

The Department of Vermont Health Access Medical Policy

Subject: Special Needs Positioning Seats, including Car Seats

Last Review: January 3, 2017

Revision 6: September 28, 2015

Revision 5: October 30, 2014

Revision 4: May 28, 2013

Revision 3: June 4, 2012

Revision 2: January 26, 2011

Revision 1: June 15, 2009

Original Effective: 2004

Technical Revision: September 8, 2009

***Please note: Most current content changes will be highlighted in yellow.**

Description of Service or Procedure

- Special needs **positioning seats** are seating devices specifically used for special needs children. The devices are for children who cannot use conventional seats such as high chairs or booster seats in order to participate in basic activities of daily living (feeding, grooming, hygiene, and dressing) because of a medical condition. The special needs positioning seat provides proper postural control, proper alignment, and proper support to optimize functional abilities and safety.
- Specialized **car seats** are safety and positioning devices specifically used for special needs children who can no longer fit in conventional car seats but continue to need special supports or for special needs children when conventional car seats are not medically appropriate.

Disclaimer

Coverage is limited to that outlined in Medicaid Rule that pertains to the member's aid category. Prior Authorization (PA) is only valid if the member is eligible for the applicable item or service on the date of service.

Medicaid Rule

[7102.2](#) Prior Authorization Determination

[7103](#) Medical Necessity



[7505](#) Interpretive Memo 2/10/06 allowing coverage for special needs car seats

[7505.5](#) Non-covered Services

[7506.5](#) (Wheelchairs) Non-covered Services

Medicaid Rules can be found at <http://humanservices.vermont.gov/on-line-rules>

Coverage Position

A special needs **positioning seat and/or a car seat** may be covered for beneficiaries:

- When the special needs car seat is prescribed by a licensed medical provider, enrolled in the Vermont Medicaid program, operating within their scope of practice in accordance with their Vermont State Practice Act who is knowledgeable in orthopedics, neurology, and/or pediatrics, who is knowledgeable about special needs equipment, and who provides medical care to the beneficiary AND
- When the clinical guidelines below are met.

Coverage Criteria

A special needs **positioning seat** may be covered for beneficiaries who:

- Are not able to sit safely in a conventional chair, booster seat, or high chair, AND
- Require specialized positioning in order to safely perform **basic** activities of daily living, AND
- Have successfully trialed the device in the beneficiary's **home** environment AND
- Exhibit one or more of the following medical condition(s):
 - Significant head and trunk instability and/or weakness,
 - Significant hypotonicity, hypertonicity, athetosis, spasticity, or muscle spasming which results in uncontrollable movement and position change,
 - Absence or latency of protective reactions,
 - Inability to maintain an unsupported sitting position independently, or
 - Other significant positional needs that cannot be met in the conventional seats listed above.

A special needs **car seat** may be covered for beneficiaries who:

- Are not able to fit safely into a conventional car seat **OR exhibit behavioral manifestations of a documented medical condition that put the driver or beneficiary at risk of injury**, AND
- Are not able to be properly supported and safe in the vehicle during normal transport, including turns, accelerations, decelerations, or riding over rough terrain **without the requested device** AND
- Have successfully trialed the device or a close simulation in the beneficiary's environment AND
- Exhibit one or more of the following medical condition(s):
 - Significant head and trunk instability and/or weakness,
 - Significant hypotonicity, hypertonicity, athetosis, spasticity, or muscle spasming which results in uncontrollable movement and position change,
 - Absence or latency of protective reactions,
 - Inability to maintain an unsupported sitting position independently,
 - Severe seizure activity that results in uncontrollable movement and position change (such as tonic-clonic seizures),

- Orthopedic disease processes resulting in significant bony fragility (for example: osteogenesis imperfecta) or significant contracture that would result in a child's inability to perform postural corrections due to vehicle motion (for example: arthrogyposis),
- Behaviors that put the beneficiary or driver at risk of injury. .

Other information regarding special needs positioning seats:

Special needs positioning seats with a seat- to- floor feature may be covered when the beneficiary requires access to the floor for self-transfers and to access their means of mobility (for example, a child who mobilizes through creeping or rolling and is able to self-transfer into the chair independently or with less than maximal assistance).

Special needs positioning seats with a high-seat-to-low-seat feature may be covered when the beneficiary requires access to both higher and lower surfaces to accomplish their **basic** activities of daily living (for example, accessing the table for eating and the sink for tooth brushing).

Special needs positioning seat: Proper evaluation must address issues including:

- Airway integrity,
- Skin integrity,
- Circulatory integrity,
- Allowance of voluntary movement where it does not negatively impact safety,
- Proper positioning,
- Type of release mechanism, to ensure safety for beneficiaries with behavioral and/or judgment issues,
- The ability of the device to support the beneficiary properly despite seizure activity or muscle spasms,
- The ability of the device to support a growing child over time including growth in height and weight, and
- Parent/caregiver education: Parents/caregivers must always be advised that devices with straps, belts, or harnesses can result in danger of strangulation. Beneficiaries should never be left alone with devices that have straps, belts or harnesses. Positioning seats can never be used as restraints.

Other Information regarding specialized car seats:

Some beneficiaries may need a car bed rather than a car seat (for example, a child with Pierre Robin sequence may need to be positioned in prone during car rides to maintain an open airway).

Many beneficiaries with special health needs can be safely supported in standard car seats or booster seats, which are not covered by Vermont Medicaid. The need for a specialized car seat must be demonstrated by a physician's certificate of medical necessity, and a physical or occupational therapy evaluation with supporting documentation.

Specialized car seat evaluation must address issues including:

- Airway integrity,
- Skin integrity,
- Circulatory integrity,
- Allowance of voluntary movement where it does not negatively impact safety,
- Proper positioning,
- Type of release mechanism, to ensure the safety of beneficiaries with behavioral and/or judgment issues,

- The ability of the device to support the beneficiary properly despite seizure activity or muscle spasms,
- The ability of the device to support a growing child over time including growth in height and weight, and
- Parent/caregiver education: Parents/caregivers must always be advised that the rear seat is the safest location for children. Seat belts should always lie across the hips rather than the abdomen, and shoulder straps should always lie across the chest, not the neck or throat. Parents/caregivers must also be advised that properly used car seats are safer than transporting beneficiaries in a wheelchair within the vehicle, even with special transit brackets affixed to the wheelchair.

Beneficiaries with a tracheostomy should not be seated in car seats that have a tray or shield harness system. The American Academy of Pediatrics reports that these systems can block the airway of a child with a tracheostomy during a crash.

The prescribing medical practitioner and the DME provider must educate the family on proper positioning and proper usage of the special needs car seat per the manufacturer's specifications. Medical professionals are expected to periodically assess the family's needs for safe transportation of the special needs individual.

Clinical guidelines for repeat service or procedure

- When the device has been outgrown, OR
- When the device no longer meets the medical needs of the beneficiary, OR
- When the device is no longer functional through normal wear (expected to last at least 5 years), OR
- For specialized car seats: When the device has been in a motor vehicle accident that may have compromised its ability to protect the beneficiary.

Type of service or procedure covered

- Special needs positioning seats and positioning components.
- Specialized car seats, including forward or backward facing seats, horizontal car beds, and vest harnesses, for beneficiaries with special needs. Also covered are specialized support components for the car seat.
- The car seats acceptable for DVHA coverage must meet Federal Safety standards, must be able to accommodate safety adaptations, and must be able to accommodate a pediatric beneficiary's growth.
- Specific coding for a special needs car seat is required if applicable.

Type of service or procedure not covered (this list may not be all inclusive)

- Positioning seats that include a mobility feature are not covered per Medicaid Rule 7506.5 "payment will not be made for:...customized seating systems for mobility devices other than wheelchairs."
- Positioning seats that are for the convenience of the caregiver or comfort of the beneficiary are not covered per Medicaid Rule 7505.5.
- Positioning seats cannot be covered for the purpose of restraint.

- Positioning seats will not be covered if the child's wheelchair/mobility device can meet the medical need.
- Positioning and car seats for individuals without special needs as described above.
- Conventional seats and car seats.
- Vehicle modifications to accommodate car seats.
- Multiple positioning and car seats for one beneficiary.

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