Important Information – Please Read Before Using This Policy

These services may or may not be covered by all Medica plans. Please refer to the member’s plan document for specific coverage information. If there is a difference between this general information and the member’s plan document, the member’s plan document will be used to determine coverage. With respect to Medicare and Minnesota Health Care Programs, this policy will apply unless those programs require different coverage. Members may contact Medica Customer Service at the phone number listed on their member identification card to discuss their benefits more specifically. Providers with questions about this Medica coverage policy may call the Medica Provider Service Center toll-free at 1-800-458-5512.

Medica coverage policies are not medical advice. Members should consult with appropriate health care providers to obtain needed medical advice, care and treatment.

Coverage Policy
Thermography is investigative and unproven and therefore NOT COVERED. There is insufficient reliable evidence in the form of high quality peer-reviewed medical literature to establish the safety and efficacy or effects on health care outcomes.

Description
Thermography (i.e., thermal imaging, digital infrared thermal imaging [DITI]) is a non-invasive imaging technique used to measure the heat (infrared energy) emanating from the surface of the skin. The two most commonly used types of thermography are infrared thermography and liquid crystal thermography. Infrared thermography utilizes an infrared camera or computer to sense body temperature and demonstrates areas of differing heat emission by producing brightly colored patterns. In liquid crystal thermography, liquid crystal sheets are placed directly on the surface of the skin and change color in response to variations in surface body temperature. Interpretation of the color patterns is purported to assist in the detection and diagnosis of many disorders, including but not limited to, breast cancer, back pain, Raynaud’s phenomenon, peripheral nerve injury/Reflex Sympathetic Dystrophy (RSD), orofacial pain, ophthalmological diagnoses, diabetic foot ulcers and allergies.

In contrast to skin surface thermography techniques, a newer invasive test known as temperature gradient study, involves an intravenous catheter. The catheter is threaded into the coronary arteries to directly measure temperature differences on the inner artery walls. Researchers have suggested that this information may be related to the presence of unstable coronary artery plaques and could be useful in diagnosing vulnerable patients.

FDA Approval
The FDA approved the first thermal imaging device as an adjuvant screening tool for breast cancer in 1985. Since that time, 22 additional thermographic imaging systems have received FDA 510(k) approval as Class I devices. They are approved as adjuvant screening and diagnostic tools for a variety of conditions, including breast cancer, orthopedics, pain management, neurology, diabetic foot care, peripheral vascular disease, facial vascular disease, thyroid abnormalities, and other metabolic disorders.

The FDA has indicated via its website that despite widely publicized claims to the contrary, thermography should not be used in place of mammography for breast cancer screening or diagnosis. The agency has sent several warning letters to health care providers and a thermography manufacturer who claimed that thermography can take the place of mammography.
Prior Authorization
Prior authorization is not applicable. Claims for this service are subject to retrospective review and denial of coverage, as investigative services are not eligible for reimbursement.

Coding Considerations
Use the current applicable CPT/HCPCS code(s). The following codes are included below for informational purposes only, and are subject to change without notice. Inclusion or exclusion of a code does not constitute or imply member coverage or provider reimbursement.

CPT Codes:
93740: Temperature gradient studies

Original Effective Date: 12/1/2005

Re-Review Date(s): 8/26/2008
8/22/2011
9/17/2014
8/16/2017
3/16/2020 – administrative update; format
9/16/2020