



UM-CDG-042 Autism Spectrum Disorders Diagnosis
and Treatment

Approved By:
Director, Health Services

Effective Date:
10/22/2025

This Policy applies to all SECUR affiliates, associates, and subsidiaries.

Approved by Courtney Gonzales, Director of Health Services on behalf of the Utilization Management Committee.

PURPOSE

This coverage determination guideline serves to address autism spectrum disorders diagnosis and treatment. Autism spectrum disorders (ASD) are a group of biologically based chronic neurodevelopmental disorders characterized by persistent defects in social communication and interaction and restricted, repetitive patterns of behavior, interests, and activities. While the exact cause remains unclear, it is believed that many contributory factors exist, including a strong genetic component.

For SECUR Health Plan members, National Coverage Determinations (NCD) and Local Coverage Determinations (LCD) will be applied to requests when applicable. SECUR Health Plan Coverage Determination Guidelines (CDG) will be utilized in the absence of an appropriate NCD and/or LCD.

DEFINITIONS

None

POLICY

SECUR Health Plan will follow National Coverage Determination guidance for tests and services related to ASD including:

- Complete Blood Counts (CBC)
- Evoked Response Tests
- Hair Analysis
- Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI)
- Speech Generating Devices
- Thyroid Testing

According to the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fifth Edition, (DSM-5), symptoms must be present in the early developmental period but may not become fully manifested until social demands exceed limited capacities or may be masked by learned strategies adapted to later in life. There are no medical tests for ASD for individuals of any age.

Although adult-specific methods of diagnosis of ASD are limited, the current DSM-5 may be adapted and used for individuals who were not diagnosed during childhood. Clinicians primarily diagnose adults with ASD through a series of in-person observations and interactions and may also consider any symptoms being experienced.

SECUR Health Plan will consider ASD evaluation and diagnosis and medically necessary when persistent deficits in social communication and interaction across multiple contexts have been identified and when evaluation includes one or more of the following methods:

- Adaptive behavior evaluation
- Cognitive evaluation
- Medical evaluation
- Formal audiological hearing evaluation including frequency-specific brainstem auditory evoked response or otoacoustic emissions
- Measurement of blood lead level if the member exhibits a developmental delay and pica or lives in a high-risk environment
- Genetic testing, specifically high resolution chromosome analysis (karyotype) and DNA analysis for fragile X syndrome in the presence of mental retardation (or if mental retardation cannot be excluded) if there is a familial history of fragile X or mental retardation of unknown etiology, or if dysmorphic features are present

Psychotherapy, such as adaptive behavior therapy, behavior modification, and cognitive behavioral therapy will be considered medically necessary to treat ASD.

The following neuroimaging studies are considered not medically necessary for the evaluation and diagnosis of ASD:

- Computed tomography (CT) scan
- Functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI)
- Positron emission tomography (PET)

Current medical literature shows no evidence to prove these modalities are effective or standard methodology for the evaluation and treatment of ASD.

While the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) offers general guidance for tests and treatments that may be applicable for various clinical conditions, evidence-based guidance regarding the evaluation for and diagnosis or treatment of ASD remains lacking.

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