Harvard Pilgrim Health Care | TUFTS Health Plan

Point32Health companies

Payment Policy:

Laboratory: General Inflammation Testing

Applies to:

Commercial Products

☒ Harvard Pilgrim Health Care Commercial products
☐ Tufts Health Plan Commercial products

Public Plans Products

☐ Tufts Health Direct – A Massachusetts Qualified Health Plan (QHP) (a commercial product)
☐ Tufts Health Together – MassHealth Accountable Care Partnership Plans
☐ Tufts Health RITogether – A Rhode Island Medicaid Plan
☐ Tufts Health One Care – A dual-eligible product

Senior Products

☐ Tufts Health Plan Senior Care Options (SCO) (a dual-eligible product)
☐ Tufts Medicare Preferred HMO/PPO (Medicare Advantage products)

Policy

Inflammatory response can occur due to tissue injury and/or various disorders, including arthritis, lupus, and infection. Acute phase reactants, such as serum C-reactive protein (CRP), are released in the acute phase response during inflammation and can be used to monitor inflammation. Inflammation may also be measured using the simple laboratory technique of erythrocyte sedimentation rate (ESR).[1]

For guidance on the use of CRP as a cardiac biomarker, refer to the Biomarkers for Myocardial Infarction and Chronic Heart Failure policy. For guidance on the use of CRP as a marker for acute pancreatitis, refer to the Pancreatic Enzyme Testing for Acute Pancreatitis policy.

Indications and/or Limitations of Coverage

Application of coverage criteria is dependent upon an individual's benefit coverage at the time of the request.

1. Measurement of C-reactive protein (CRP) and/or erythrocyte sedimentation rate (ESR) **MEETS COVERAGE CRITERIA** for the conditions specified in **Note 1**.
2. For individuals without a diagnosed or suspected inflammatory condition (see Note 1), measurement of ESR **DOES NOT MEET COVERAGE CRITERIA**.
3. Measurement of CRP and/or ESR during general exam without abnormal findings **DOES NOT MEET COVERAGE CRITERIA**.

NOTES:
Note 1: Coverage of CRP, ESR, CRP or ESR, or both CRP and ESR is designated based on the diagnosed or suspected inflammatory condition. Either conventional or high-sensitivity CRP testing are allowed methods of testing for CRP levels. When either CRP or ESR are allowed, CRP is the preferred biomarker. If CRP and ESR are ordered at the same time for a condition where CRP or ESR are allowed, only CRP will be approved.

Condition	Test Coverage	Frequency of Testing
Acute and Chronic Urticaria	CRP or ESR	Not specified (NS)
Acute Hematogenous Osteomyelitis (AHO)	CRP	To confirm diagnosis; 2-3 days during the early therapeutic course; weekly until normalization (or a clear trend toward normalization is evident)
Acute Phase Inflammation	CRP	NS
Ankylosing Spondylitis	CRP or ESR	Regular interval use in patients with active symptoms

Condition	Test Coverage	Frequency of Testing
Arthritis	CRP and ESR	1-3 months initially; 6-12 months later
Castleman's Disease	CRP	NS
General Inflammation	CRP	NS
Hodgkin Lymphoma	ESR	Every 3-6 months for 1-2 years; every 6-12 months for the next 3 years; annually thereafter
Irritable Bowel Syndrome	CRP and ESR	During initial assessment to exclude other diagnoses (e.g., inflammatory bowel disease)
Large Vessel Vasculitis (Giant Cell Arteritis, Takayasu Arteritis)	CRP and ESR	To confirm diagnosis; every 1–3 months during the first year; every 3–6 months thereafter
Multisystem Inflammatory Syndrome in Children (MIS-C)	CRP	To establish diagnosis
Nonradiographic Axial Spondyloarthritis	CRP or ESR	Regular interval use in patients with active symptoms
Pediatric Chronic Nonbacterial Osteomyletis (CNO)	CRP and ESR	To confirm diagnosis for individuals meeting all of the entry criteria (see Note 2)
Periprosthetic Joint Infections (PJI)	CRP and ESR	NS
Polymyalgia Rheumatica	CRP or ESR	At initial diagnosis; every 3 months during long-term steroid therapy
Rheumatoid Arthritis	CRP or ESR	Prior to treatment; every 1-3 months during active disease; annually when disease is inactive
Systemic Lupus Erythematosus	CRP or ESR	At initial assessment; every 1-3 months during active disease; every 6-12 months during stable disease; during pregnancy
T-cell lymphomas	ESR	NS

Note 2: Entry criteria for CNO:

- Bone pain and/or musculoskeletal functional limitation for six or more weeks
- Onset before 18 years of age
- Abnormal radiograph or advanced imaging (MRI, CT, bone scintigraphy at nonarthritic bone sites) findings

Applicable CPT/HCPCS Procedure Codes

Procedure codes appearing in policy documents are included only as a general reference tool for each policy. They may not be all-inclusive.

Coding

Code	Description
85651	Sedimentation rate, erythrocyte; non-automated
85652	Sedimentation rate, erythrocyte; automated
86140	C-reactive protein
86141	C-reactive protein; high sensitivity (hsCRP)

Evidence-based Scientific References

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Publication History

11/01/2026: Annual policy review; administrative edits
09/01/2025: Policy created to support coverage guidelines, effective for dates of service beginning Nov. 1, 2025

Background and Disclaimer Information

This policy applies to the products of Harvard Pilgrim Health Care and Tufts Health Plan and their affiliates, as identified in the check boxes on the first page for services performed by contracted providers.

Payment is based on member benefits and eligibility on the date of service, medical necessity review, where applicable, and the provider's network participation agreement with the Plan. As every claim is unique, this policy is neither a guarantee of payment, nor a final indication of how specific claim(s) will be adjudicated. Claims payment is subject to member eligibility and benefits on the date of service, coordination of benefits, referral/authorization, and utilization management requirements (when applicable), adherence to Plan policies and procedures, and claims editing logic. An authorization is not a guarantee of payment.

Point32Health reserves the right to amend a payment policy at its discretion. CPT and HCPCS codes are updated as applicable; please adhere to the most recent CPT and HCPCS coding guidelines.

We reserve the right to conduct audits on any provider and/or facility to ensure accuracy and compliance with the guidelines stated in this payment policy. If such an audit determines that a provider/facility did not comply with this payment policy, Harvard Pilgrim Health Care and Tufts Health Plan will expect the provider/facility to refund all payments related to noncompliance.