

# Image-Guided Minimally Invasive Decompression for Spinal Stenosis

**Policy # 00278**

Original Effective Date: 11/16/2010

Current Effective Date: 02/23/2025

*Applies to all products administered or underwritten by Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Louisiana and its subsidiary, HMO Louisiana, Inc. (collectively referred to as the “Company”), unless otherwise provided in the applicable contract. Medical technology is constantly evolving, and we reserve the right to review and update Medical Policy periodically.*

*Note: Interspinous and Interlaminar Stabilization/Distractor Devices (Spacers) is addressed separately in medical policy 00221.*

## Services Are Considered Investigational

*Coverage is not available for investigational medical treatments or procedures, drugs, devices or biological products.*

Based on review of available data, the Company considers image-guided minimally invasive spinal decompression to be **investigational**.\*

## Background/Overview

### Spinal Stenosis

In spinal stenosis, the space around the spinal cord narrows, compressing the spinal cord and its nerve roots. The goal of surgical treatment is to “decompress” the spinal cord and/or nerve roots.

The most common symptoms of lumbar spinal stenosis are back pain with neurogenic claudication (ie, pain, numbness, weakness) in the legs that worsens with standing or walking and is alleviated by sitting or leaning forward. Compression of neural elements generally occurs from a combination of degenerative changes, including ligamentum flavum hypertrophy, bulging of the intervertebral disc, and facet thickening with arthropathy. Spinal stenosis is often linked to age-related changes in disc height and arthritis of the facet joints. Lumbar spinal stenosis is among the most common reasons for back surgery and the most common reason for lumbar spine surgery in adults over the age of 65.

The most common symptoms of cervical/thoracic spinal stenosis are neck pain and radiculopathy of the shoulder and arm. The most common cause of cervical radiculopathy is degenerative changes, including disc herniation.

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### **Treatment**

#### **Conventional Posterior Decompression Surgery**

For patients with lumbar spinal stenosis, surgical laminectomy has established benefits in reducing pain and improving quality of life.

For patients with cervical or thoracic stenosis, surgical treatment includes discectomy or foraminal decompression.

A systematic review by Chou et al (2009) assessed surgery for back pain; it was commissioned by the American Pain Society and conducted by an evidence-based center. Four higher quality randomized trials were reviewed; they compared surgery with nonsurgical therapy for spinal stenosis, including 2 studies from the multicenter Spine Patient Outcomes Research Trial that evaluated laminectomy for spinal stenosis (specifically with or without degenerative spondylolisthesis). All 4 studies found that initial decompressive surgery (laminectomy) was slightly to moderately superior to initial nonsurgical therapy (eg, average 8- to 18-point differences on the 36-Item Short-Form Health Survey and Oswestry Disability Index). However, there was insufficient evidence to determine the optimal adjunctive surgical methods for laminectomy (ie, with or without fusion, instrumented vs noninstrumented fusion) in patients with or without degenerative spondylolisthesis. The Spine Patient Outcomes Research Trial continues to be referenced as the highest quality evidence published on decompressive surgery.

Less invasive surgical procedures include open laminotomy and microendoscopic laminotomy. In general, the literature comparing surgical procedures is limited. The literature has suggested that less invasive surgical decompression may reduce perioperative morbidity without impairing long-term outcomes when performed in appropriately selected patients. Posterior decompressive surgical procedures include: decompressive laminectomy, hemilaminotomy and laminotomy, and microendoscopic decompressive laminotomy.

Decompressive laminectomy, the classic treatment for lumbar spinal stenosis, unroofs the spinal canal by extensive resection of posterior spinal elements, including the lamina, spinous processes, portions of the facet joints, ligamentum flavum, and the interspinous ligaments. Wide muscular dissection and retraction is needed to achieve adequate surgical visualization. The extensive resection and injury to the posterior spine and supporting musculature can lead to instability with significant morbidity, both postoperatively and longer term. Spinal fusion, performed at the same time as laminectomy or after symptoms have developed, may be required to reduce resultant instability. Laminectomy may also be used for extensive multilevel decompression.

Hemilaminotomy and laminotomy, sometimes termed laminoforaminotomy, are less invasive than laminectomy. These procedures focus on the interlaminar space, where most of the pathologic changes are concentrated, minimizing resection of the stabilizing posterior spine. A laminotomy



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typically removes the inferior aspect of the cranial lamina, superior aspect of the subjacent lamina, ligamentum flavum, and the medial aspect of the facet joint. Unlike laminectomy, laminotomy does not disrupt the facet joints, supra- and interspinous ligaments, a major portion of the lamina, or the muscular attachments. Muscular dissection and retraction are required to achieve adequate surgical visualization.

Microendoscopic decompressive laminotomy, similar to laminotomy, uses endoscopic visualization. The position of the tubular working channel is confirmed by fluoroscopic guidance, and serial dilators are used to dilate the musculature and expand the fascia. For microendoscopic decompressive laminotomy, an endoscopic curette, rongeur, and drill are used for the laminotomy, facetectomy, and foraminotomy. The working channel may be repositioned from a single incision for multilevel and bilateral dissections.

### **Image-Guided Minimally Invasive Spinal Decompression**

Posterior decompression for spinal stenosis has been evolving toward increasingly minimally invasive procedures in an attempt to reduce postoperative morbidity and spinal instability. Unlike conventional surgical decompression, the percutaneous mild<sup>®‡</sup> decompressive procedure is performed solely under fluoroscopic guidance (eg, without endoscopic or microscopic visualization of the work area). This procedure is indicated for central stenosis only, without the capability of addressing nerve root compression or disc herniation, should either be required.

Percutaneous image-guided minimally invasive spinal decompression using a specially designed tool kit (mild<sup>®‡</sup>) has been proposed as an ultra-minimally invasive treatment of central lumbar spinal stenosis. In this procedure, the epidural space is filled with contrast medium under fluoroscopic guidance. Using a 6-gauge cannula clamped in place with a back plate, single-use tools (portal cannula, surgical guide, bone rongeur, tissue sculpter, trocar) are used to resect thickened ligamentum flavum and small pieces of lamina. The tissue and bone sculpting is conducted entirely under fluoroscopic guidance, with contrast media added throughout the procedure to aid visualization of the decompression. The process is repeated on the opposite side for bilateral decompression of the central canal. The devices are not intended for use near the lateral neural elements and are contraindicated for disc procedures.

## **FDA or Other Governmental Regulatory Approval**

### **U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA)**

In 2006, the X-Sten MILD Tool Kit (now the mild<sup>®‡</sup> device kit, X-Sten Corp. renamed Vertos Medical) was cleared for marketing by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration through the 510(k) process for treatment of various spinal conditions. This set of specialized surgical instruments is used to perform percutaneous lumbar decompressive procedures.



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Vertos's mild<sup>®</sup>‡ instructions state that the device is not intended for disc procedures but rather for tissue resection at the perilaminar space, within the interlaminar space, and at the ventral aspect of the lamina. The device is not intended for use near the lateral neural elements and remains dorsal to the dura using image guidance and anatomic landmarks.

Food and Drug Administration product code: HRX.

### **Rationale/Source**

This medical policy was developed through consideration of peer-reviewed medical literature generally recognized by the relevant medical community, U.S. Food and Drug Administration approval status, nationally accepted standards of medical practice and accepted standards of medical practice in this community, technology evaluation centers, reference to federal regulations, other plan medical policies, and accredited national guidelines.

Image-guided minimally invasive decompression describes a percutaneous procedure for decompression of the central spinal canal in patients with spinal stenosis and hypertrophy of the ligamentum flavum. In this procedure, a specialized cannula and surgical tools (mild<sup>®</sup>)‡ are used under fluoroscopic guidance for bone and tissue sculpting near the spinal canal. Image-guided minimally invasive lumbar decompression is proposed as an alternative to existing posterior decompression procedures.

### **Summary of Evidence**

For individuals who have lumbar spinal stenosis who receive image-guided minimally invasive lumbar decompression (MILD), the evidence includes a large, randomized controlled trial (RCT) (N=302), a second RCT (N=138) comparing MILD to non-surgical conventional medical management (CMM), a systematic review that included a small RCT (N=38), and a number of prospective and retrospective cohort studies and case series. Relevant outcomes are symptoms, functional outcomes, health status measures, and treatment-related morbidity. The largest RCT (MIDAS Encore) compared image-guided MILD with epidural steroid injections (control) in patients who had ligamentum flavum hypertrophy and who failed conservative therapy. Results suggested reductions in pain and improvements in function scores in the image-guided minimally invasive lumbar decompression group versus the control group. The trial was unblinded, and there is evidence of differing expectations and follow-up in the 2 groups, suggesting a high risk of bias. The MOTION RCT compared MILD as first-line therapy in combination with nonsurgical CMM to CMM alone in 138 individuals with lumbar spinal stenosis. At 1-year follow-up, patients in the MILD + CMM group experienced a 16.1-point composite Oswestry Disability Index (ODI) mean improvement (the primary outcome), compared with a 2.0-point mean improvement for participants in the CMM-alone arm (p<.001). A major limitation of this trial was the wide variation in CMM interventions received by individuals in both the intervention and control groups; for example, 38.7% of individuals in the CMM alone group received no interventional therapy. Lack of blinding and



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follow-up for only 12 months were additional limitations. The available evidence is insufficient to determine the efficacy of MILD compared with placebo, open decompression, or conservative treatment. Well-designed and conducted trials with relevant control groups could provide greater certainty on the risks and benefits of this procedure. The evidence is insufficient to determine that the technology results in an improvement in the net health outcome.

For individuals who have cervical or thoracic spinal stenosis who receive image-guided minimally invasive spinal decompression, no evidence was identified. The evidence is insufficient to determine that the technology results in an improvement in the net health outcome.

### **Supplemental Information**

#### **Practice Guidelines and Position Statements**

Guidelines or position statements will be considered for inclusion in 'Supplemental Information' if they were issued by, or jointly by, a US professional society, an international society with US representation, or National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE). Priority will be given to guidelines that are informed by a systematic review, include strength of evidence ratings, and include a description of management of conflict of interest.

#### **Lumbar Spinal Stenosis Consensus Group**

In 2018, the Lumbar Spinal Stenosis Consensus Group, composed of a panel of nationally recognized spine experts, convened to evaluate the available literature and develop guidelines for minimally invasive spine treatment (MIST Guidelines). Based on a systematic review of the available literature on percutaneous image-guided lumbar decompression, the consensus committee determined there is sufficient support to warrant Level I evidence (Grade A, Level I, Consensus strong). Grade A evidence is defined as "extremely recommendable (good evidence that the measure is effective and that benefits outweigh the harms.)"

#### **North American Spine Society**

In 2011, the North American Spine Society revised clinical practice guidelines on the diagnosis and treatment of degenerative lumbar spinal stenosis. Treatment recommendations included:

- Interlaminar epidural steroid injection for short-term (6 weeks to 6 months) symptom relief in patients with neurogenic claudication or radiculopathy; however, there is conflicting evidence regarding long-term efficacy. (Grade of Recommendation: B)
- A multiple injection regimen of radiographically-guided transforaminal epidural steroid injection or caudal injection for medium-term relief of pain. (Grade of Recommendation: C)
- Decompressive surgery to improve outcomes in patients with moderate to severe symptoms of lumbar spinal stenosis. (Grade of Recommendation: B)

No specific recommendations on percutaneous image-guided lumbar decompression were provided.



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### U.S. Preventive Services Task Force Recommendations

Not applicable.

### Medicare National Coverage

The Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services determined that percutaneous image-guided lumbar decompression would be covered by Medicare when provided in a clinical study through coverage with evidence development for beneficiaries with lumbar spinal stenosis enrolled in an approved clinical study meeting criteria in the decision memo (NCD 150.13). According to the national coverage decision, percutaneous image-guided lumbar decompression is a posterior decompression of the lumbar spine performed under indirect image guidance without any direct visualization of the surgical area. This procedure is proposed as a treatment for symptomatic lumbar spinal stenosis unresponsive to conservative therapy. This procedure is generally described as a noninvasive procedure using specially designed instruments to percutaneously remove a portion of the lamina and debulk the ligamentum flavum. The procedure is performed under x-ray guidance (eg, fluoroscopic, computed tomography) with contrast media to identify and monitor the compressed area via epidurogram.

### Ongoing and Unpublished Clinical Trials

Some currently unpublished trials that might influence this review are listed in Table 1.

**Table 1. Summary of Key Trials**

NCT No.	Trial Name	Planned Enrollment	Completion Date
<i>Ongoing</i>			
NCT03072927 <sup>a</sup>	MILD <sup>®‡</sup> Percutaneous Image-Guided Lumbar Decompression: A Medicare Claims Study	4000	Dec 2026
NCT04594980	An Open-Label Randomized Controlled Study of the Efficacy of Surgical Treatment in Patients With Single Level Lumbar Spinal Stenosis Using Minimally Invasive Decompression and Fusion and Traditional Open	96	Feb 2025

NCT: national clinical trial.

<sup>a</sup> Denotes industry-sponsored or cosponsored trial.

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15. Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services. National Coverage Determination (NCD) for Percutaneous Image-guided Lumbar Decompression for Lumbar Spinal Stenosis (2020) <https://www.cms.gov/medicare-coverage-database/view/ncd.aspx?ncdid=358&ncdver=2>.

### **Policy History**

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- 11/04/2010 Medical Policy Committee review
- 11/16/2010 Medical Policy Implementation Committee approval. New policy.
- 11/03/2011 Medical Policy Committee review.
- 11/16/2011 Medical Policy Implementation Committee.
- 12/06/2011 Posted as Archived policy.
- 03/05/2012 Re-posted as active policy.
- 11/01/2012 Medical Policy Committee review.
- 11/28/2012 Medical Policy Implementation Committee. No change to coverage.
- 11/07/2013 Medical Policy Committee review.
- 11/20/2013 Medical Policy Implementation Committee. No change to coverage.
- 11/06/2014 Medical Policy Committee review.
- 11/21/2014 Medical Policy Implementation Committee. No change to coverage.
- 08/03/2015 Coding update: ICD10 Diagnosis code section added; ICD9 Procedure code section removed.
- 10/29/2015 Medical Policy Committee review.
- 11/16/2015 Medical Policy Implementation Committee. No change to coverage.
- 11/03/2016 Medical Policy Committee review.
- 11/16/2016 Medical Policy Implementation Committee. No change to coverage.
- 11/02/2017 Medical Policy Committee review.
- 11/15/2017 Medical Policy Implementation Committee. Policy statement changed from “lumbar” to “spinal” to include cervical/thoracic decompression. “Lumbar” removed from title.
- 11/08/2018 Medical Policy Committee review.
- 11/21/2018 Medical Policy Implementation Committee. No change to coverage.
- 11/07/2019 Medical Policy Committee review.
- 11/13/2019 Medical Policy Implementation Committee. No change to coverage.
- 11/05/2020 Medical Policy Committee review.
- 11/11/2020 Medical Policy Implementation Committee. No change to coverage.
- 11/04/2021 Medical Policy Committee review.
- 11/10/2021 Medical Policy Implementation Committee. No change to coverage.
- 11/03/2022 Medical Policy Committee review.
- 11/09/2022 Medical Policy Implementation Committee. No change to coverage.
- 11/02/2023 Medical Policy Committee review.





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11/08/2023 Medical Policy Implementation Committee. No change to coverage.

11/07/2024 Medical Policy Committee review.

11/13/2024 Medical Policy Implementation Committee. Coverage eligibility unchanged.

Next Scheduled Review Date: 11/2025

### **Coding**

*The five character codes included in the Louisiana Blue Medical Policy Coverage Guidelines are obtained from Current Procedural Terminology (CPT®)†, copyright 2023 by the American Medical Association (AMA). CPT is developed by the AMA as a listing of descriptive terms and five character identifying codes and modifiers for reporting medical services and procedures performed by physician.*

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CPT is a registered trademark of the American Medical Association.

Codes used to identify services associated with this policy may include (but may not be limited to) the following:

Code Type	Code
CPT	0274T, 0275T
HCPCS	G0276
ICD-10 Diagnosis	All related diagnoses

\*Investigational – A medical treatment, procedure, drug, device, or biological product is Investigational if the effectiveness has not been clearly tested and it has not been incorporated into standard medical practice. Any determination we make that a medical treatment, procedure, drug, device, or biological product is Investigational will be based on a consideration of the following:

- A. Whether the medical treatment, procedure, drug, device, or biological product can be lawfully marketed without approval of the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and



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whether such approval has been granted at the time the medical treatment, procedure, drug, device, or biological product is sought to be furnished; or

- B. Whether the medical treatment, procedure, drug, device, or biological product requires further studies or clinical trials to determine its maximum tolerated dose, toxicity, safety, effectiveness, or effectiveness as compared with the standard means of treatment or diagnosis, must improve health outcomes, according to the consensus of opinion among experts as shown by reliable evidence, including:
1. Consultation with technology evaluation center(s);
  2. Credible scientific evidence published in peer-reviewed medical literature generally recognized by the relevant medical community; or
  3. Reference to federal regulations.

**\*\*Medically Necessary (or “Medical Necessity”)** - Health care services, treatment, procedures, equipment, drugs, devices, items or supplies that a Provider, exercising prudent clinical judgment, would provide to a patient for the purpose of preventing, evaluating, diagnosing or treating an illness, injury, disease or its symptoms, and that are:

- A. In accordance with nationally accepted standards of medical practice;
- B. Clinically appropriate, in terms of type, frequency, extent, level of care, site and duration, and considered effective for the patient's illness, injury or disease; and
- C. Not primarily for the personal comfort or convenience of the patient, physician or other health care provider, and not more costly than an alternative service or sequence of services at least as likely to produce equivalent therapeutic or diagnostic results as to the diagnosis or treatment of that patient's illness, injury or disease.

For these purposes, “nationally accepted standards of medical practice” means standards that are based on credible scientific evidence published in peer-reviewed medical literature generally recognized by the relevant medical community, Physician Specialty Society recommendations and the views of Physicians practicing in relevant clinical areas and any other relevant factors.

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**NOTICE:** If the Patient’s health insurance contract contains language that differs from the BCBSLA Medical Policy definition noted above, the definition in the health insurance contract will be relied upon for specific coverage determinations.

**NOTICE:** Medical Policies are scientific based opinions, provided solely for coverage and informational purposes. Medical Policies should not be construed to suggest that the Company recommends, advocates, requires, encourages, or discourages any particular treatment, procedure, or service, or any particular course of treatment, procedure, or service.



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**NOTICE:** Federal and State law, as well as contract language, including definitions and specific contract provisions/exclusions, take precedence over Medical Policy and must be considered first in determining eligibility for coverage.

