

## Information for Referring Clinicians

Northern Health Medical Imaging sites have adopted appropriateness criteria for MRI lumbar spine exams. These criteria are consistent with the Choosing Wisely Canada recommendations.

### How will appropriateness criteria be implemented?

An appropriateness checklist has been developed to accompany adult MRI lumbar spine referrals. The checklist must be completed and attached to the MRI requisition.

### Why introduce appropriateness criteria?

The appropriateness criteria and checklist provide decision support to referring clinicians and support our commitment to quality improvement.

### What does this mean for referring clinicians?

- Referring clinicians must complete and attach a lumbar spine checklist to their MRI requisition for patients 18 years of age and older.
- The requisition and checklist must be forwarded to the MRI booking office together.

### What are the appropriateness criteria for MRI lumbar spine?

One or more of the following must apply to be eligible for MRI lumbar spine:

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| ✓ Cauda equina syndrome   | ✓ Use of IV drugs or steroids or suspected infection/fracture |
| ✓ Unexplained weight loss, fever, immunosuppression                         | ✓ Any neurologic symptoms                                     |
| ✓ History of cancer or suspected cancer                                     | ✓ MRI was recommended on a previous imaging report            |
| ✓ Use of IV drugs or steroids   | ✓ Previous lumbar spine surgery                               |
| ✓ Significant acute traumatic event immediately preceding onset of symptoms | ✓ Age over 65 with first episode of severe back pain          |
|   | ✓ Pain lasting 12 weeks or longer                             |

### What should I discuss with my patients if they don't meet the appropriateness criteria?

- Lower back pain is very common. It is often caused by back strain and resolves within weeks without medical treatment.
- CT, MRI, and X-rays rarely help with diagnosis and treatment.
- Discuss treatment and pain management options.
- Provide them with Choosing Wisely patient handout "Imaging Tests for Low Back Pain".

Continue to monitor your patient and if their symptoms don't resolve, consider consulting orthopedic and rheumatology specialist as there may be other reasons for your patient's pain.

#### MRI Central Intake

In addition to the regional MRI requisition form, referrals for lumbar spine, knee, and hip must include the regional appropriateness checklist.

Both the forms are available at:

- **11-210-5048 UHNBC use only**
- **10-210-5048 Regional**

#### Fax requisition and appropriateness checklist to the MRI preferred exam site:

Fort St John: 250-261-7637  
Terrace: 250-638-4077  
Prince George: 250-565-5877

#### Resources

Appropriateness criteria are consistent with the Choosing Wisely Canada recommendations. For more information, visit <https://choosingwiselycanada.org>

For appropriateness guidance from a radiologist, call the Northern Rapid Access to Consultative Expertise (Northern RACE) line: 1-855-605-7223

[Northern RACE](#) (Rapid Access to Consultative Expertise) is an advice line to support primary care providers in Northern BC. Northern specialist physicians will provide telephone support for non-emergent, patient-related questions. For more generic information, please visit the [RACE connect website](#)

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