prove to have a disorder of the blood or bone marrow. Furthermore, many medical conditions that are not primarily due to abnormalities of blood or bone marrow may have hematological manifestations that result from the disease or its treatment. As a result, the CBC is one of the most commonly indicated laboratory tests.

Inpatients with possible hematological abnormalities, it may be necessary to determine the hemoglobin and hematocrit, to calculate the red cell indices, and to measure the concentration of white blood cells and platelets. These measurements are usually performed on a multichannel analyzer that measures all of the parameters on every sample. Therefore, laboratory assessments routinely include these measurements.

Indications and Limitations of Coverage

Indications

Indications for a CBC or hemogram include red cell, platelet, and white cell disorders. Examples of these indications are enumerated individually below.

1. Indications for a CBC generally include the evaluation of bone marrow dysfunction as a result of neoplasms, therapeutic agents, exposure to toxic substances, or pregnancy. The CBC is also useful in assessing peripheral destruction of blood cells, suspected bone marrow failure or bone marrow infiltrate, suspected myeloproliferative, myelodysplastic, or lymphoproliferative processes, and immune disorders.
2. Indications for hemogram or CBC related to red cell (RBC) parameters of the hemogram include signs, symptoms, test results, illness, or disease that can be associated with anemia or other red blood cell disorder (e.g., pallor, weakness, fatigue, weight loss, bleeding, acute injury associated with blood loss or suspected blood loss, abnormal menstrual bleeding, hematuria, hematemesis, hematochezia, positive fecal occult blood test, malnutrition, vitamin deficiency, malabsorption, neuropathy, known malignancy, presence of acute or chronic disease that may have associated anemia, coagulation or hemostatic disorders, postural dizziness, syncope, abdominal pain, change in bowel habits, chronic marrow hypoplasia or decreased RBC production, tachycardia, systolic heart murmur, congestive heart failure, dyspnea, angina, nailbed deformities, growth retardation, jaundice, hepatomegaly, splenomegaly, lymphadenopathy, ulcers on the lower extremities).
3. Indications for hemogram or CBC related to red cell (RBC) parameters of the hemogram include signs, symptoms, test results, illness, or disease that can be associated with polycythemia (for example, fever, chills, ruddy skin, conjunctival redness, cough, wheezing, cyanosis, clubbing of the fingers, orthopnea, heart murmur, headache, vague cognitive changes including memory changes, sleep apnea, weakness, pruritus, dizziness, excessive sweating, visual symptoms, weight loss, massive obesity, gastrointestinal bleeding, paresthesias, dyspnea, joint symptoms, epigastric distress, pain and erythema of the fingers or toes, venous or arterial thrombosis, thromboembolism, myocardial infarction, stroke, transient ischemic attacks, congenital heart disease, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, increased erythropoietin production associated with neoplastic, renal or hepatic disorders, androgen or diuretic use, splenomegaly, hepatomegaly, diastolic hypertension.)

4. Specific indications for CBC with differential count related to the WBC include signs, symptoms, test results, illness, or disease associated with leukemia, infections or inflammatory processes, suspected bone marrow failure or bone marrow infiltrate, suspected myeloproliferative, myelodysplastic or lymphoproliferative disorder, use of drugs that may cause leukopenia, and immune disorders (e.g., fever, chills, sweats, shock, fatigue, malaise, tachycardia, tachypnea, heart murmur, seizures, alterations of consciousness, meningismus, pain such as headache, abdominal pain, arthralgia, odynophagia, or dysuria, redness or swelling of skin, soft tissue bone, or joint, ulcers of the skin or mucous membranes, gangrene, mucous membrane discharge, bleeding, thrombosis, respiratory failure, pulmonary infiltrate, jaundice, diarrhea, vomiting, hepatomegaly, splenomegaly, lymphadenopathy, opportunistic infection such as oral candidiasis.)
5. Specific indications for CBC related to the platelet count include signs, symptoms, test results, illness, or disease associated with increased or decreased platelet production and destruction, or platelet dysfunction (e.g., gastrointestinal bleeding, genitourinary tract bleeding, bilateral epistaxis, thrombosis, ecchymosis, purpura, jaundice, petechiae, fever, heparin therapy, suspected DIC, shock, pre-eclampsia, neonate with maternal ITP, massive transfusion, recent platelet transfusion, cardiopulmonary bypass, hemolytic uremic syndrome, renal diseases, lymphadenopathy, hepatomegaly, splenomegaly, hypersplenism, neurologic abnormalities, viral or other infection, myeloproliferative, myelodysplastic, or lymphoproliferative disorder, thrombosis, exposure to toxic agents, excessive alcohol ingestion, autoimmune disorders (SLE, RA and other).
6. Indications for hemogram or CBC related to red cell (RBC) parameters of the hemogram include, in addition to those already listed, thalassemia, suspected hemoglobinopathy, lead poisoning, arsenic poisoning, and spherocytosis.
7. Specific indications for CBC with differential count related to the WBC include, in addition to those already listed, storage diseases/mucopolysaccharidoses, and use of drugs that cause leukocytosis such as G-CSF or GM-CSF.

8. Specific indications for CBC related to platelet count include, in addition to those already listed, May-Hegglin syndrome and Wiskott-Aldrich syndrome.

Limitations

1. Testing of patients who are asymptomatic, or who do not have a condition that could be expected to result in a hematological abnormality, is screening and is not a covered service.
2. In some circumstances it may be appropriate to perform only a hemoglobin or hematocrit to assess the oxygen carrying capacity of the blood. When the ordering provider requests only a hemoglobin or hematocrit, the remaining components of the CBC are not covered.
3. When a blood count is performed for an end-stage renal disease (ESRD) patient, and is billed outside the ESRD rate, documentation of the medical necessity for the blood count must be submitted with the claim.
4. In some patients presenting with certain signs, symptoms or diseases, a single CBC may be appropriate. Repeat testing may not be indicated unless abnormal results are found, or unless there is a change in clinical condition. If repeat testing is performed, a more descriptive diagnosis code (e.g., anemia) should be reported to support medical necessity. However, repeat testing may be indicated where results are normal in patients with conditions where there is a continued risk for the development of hematologic abnormality.

Note: Scroll down for links to the quarterly Covered Code Lists (including narrative).

Cross Reference

Also see the [Medicare Claims Processing Manual](#), Chapter 120, Clinical Laboratory Services Based on Negotiated Rulemaking.

Transmittal Information

Transmittal Number

17

Coverage Transmittal Link

<https://www.cms.gov/Regulations-and-Guidance/Guidance/Transmittals/Downloads/r17ncd.pdf>

Revision History

12/2019 - Changes to the Laboratory National Coverage Determination (NCD) Edit Software for April 2020. This Change Request (CR) announces the changes that will be included in the April 2020 quarterly release of the edit module for clinical diagnostic laboratory services. This recurring update notification applies to chapter 16, section 120.2, publication 100-04. ([TN 4475](#)) (CR11593)

07/2004 - Published NCD in the NCD Manual without change to narrative contained in PM AB-02-110. Coding guidance now published in Medicare Lab NCD Manual. Effective and Implementation dates NA. ([TN 17](#)) (CR 2130)

07/2002 - Implemented NCD. Effective date 11/25/02. Implementation date 1/01/03. ([TN AB-02-110](#)) (CR 2130)

Other

Covered Code Lists (including narrative)

January 2026 (PDF) ([ICD-10](#))
October 2025 (PDF) ([ICD-10](#))
January 2025 (PDF) ([ICD-10](#))
October 2024 (PDF) ([ICD-10](#))
July 2024 (PDF) ([ICD-10](#))
April 2024 (PDF) ([ICD-10](#))
January 2024 (PDF) ([ICD-10](#))
October 2023 (PDF) ([ICD-10](#))
July 2023 (PDF) ([ICD-10](#))
April 2023 (PDF) ([ICD-10](#))
January 2023 (PDF) ([ICD-10](#))
October 2022 (PDF) ([ICD-10](#))
July 2022 (PDF) ([ICD-10](#))
April 2022 (PDF) ([ICD-10](#))
January 2022 (PDF) ([ICD-10](#))
October 2021 (PDF) ([ICD-10](#))
July 2021 (PDF) ([ICD-10](#))
April 2021 (PDF) ([ICD-10](#))
January 2021 (PDF) ([ICD-10](#))
October 2020 (PDF) ([ICD-10](#))
July 2020 (PDF) ([ICD-10](#))
April 2020 (PDF) ([ICD-10](#))
January 2020 (PDF) ([ICD-10](#))
October 2019 (PDF) ([ICD-10](#))
July 2019 (PDF) ([ICD-10](#))
April 2019 (PDF) ([ICD-10](#))
January 2019 (PDF) ([ICD-10](#))
October 2018 (PDF) ([ICD-10](#))

July 2018 (PDF) ([ICD-10](#))
April 2018 (PDF) ([ICD-10](#))
January 2018 ([ICD-10](#))
October 2017 ([ICD-10](#))
July 2017 ([ICD-10](#))
April 2017 ([ICD-10](#))
January 2017 ([ICD-10](#))
October 2016 ([ICD-10](#))
January 2016 ([ICD-10](#))
October 2015 ([ICD-10](#), [ICD-9](#))
October 2014 ([ICD-10](#), [ICD-9](#))

Changes to Lab NCD Edit Software

[January 2026](#)
[October 2025](#)
[January 2025](#)
[October 2024](#)
[July 2024](#)
[January 2024](#)
[October 2023](#)
[April 2023](#)
[January 2023](#)
[October 2022](#)
[April 2022](#)
[January 2022](#)
[October 2021](#)
[July 2021](#)

[October 2020](#) [April 2020](#) [January 2020](#) [October 2019](#) [July 2019](#) [January 2019](#) [October 2018](#) [April 2018](#) [January 2018](#) [July 2017](#) [April 2017](#) [January 2017](#) [January 2016](#) [October 2014](#) 

Coding Analyses for Labs (CALs)

This NCD has been or is currently being reviewed under the National Coverage Determination process. The following are existing associations with CALs, from the Coding Analyses for Labs database.

- [Original Consideration for Blood Counts \(Revision of CPT Codes\) \(CAG-00182N\)](#) 
- [Original Consideration for Blood Counts \(Addition of ICD-9-CM Codes V77.1, V81.0, V81.1, and V81.2 to the list of Codes that Do Not Support Medical Necessity\) \(CAG-00285N\)](#) 

Additional Information

Other Versions

Title	Version	Effective Between	
Blood Counts	1	11/25/2002 - N/A	You are here