

PRIOR AUTHORIZATION POLICY

- POLICY:** Erythropoiesis-Stimulating Agents – Epoetin Alfa Products Prior Authorization Policy
- Epogen® (epoetin alfa injection for intravenous or subcutaneous use – Amgen)
 - Procrit® (epoetin alfa injection for intravenous or subcutaneous use – Janssen)
 - Retacrit™ (epoetin alfa-epbx injection for intravenous and subcutaneous use Pfizer/Hospira)

REVIEW DATE: 07/22/2020

OVERVIEW

Epoetin alfa (Epogen, Procrit, Retacrit), an erythropoiesis-stimulating agent (ESA), is indicated for the following uses:¹⁻³

- **Anemia due to chronic kidney disease (CKD)**, including patients on dialysis and patients not on dialysis to decrease the need for red blood cell (RBC) transfusions.
- **Anemia due to chemotherapy in patients with cancer**, in patients with non-myeloid malignancies where anemia is due to the effect of concomitant myelosuppressive chemotherapy, and upon initiation, there is a minimum of two additional months of planned chemotherapy.
- **Anemia due to zidovudine**, in patients with human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) infection.
- **Reduction of allogeneic RBC transfusions**, in patients with perioperative hemoglobin (Hb) > 10.0 to ≤ 13.0 g/dL who are at high risk for perioperative blood loss from elective, noncardiac, nonvascular surgery.

Epoetin alfa has not been shown to improve quality of life, fatigue, or patient well-being.¹⁻³ Epoetin alfa is not indicated for use:

- In patients with cancer receiving hormonal agents, biologic products, or radiotherapy unless also receiving concomitant myelosuppressive chemotherapy.
- In patients with cancer receiving myelosuppressive chemotherapy when the anticipated outcome is cure.
- In patients with cancer receiving myelosuppressive chemotherapy in whom anemia can be managed by transfusion.
- In patients scheduled for surgery who are willing to donate autologous blood.
- In patients undergoing cardiac or vascular surgery.
- As a substitute for RBC transfusions in those who require immediate correction of anemia.

Therapy should be initiated for patients with CKD on dialysis when the Hb level is < 10.0 g/dL and if the Hb level approaches or exceeds 11.0 g/dL, reduce or interrupt the dose of epoetin alfa.¹⁻³ For adults with CKD who are not on dialysis, epoetin alfa should be initiated when the Hb is < 10.0 g/dL and other considerations apply (e.g., patient is likely to need transfusions). If the Hb exceeds 10.0 g/dL, reduce or interrupt the epoetin alfa dose and use the lowest dose sufficient to reduce the need for RBC transfusions. Epoetin alfa is indicated for the treatment of anemia due to zidovudine given at ≤ 4,200 mg per week in HIV-infected patients with endogenous serum erythropoietin levels of ≤ 500 mU/mL. It is recommended to withhold epoetin alfa if Hb exceeds 12.0 g/dL. Data show that epoetin alfa elevated or maintained Hb and/or hematocrit and decreased transfusions in anemic patients (Hb < 10.0 g/dL) who were receiving zidovudine. Patients with baseline endogenous serum erythropoietin levels ≤ 500 mU/mL derived greater benefit with epoetin alfa (e.g., achievement of higher hematocrit, reduction in transfusion requirements) compared with those having levels greater than this threshold. Initiate epoetin alfa for patients on cancer chemotherapy only if the Hb is < 10.0 g/dL. Use the lowest dose of epoetin alfa necessary to avoid RBC

transfusions. Hb can be increased to (or near) a concentration of 12.0 g/dL at which time the dose of epoetin alfa should be titrated to maintain that level.

Guidelines

The Kidney Disease Improving Global Outcomes (KDIGO) clinical practice guidelines for anemia in CKD (2012) state that for adults with CKD on dialysis ESA therapy should be used to avoid having the Hb concentration fall below 9.0 g/dL by initiating ESA therapy when the Hb is between 9.0 and 10.0 g/dL.⁴ The guidelines recommend against ESA therapy for adult patients with CKD who are not on dialysis when Hb levels are ≥ 10.0 g/dL. For adult patients with CKD who are not on dialysis with Hb levels < 10.0 g/dL, the decision whether to initiate ESA therapy should be individualized based on many factors (e.g., prior response to iron therapy, the risk of needing a transfusion, presence of symptoms). In general, ESAs should not be used to maintain Hb concentrations above 11.5 g/dL in adult patients with CKD. For pediatric patients with CKD, the Hb concentration in which ESAs should be initiated in the individual patient should be considered while being aware of the potential benefits and potential harms. In all pediatric patients with CKD receiving ESA therapy, the selected Hb concentration should be in the range of 11.0 to 12.0 g/dL. Iron supplementation can improve response to ESA therapy. Baseline and periodic monitoring (e.g., iron, total iron-binding capacity, transferrin saturation, or ferritin levels) and instituting iron replacement when needed may be useful in limiting the need for ESAs, maximizing symptomatic improvement in patients, and determining the reason for failure to adequately respond to ESAs. Iron deficiency can occur following continued ESA use and, therefore, iron supplementation is required in most patients to maintain an optimal response.

Clinical practice guidelines from the National Comprehensive Cancer Network (NCCN) for myelodysplastic syndrome (MDS) [version 2.2020 – February 28, 2020] list Epoetin alfa as having utility in anemic, symptomatic patients with MDS if serum erythropoietin levels are ≤ 500 mU/mL.⁵ Iron stores should be adequate. Due to safety issues, the guidelines suggest that ESAs be used in the management of symptomatic anemia in patients with MDS and to aim for a target Hb ≤ 12.0 g/dL. The NCCN guidelines for myeloproliferative neoplasms (version 1.2020 – May 21, 2020) address Aranesp and epoetin alfa products as options for treatment of patients with anemia related to myelofibrosis having a serum erythropoietin level ≤ 500 mU/mL.⁶ Iron stores should be adequate. The guidelines also advise that ESAs are not effective for the management of transfusion-dependent anemia.

POLICY STATEMENT

Prior authorization is recommended for prescription benefit coverage of epoetin alfa products in patients with conditions other than CKD who are on dialysis. The intent of this policy is to provide recommendations for uses other than anemia in patients with CKD who are on dialysis. All approvals are provided for the duration noted below. In cases where the approval is authorized in months, 1 month is equal to 30 days. Because of the specialized skills required for evaluation and diagnosis of patients treated with epoetin alfa as well as the monitoring required for adverse events and long-term efficacy, approval requires epoetin alfa to be prescribed by or in consultation with a physician who specializes in the condition being treated.

Automation: None.

RECOMMENDED AUTHORIZATION CRITERIA

Coverage of epoetin alfa is recommended in those who meet the following criteria:

FDA-Approved Indications

1. **Anemia in Patients with Chronic Kidney Disease who are on Dialysis.** Approve for 3 years.
2. **Anemia in Patients with Chronic Kidney Disease who are not on Dialysis.** Approve for 1 year if the patient meets the following criteria (A or B):
 - A) **Initial Therapy.** Approve if the patient meets the following criteria (i and ii):
 - i. Patient meets one of the following (a or b):
 - a) Patient is ≥ 18 years of age with a hemoglobin < 10.0 g/dL; OR
 - b) Patient is < 18 years of age with a hemoglobin ≤ 11.0 g/dL; AND
 - ii. Patient meets one of the following (a or b):
 - a) Patient is currently receiving iron therapy; OR
 - b) Patient has adequate iron stores according to the prescriber; OR
 - B) **Patient is currently receiving an erythropoiesis-stimulating agent (ESA).** Approve if the patient meets the following criteria (i and ii):

Note: Examples of erythropoiesis-stimulating agents include an epoetin alfa product (e.g., Epogen, Procrit, or Retacrit), a darbepoetin alfa product (e.g., Aranesp), or a methoxy polyethylene glycol-epoetin beta product (e.g., Mircera).

 - i. Patient meets one of the following (a or b):
 - a) Patient is ≥ 18 years of age with a hemoglobin < 11.5 g/dL; OR
 - b) Patient is < 18 years of age with a hemoglobin ≤ 12.0 g/dL; AND
 - ii. Patient meets one of the following (a or b):
 - a) Patient is currently receiving iron therapy; OR
 - b) Patient has adequate iron stores according to the prescriber.
3. **Anemia in Patients with Cancer due to Cancer Chemotherapy.** Approve for 6 months if the patient meets the following criteria (A or B):
 - A) **Initial Therapy.** Approve if the patient meets the following criteria (i, ii, and iii):
 - i. Patient has a hemoglobin < 10.0 g/dL; AND
 - ii. Patient is currently receiving myelosuppressive chemotherapy; AND
 - iii. Patient meets one of the following (a or b):
 - a) Patient is currently receiving iron therapy; OR
 - b) Patient has adequate iron stores according to the prescriber; OR
 - B) **Patient is currently receiving an erythropoiesis-stimulating agent (ESA).** Approve if the patient meets the following criteria (i, ii, and iii):

Note: Examples of erythropoiesis-stimulating agents include an epoetin alfa product (e.g., Epogen, Procrit, or Retacrit), or a darbepoetin alfa product (e.g., Aranesp).

 - i. Patient has a hemoglobin ≤ 12.0 g/dL; AND
 - ii. Patient is currently receiving myelosuppressive chemotherapy; AND
 - iii. Patient meets one of the following (a or b):
 - a) Patient is currently receiving iron therapy; OR
 - b) Patient has adequate iron stores according to the prescriber.
4. **Patients with Anemia and Human Immunodeficiency Virus who are Receiving Zidovudine.** Approve for 1 year if the patient meets the following criteria (A or B):
 - A) **Initial Therapy.** Approve if the patient meets the following criteria (i, ii, and iii):
 - i. Patient meets one of the following (a or b):
 - a) Patient has a hemoglobin < 10.0 g/dL; OR
 - b) Patient has a serum erythropoietin level is ≤ 500 mU/mL; AND

- ii. Patient is currently receiving zidovudine therapy; AND
 - iii. Patient meets one of the following (a or b):
 - a) Patient is currently receiving iron therapy; OR
 - b) Patient has adequate iron stores according to the prescriber; OR
 - B) Patient is currently receiving an erythropoiesis-stimulating agent (ESA).** Approve if the patient meets the following criteria (i, ii, and iii):
Note: Examples of erythropoiesis-stimulating agents include an epoetin alfa product (e.g., Epogen, Procrit, or Retacrit), or darbepoetin alfa product (e.g., Aranesp).
 - i. Patient has a hemoglobin ≤ 12.0 g/dL; AND
 - ii. Patient is currently receiving zidovudine therapy; AND
 - iii. Patient meets one of the following (a or b):
 - a) Patient is currently receiving iron therapy; OR
 - b) Patient has adequate iron stores according to the prescriber.
- 5. Reduction of Allogeneic Red Blood Cell Transfusions in Patients Undergoing Surgery.** Approve for 1 month if the patient meets the following criteria (A, B, C and D):
- A) Hemoglobin is ≤ 13.0 g/dL; AND
 - B) The surgery is elective, nonvascular and noncardiac; AND
 - C) Patient is not willing or able to donate autologous blood prior to surgery; AND
 - D) Patient meets one of the following (i or ii):
 - i. Patient is currently receiving iron therapy; OR
 - ii. Patient has adequate iron stores according to the prescriber.

Other Uses with Supportive Evidence

- 6. Anemia Associated with Myelodysplastic Syndrome (MDS).** Approve for 1 year if the patient meets the following criteria (A or B):
- A) Initial Therapy. Approve if the patient meets the following criteria (i, ii, iii, and iv):
 - i. Patient meets one of the following (a or b):
 - a) Patient has a hemoglobin < 10.0 g/dL; OR
 - b) Patient has a serum erythropoietin level ≤ 500 mU/mL; AND
 - ii. Patient is ≥ 18 years of age; AND
 - iii. The agent is prescribed by or in consultation with a hematologist or oncologist; AND
 - iv. Patient meets one of the following (a or b):
 - a) Patient is currently receiving iron therapy; OR
 - b) Patient has adequate iron stores according to the prescriber; OR
 - B) Patient is currently receiving an erythropoiesis-stimulating agent (ESA). Approve if the patient meets the following criteria (i, ii, iii, and iv):
Note: Examples of erythropoiesis-stimulating agents include an epoetin alfa product (e.g., Epogen, Procrit, or Retacrit), or a darbepoetin alfa product (e.g., Aranesp).
 - i. Patient has a hemoglobin ≤ 12.0 g/dL; AND
 - ii. Patient is ≥ 18 years of age; AND
 - iii. The agent is prescribed by or in consultation with a hematologist or oncologist; AND
 - iv. Patient meets one of the following (a or b):
 - a) Patient is currently receiving iron therapy; OR
 - b) Patient has adequate iron stores according to the prescriber.
- 7. Anemia Associated with Myelofibrosis.** Approve for the duration noted below if the patient meets the following criteria (A or B):

- A) Initial Therapy. Approve for 3 months if the patient meets the following criteria (i, ii, and iii):
- i. Patient meets one of the following (a or b):
 - a) Patient has a hemoglobin < 10.0 g/dL; OR
 - b) Patient has a serum erythropoietin level \leq 500 mU/mL; AND
 - ii. The agent is prescribed by or in consultation with a hematologist or oncologist; AND
 - iii. Patient meets one of the following (a or b):
 - a) Patient is currently receiving iron therapy; OR
 - b) Patient has adequate iron stores according to the prescriber; OR
- B) Patient is currently receiving an erythropoiesis-stimulating agent (ESA) therapy. Approve for 1 year if the patient meets the following criteria (i, ii, iii, and iv):
- Note: Examples of erythropoiesis-stimulating agents include an epoetin alfa product (e.g., Epogen, Procrit, or Retacrit), or a darbepoetin alfa product (e.g., Aranesp).
- i. Patient has a hemoglobin \leq 12.0 g/dL; AND
 - ii. The ESA therapy is prescribed by or in consultation with a hematologist or oncologist; AND
 - iii. Patient meets one of the following (a or b):
 - a) Patient is currently receiving iron therapy; OR
 - b) Patient has adequate iron stores according to the prescriber; AND
 - iv. According to the prescriber, patient has responded to therapy defined as hemoglobin \geq 10 g/dL or a hemoglobin increase of \geq 2 g/dL.

CONDITIONS NOT RECOMMENDED FOR APPROVAL

Coverage of Epoetin alfa is not recommended in the following situations:

1. **Anemia Associated with Cancer in Patients not Receiving Myelosuppressive Cancer Chemotherapy.** Epoetin alfa is not indicated in patients with cancer who are not receiving cancer chemotherapy.¹⁻³
2. **Anemia Associated with Acute Myelogenous Leukemias (AML), Chronic Myelogenous Leukemias (CML) or other Myeloid Cancers.** Epoetin alfa is indicated for use in non-myeloid cancers. AML and CML are examples of myeloid cancers.¹⁻³
3. **Anemia Associated with Radiotherapy in Cancer.** Epoetin alfa is not indicated for use in patients with cancer who are given only radiation therapy.¹⁻³
4. **To Enhance Athletic Performance.** Epoetin alfa is not recommended for approval because this indication is excluded from coverage in a typical pharmacy benefit.
5. **Anemia due to Acute Blood Loss.** Use of Epoetin alfa is not appropriate in these types of situations.
6. **Non-Anemic Patients (Hemoglobin [Hb] > 13.0 g/dL) Prior to Surgery.** Although studies have been done that involved non-anemic patients undergoing various surgeries receiving epoetin alfa preoperatively and sometimes postoperatively to prevent transfusions or subsequent anemia, the overall benefit of this therapy in those with relatively normal preoperative Hb level is questionable.
7. Coverage is not recommended for circumstances not listed in the Recommended Authorization Criteria. Criteria will be updated as new published data are available.

REFERENCES

1. Procrit[®] injection for intravenous or subcutaneous use [prescribing information]. Horsham, PA: Janssen; May 2020.
2. Epogen[®] injection for intravenous or subcutaneous use [prescribing information]. Thousand Oaks, CA: Amgen, Inc.; July 2018.
3. Retacrit[™] injection for subcutaneous or intravenous use [prescribing information]. New York, NY and Lake Forest, IL: Pfizer and Hospira; June 2020.
4. Kidney Disease: Improving Global Outcomes (KDIGO) Anemia Work Group. KDIGO Clinical Practice Guideline for Anemia in Chronic Kidney Disease. *Kidney Int.* 2012;2(Suppl):279-335.
5. The NCCN Myelodysplastic Syndromes Clinical Practice Guidelines in Oncology (version 2.2020 – February 28, 2020). © 2020 National Comprehensive Cancer Network, Inc. Available at: <http://www.nccn.org>. Accessed on June 29, 2020.
6. The NCCN Myeloproliferative Neoplasms Clinical Practice Guidelines in Oncology (version 1.2020 – May 21, 2020). © 2020 National Comprehensive Cancer Network, Inc. Available at: <http://www.nccn.org>. Accessed on June 29, 2020.