Hospital Services: Observation and Inpatient

Policy Number: 2026T0643J
Effective Date: August 1, 2026

➲ Instructions for Use

Table of Contents **Page**

Application 1
Coverage Rationale 1
References 2
Policy History/Revision Information 2
Instructions for Use 2

Related Commercial/Individual Exchange Policy
- Elective Inpatient Services

Community Plan Policy
- Hospital Services: Observation and Inpatient

Medicare Advantage Policy
- Hospital, Emergency, and Ambulance Services

Application

UnitedHealthcare Commercial

This Medical Policy applies to UnitedHealthcare Commercial benefit plans.

UnitedHealthcare Individual Exchange

This Medical Policy applies to Individual Exchange benefit plans.

Coverage Rationale

UnitedHealthcare uses InterQual® as a source of medical evidence to support medical necessity and level of care decisions, when applicable. InterQual® criteria are intended to be used in connection with the independent professional medical judgment of a qualified health care provider and do not constitute the practice of medicine or medical advice.

Click here to view the InterQual® criteria.

An observation level of care is often used to manage the following clinical conditions and symptoms (list is not all inclusive):

- Abdominal pain
- Allergic reaction (generalized)
- Altered mental status (confusion)
- Anemia
- Asthma
- Atrial fibrillation
- Back pain
- Bronchiolitis
- Bronchitis
- Cellulitis
- Chest pain
- Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease
- Croup
- Dehydration
- Diabetes mellitus
- Epistaxis
- Febrile illness
- Gastroenteritis
- Heart failure
- Hemoptysis
- Migraine
- Pneumonia
- Poisoning/toxic ingestions
- Renal colic, kidney stone
- Seizures
- Syncope and collapse
- Transient ischemic attack
- Urinary tract infection
- Vaginal bleeding (nonobstetric)
- Weakness

If the individual's condition does not improve within 48 hours, additional clinical information should be submitted to support an inpatient level of care.

Observation services are not medically necessary for the convenience of the hospital, physicians, individuals, or individuals' families or while awaiting placement to another health care facility.

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Note: The observation services portion of this policy does not apply to an obstetric member during pregnancy, childbirth, or the postpartum period.

References

InterQual® Level of Care (LOC): Acute Adult and Level of Care (LOC): Acute Pediatric.

Loureiro R and Hall M. Emergency medicine observation medicine. In: Bakes K, Buchanan J, Moreira M, Byyny R, editors. Emergency Medicine Secrets. 7th ed. Philadelphia, PA: Elsevier; 2022. P. 55-57.

Policy History/Revision Information

Date	Summary of Changes
08/01/2026	**Supporting Information** • Updated *References* section to reflect the most current information • Archived previous policy version 2026T0643I

Instructions for Use

This Medical Policy provides assistance in interpreting UnitedHealthcare standard benefit plans. When deciding coverage, the member specific benefit plan document must be referenced as the terms of the member specific benefit plan may differ from the standard plan. In the event of a conflict, the member specific benefit plan document governs. Before using this policy, check the member specific benefit plan document and any applicable federal or state mandates. UnitedHealthcare reserves the right to modify its policies and guidelines as necessary. This Medical Policy is provided for informational purposes. It does not constitute medical advice.

This Medical Policy may also be applied to Medicare Advantage plans in certain instances. In the absence of a Medicare National Coverage Determination (NCD), Local Coverage Determination (LCD), or other Medicare coverage guidance, CMS allows a Medicare Advantage Organization (MAO) to create its own coverage determinations, using objective evidence-based rationale relying on authoritative evidence (Medicare IOM Pub. No. 100-16, Ch. 4, §90.5).

UnitedHealthcare may also use tools developed by third parties, such as the InterQual® criteria, to assist us in administering health benefits. UnitedHealthcare Medical Policies are intended to be used in connection with the independent professional medical judgment of a qualified health care provider and do not constitute the practice of medicine or medical advice.

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