



BlueCross BlueShield  
of Alabama

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**Name of Blue Advantage Policy:**

**Phototherapy for the Treatment of Skin Disorders**

Policy #: 301

Latest Review Date: January 2025

Category: Dermatology

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**BACKGROUND:**

*Blue Advantage medical policy does not conflict with Local Coverage Determinations (LCDs), Local Medical Review Policies (LMRPs) or National Coverage Determinations (NCDs) or with coverage provisions in Medicare manuals, instructions or operational policy letters. In order to be covered by Blue Advantage the service shall be reasonable and necessary under Title XVIII of the Social Security Act, Section 1862(a)(1)(A). The service is considered reasonable and necessary if it is determined that the service is:*

1. *Safe and effective;*
2. *Not experimental or investigational\*;*
3. *Appropriate, including duration and frequency that is considered appropriate for the service, in terms of whether it is:*
  - *Furnished in accordance with accepted standards of medical practice for the diagnosis or treatment of the patient's condition or to improve the function of a malformed body member;*
  - *Furnished in a setting appropriate to the patient's medical needs and condition;*
  - *Ordered and furnished by qualified personnel;*
  - *One that meets, but does not exceed, the patient's medical need; and*
  - *At least as beneficial as an existing and available medically appropriate alternative.*

*\*Routine costs of qualifying clinical trial services with dates of service on or after September 19, 2000 which meet the requirements of the Clinical Trials NCD are considered reasonable and necessary by Medicare. Providers should bill **Original Medicare** for covered services that are related to **clinical trials** that meet Medicare requirements (Refer to Medicare National Coverage Determinations Manual, Chapter 1, Section 310 and Medicare Claims Processing Manual Chapter 32, Sections 69.0-69.11).*

## **POLICY:**

**Blue Advantage** will treat **ultraviolet A or B therapy (CPT 96900)** as a **covered** benefit in the treatment of the following conditions:

- Chronic urticaria
- Eczema (atopic dermatitis)
- Lichen planus
- Mycosis fungoides (cutaneous T-cell lymphoma)
- Pityriasis lichenoides
- Pityriasis rosea
- Pruritus of renal failure
- Vitiligo
- Localized scleroderma

**Blue Advantage** will treat **ultraviolet B with the addition of topical coal tar** (also known as Goeckerman treatment) **or petrolatum (CPT 96910)** as a **covered benefit** for **severe psoriasis** (defined as psoriasis that affects more than 10% of the body surface area).

**Blue Advantage** will treat **ultraviolet B with the addition of topical coal tar** (also known as Goeckerman treatment) **or petrolatum** as a **non-covered benefit** and as **investigational for all other indications**.

**Blue Advantage** will treat **ultraviolet B light therapy (CPT 96900) administered in the home** as a **covered** benefit for the following conditions and when conducted under a physician's supervision with regularly scheduled exams:

- Atopic dermatitis-mild to moderate forms when standard treatment has failed
- Lichen planus
- Mycosis fungoides
- Pityriasis lichenoides
- Pruritus of hepatitis disease
- Pruritus of renal failure
- Severe atopic dermatitis

**Blue Advantage** will treat **ultraviolet B light therapy (CPT 96900) administered in the home** as a **non-covered benefit for conditions not listed above**.

**Blue Advantage** will treat **Psoralens and ultraviolet A light (PUVA) therapy (CPT 96912)** as a **covered** benefit for the following conditions:

- Acrodermatitis continua
- Acute/chronic pityriasis lichenoides
- Eczema (atopic dermatitis)
- Lichen planus
- Mycosis fungoides (cutaneous T-cell lymphoma)
- Nummular dermatitis
- Palmoplantar pustulosis

- Parapsoriasis
- Poikiloderma vasculare
- Psoriasis
- Pustulosis palmaris
- Vitiligo

**Blue Advantage** will treat **photochemotherapy (Goeckerman and/or PUVA) for severe photoresponsive dermatoses requiring at least 4-8 hours of care under direct supervision of the physician (CPT 96913)** as a **covered benefit** for the following conditions:

- Acrodermatitis continua
- Acute/chronic pityriasis lichenoides
- Eczema (atopic dermatitis)
- Lichen planus
- Mycosis fungoides (cutaneous T-cell lymphoma)
- Psoriasis
- Pustulosis palmaris
- Vitiligo

**Blue Advantage** will treat **excimer laser treatment of vitiligo of the face, neck, trunk, abdomen, back and/or proximal limbs** as a **covered benefit for up to three sessions per week for 12 weeks.**

**Blue Advantage** will treat **excimer laser treatment of vitiligo of the distal limbs and bony prominences (i.e. fingers, wrists, elbows, knees)** as a **non-covered benefit** and as **investigational.**

*Blue Advantage does not approve or deny procedures, services, testing, or equipment for our members. Our decisions concern coverage only. The decision of whether or not to have a certain test, treatment or procedure is one made between the physician and his/her patient. Blue Advantage administers benefits based on the members' contract and medical policies. Physicians should always exercise their best medical judgment in providing the care they feel is most appropriate for their patients. Needed care should not be delayed or refused because of a coverage determination.*

## **DESCRIPTION OF PROCEDURE OR SERVICE:**

Phototherapy is defined as the exposure to nonionizing radiation for therapeutic benefit. It may involve exposure to UVA UVB or various combinations of UVA and UVB radiation. UV light therapy, including phototherapy and photochemotherapy, is used for the treatment of certain skin conditions.

Targeted phototherapy may also be used in specific conditions that have not responded to standard therapies describes the use of ultraviolet light that can be focused on specific body areas or lesions. In contrast, photochemotherapy or psoralens in conjunction with UVA is the

therapeutic use of radiation in combination with a photosensitizing chemical. Treatment with these modalities may involve partial or whole-body exposure. Photochemotherapy has been used for a large number of skin diseases but confirmed data of its usefulness is available in only a relatively few. PUVA uses a psoralen derivative in conjunction with long wavelength UVA light (sunlight or artificial) for photochemotherapy of skin conditions.

Targeted phototherapy with handheld lamps or lasers is also being evaluated. Potential advantages of targeted phototherapy include the ability to use higher treatment doses and to limit exposure to surrounding tissue. Original UVB devices consisted of a Phillips TL-01 fluorescent bulb with a maximum wavelength ( $\lambda_{\text{max}}$ ) at 311 nm. Subsequently, xenon chloride (XeCl) lasers and lamps were developed as targeted UVB treatment devices; these devices generate monochromatic or very narrowband (NB) radiation with a  $\lambda_{\text{max}}$  of 308 nm. Targeted phototherapy devices are directed at specific lesions or affected areas, thus limiting exposure to the surrounding normal tissues. They may therefore allow higher dosages compared with a light box, which could result in fewer treatments.

There are numerous medical and surgical treatments aimed at decreasing disease progression and/or attaining repigmentation. Topical corticosteroids, alone or in combination with topical vitamin D3 analogues, are common first-line treatment for vitiligo. Alternative first-line therapies include topical calcineurin inhibitors, systemic steroids, and topical antioxidants. Treatment options for vitiligo recalcitrant to first-line therapy include, among others, light box therapy with narrowband ultraviolet B (NB-UVB) and psoralen plus ultraviolet A (PUVA) and targeted light therapy.

Light therapy for vitiligo includes both targeted phototherapy and photochemotherapy with psoralen plus PUVA. Vitiligo is an idiopathic skin disorder that causes depigmentation of sections of skin, most commonly on the extremities. Depigmentation occurs because melanocytes are no longer able to function properly. The cause of vitiligo is unknown; it is sometimes considered an autoimmune disease. The most common form of the disorder is nonsegmental vitiligo (NSV) in which depigmentation is generalized, bilateral, symmetrical, and increases in size over time. In contrast, segmental vitiligo (SV), also called asymmetric or focal vitiligo, covers a limited area of skin. The typical natural history of vitiligo involves stepwise progression with long periods in which the disease is static and relatively inactive, and relatively shorter periods in which areas of pigment loss increase.

PUVA uses a psoralen derivative in conjunction with long-wavelength UVA light (sunlight or artificial) for photochemotherapy of skin conditions. Psoralens are tricyclic furocoumarin that occur in certain plants and can also be synthesized. They are available in oral and topical forms. Oral PUVA is generally given 1.5 hours before exposure to UVA radiation. Topical PUVA therapy refers the direct application of psoralen to the skin with subsequent exposure to UVA light. With topical PUVA, UVA exposure is generally administered within thirty minutes of psoralen application. No topical psoralen formulation is currently available in the US.

Excimer laser is a form of ultraviolet laser proposed for the treatment of various dermatologic conditions including atopic dermatitis, psoriasis and vitiligo. Laser therapy provides intense UVB light to a limited area of skin, providing the potential benefit of more rapid clinical

response from targeted phototherapy while avoiding the side effects of ultraviolet light on unaffected skin.

## **KEY POINTS:**

The most recent literature update was performed through October 29, 2024.

### **Summary of Evidence**

For individuals who have vitiligo who receive targeted phototherapy, the evidence includes systematic reviews of randomized controlled trials (RCTs), 2 individual RCTs, and 2 retrospective studies. Relevant outcomes are a change in disease status, quality of life (QOL), and treatment-related morbidity. Individual studies tend to have small sample sizes, and few were designed to isolate the effect of laser therapy. Two meta-analyses were attempted; however, results from a meta-analysis could not be verified because the selected studies were not available in English, and 1 estimate was imprecise due to the small number of studies and participants. RCTs have shown targeted phototherapy to be associated with statistically significant improvements in Vitiligo Area Scoring Index (VASI) scores and/or repigmentation compared to alternate treatment options in some studies, but the results are inconsistent. Overall, there is a lack of clinical trial evidence that compares targeted phototherapy with more conservative treatments or no treatment/placebo.

For individuals who have vitiligo who have not responded to conservative therapy who receive PUVA (photochemotherapy), the evidence includes systematic reviews and RCTs. Relevant outcomes are a change in disease status, quality of life, and treatment-related morbidity. There is some evidence from randomized studies, mainly those published before 1985, that PUVA is more effective than a placebo for treating vitiligo. When compared with narrowband UVB (NB-UVB) in meta-analyses, results have shown that individuals receiving NB-UVB experienced higher rates of repigmentation than individuals receiving PUVA, though the differences were not statistically significant. Based on the available evidence and clinical guidelines, PUVA may be considered in individuals with vitiligo who have not responded adequately to conservative therapy.

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

#### **Vitiligo Working Group**

The Vitiligo Working Group is supported by the National Institute of Arthritis and Musculoskeletal and Skin Diseases (NIAMS), part of the National Institutes of Health (NIH). In 2017, the group published guidelines on current and emerging treatments for vitiligo. The Working Group indicated that psoralens with UVA has largely been replaced by NB-UVB, but that “PUVA may be considered in individuals with darker Fitzpatrick skin phototypes or those with treatment-resistant vitiligo (level I evidence).” The Working Group also stated that “Targeted phototherapy (excimer lasers and excimer lamps) can be considered when <10% of body surface area is affected (level II evidence).”

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

Not applicable.

**KEY WORDS:**

Phototherapy, photochemotherapy, UVA, UVB, PUVA, ultraviolet A, ultraviolet B, excimer laser phototherapy, excimer laser, 308-nm excimer laser, 308-nm xenon chloride excimer laser, vitiligo, psoralen plus, atopic dermatitis, Handisol II<sup>®</sup>, XTRAC<sup>®</sup>, Xenon monochloride (XeCl),

**APPROVED BY GOVERNING BODIES:**

In 2001, XTRAC<sup>®</sup> (PhotoMedex), a XeCl excimer laser, was cleared for marketing by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) through the 510(k) process for the treatment of skin conditions such as vitiligo. The 510(k) clearance has subsequently been obtained for a number of targeted UVB lamps and lasers, including newer versions of the XTRAC<sup>®</sup> system including the XTRAC<sup>®</sup> Ultra, the VTRAC<sup>™</sup> lamp (PhotoMedex), the BCclear<sup>™</sup> lamp (Lumenis), the 308 excimer lamp phototherapy system (Quantel Medical), MultiClear Multiwavelength Targeted Phototherapy System, Psoria-Light<sup>™</sup>, and the Excilite<sup>™</sup> and Excilite  $\mu$ <sup>™</sup> XeCl lamps. The intended use of all of these devices includes vitiligo among other dermatologic indications. Some light-emitting devices are handheld.

The oral psoralen product, methoxsalen soft gelatin capsules (previously available under the brand name Oxsoralen Ultra), has been approved by the FDA.

**BENEFIT APPLICATION:**

Coverage is subject to the member's specific benefits. Group-specific policy will supersede this policy when applicable.

**CURRENT CODING:****CPT Codes:**

|       |                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
|-------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 96900 | Actinotherapy (ultraviolet light)                                                                                                                                                                                            |
| 96910 | Photochemotherapy; tar and ultraviolet B (Goeckerman treatment) or petrolatum and ultraviolet B                                                                                                                              |
| 96912 | ; psoralens and ultraviolet A                                                                                                                                                                                                |
| 96913 | Photochemotherapy (Goeckerman and/or PUVA) for severe photoresponsive dermatoses requiring at least four to eight hours of care under direct supervision of the physician (includes application of medication and dressings) |
| 96920 | Laser treatment for inflammatory skin disease (psoriasis); total area less than 250 sq cm                                                                                                                                    |
| 96921 | ; 250 sq cm to 500 sq cm                                                                                                                                                                                                     |

|       |                                                      |
|-------|------------------------------------------------------|
| 96922 | ; over 500 sq cm                                     |
| 96999 | Unlisted special dermatological service or procedure |

**HCPCS:**

|       |                                                                                                                        |
|-------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| E0691 | Ultraviolet light therapy system, includes bulbs/lamps, timer and eye protection; treatment area 2 square feet or less |
| E0692 | ; 4 foot panel                                                                                                         |
| E0693 | ; 6 foot panel                                                                                                         |
| E0694 | Ultraviolet multidirectional light therapy system in six foot cabinet, includes bulbs/lamps, timer and eye protection  |

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## **POLICY HISTORY:**

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Medical Policy Group, April 2019

Medical Policy Group, December 2019

Medical Policy Group, March 2020: Updates to Coding Section to include CPT codes 96920, 96921, 96922, and 96999.

Medical Policy Group, January 2021

Medical Policy Group, January 2022

Medical Policy Group, December 2022

UM Committee, December 2023: Policy approved by UM Committee for use for Blue Advantage business.

Medical Policy Group, January 2024

UM Committee, January 2024: Annual review of policy approved by UM Committee for use for Blue Advantage business.

Medical Policy Group, January 2025

UM Committee January 2025: Annual review of policy approved by UM Committee for use for Blue Advantage business.

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*This medical policy is not an authorization, certification, explanation of benefits, or a contract. Eligibility and benefits are determined on a case-by-case basis according to the terms of the member's plan in effect as of the date services are rendered. All medical policies are based on (i) research of current medical literature and (ii) review of common medical practices in the treatment and diagnosis of disease as of the date hereof. Physicians and other providers are solely responsible for all aspects of medical care and treatment, including the type, quality, and levels of care and treatment.*

*This policy is intended to be used for adjudication of claims (including pre-admission certification, pre-determinations, and pre-procedure review) in Blue Cross and Blue Shield's administration of plan contracts.*