

## **Clinical Policy: Belimumab (Benlysta)**

Reference Number: CP.PHAR.88

Effective Date: 10.01.11

Last Review Date: 05.25

Line of Business: Commercial, HIM, Medicaid

[Coding Implications](#)  
[Revision Log](#)

See [Important Reminder](#) at the end of this policy for important regulatory and legal information.

### **Description**

Belimumab (Benlysta<sup>®</sup>) is B-lymphocyte stimulator specific inhibitor.

### **FDA Approved Indication(s)**

Benlysta is indicated for the treatment of:

- Patients aged 5 years and older with active, autoantibody-positive, systemic lupus erythematosus (SLE) who are receiving standard therapy.
- Patients aged 5 years and older with active lupus nephritis (LN) who are receiving standard therapy.

Limitation(s) of use: The efficacy of Benlysta has not been evaluated in patients with severe active central nervous system lupus. Use of Benlysta is not recommended in this situation.

### **Policy/Criteria**

*Provider must submit documentation (such as office chart notes, lab results or other clinical information) supporting that member has met all approval criteria.*

It is the policy of health plans affiliated with Centene Corporation<sup>®</sup> that Benlysta is **medically necessary** when the following criteria are met:

#### **I. Initial Approval Criteria**

##### **A. Systemic Lupus Erythematosus (must meet all):**

1. Diagnosis of SLE;
2. Prescribed by or in consultation with a rheumatologist;
3. Age  $\geq$  5 years;
4. Documentation confirms that member is positive for an SLE autoantibody (e.g., anti-nuclear antibody (ANA), anti-double-stranded DNA (anti-dsDNA), anti-Smith (anti-Sm), anti-ribonucleoprotein (anti-RNP), anti-Ro/SSA, anti-La/SSB, antiphospholipid antibody);
5. Prescribed in combination with standard therapy for SLE that includes one or more of the following agents, unless all agents are contraindicated: glucocorticoids (e.g., prednisone), antimalarial (e.g., hydroxychloroquine or chloroquine), non-biologic immunosuppressants (e.g., azathioprine, methotrexate, mycophenolate);
6. Benlysta is not prescribed concurrently with Lupkynis<sup>®</sup> or a biologic (e.g., rituximab, Saphnelo<sup>®</sup>);
7. Request meets one of the following (a or b):
  - a. IV: Dose does not exceed 10 mg/kg per dose every 2 weeks for the first 3 doses and every 4 weeks thereafter;

- b. SC (i or ii):
  - i. For pediatric members weighing  $\geq 40$  kg and adults: 200 mg once weekly;
  - ii. For pediatric members weighing 15 kg to  $< 40$ kg: 200mg once every 2 weeks.

**Approval duration:**

**Medicaid/HIM** – 6 months

**Commercial** – 6 months or to member’s renewal date, whichever is longer

**B. Lupus Nephritis (must meet all):**

1. Diagnosis of LN with kidney biopsy that confirms one of the following (a, b, or c):
  - a. LN Class III (focal);
  - b. LN Class IV (diffuse segmental or global);
  - c. LN Class V (membranous);
2. Prescribed by or in consultation with a nephrologist or rheumatologist;
3. Age  $\geq 5$  years;
4. Member has a confirmed diagnosis of systemic lupus erythematosus;
5. Prescribed in combination with standard therapy for SLE that includes one or more of the following agents, unless all agents are contraindicated: glucocorticoids (e.g., prednisone), antimalarial (e.g., hydroxychloroquine or chloroquine), non-biologic immunosuppressants (e.g., azathioprine, cyclophosphamide, methotrexate, mycophenolate);
6. Benlysta is not prescribed concurrently with Lupkynis<sup>®</sup> or a biologic (e.g., Saphnelo<sup>®</sup>, rituximab);
7. Request meets one of the following (a or b):
  - a. IV: Dose does not exceed 10 mg/kg per dose every 2 weeks for the first 3 doses and every 4 weeks thereafter;
  - b. SC in adults ( $\geq 18$  years of age): Dose does not exceed 400 mg per week SC for the first 4 doses\*, then 200 mg/week SC.

*\*Loading doses not permitted if previously receiving Benlysta for treatment of SLE*

**Approval duration:**

**Medicaid/HIM** – 6 months

**Commercial** – 6 months or to member’s renewal date, whichever is longer

**C. Other diagnoses/indications (must meet 1 or 2):**

1. If this drug has recently (within the last 6 months) undergone a label change (e.g., newly approved indication, age expansion, new dosing regimen) that is not yet reflected in this policy, refer to one of the following policies (a or b):
  - a. For drugs on the formulary (commercial, health insurance marketplace) or PDL (Medicaid), the no coverage criteria policy for the relevant line of business: CP.CPA.190 for commercial, HIM.PA.33 for health insurance marketplace, and CP.PMN.255 for Medicaid; or
  - b. For drugs NOT on the formulary (commercial, health insurance marketplace) or PDL (Medicaid), the non-formulary policy for the relevant line of business: CP.CPA.190 for commercial, HIM.PA.103 for health insurance marketplace, and CP.PMN.16 for Medicaid; or
2. If the requested use (e.g., diagnosis, age, dosing regimen) is NOT specifically listed under section III (Diagnoses/Indications for which coverage is NOT authorized) AND

criterion 1 above does not apply, refer to the off-label use policy for the relevant line of business: CP.CPA.09 for commercial, HIM.PA.154 for health insurance marketplace, and CP.PMN.53 for Medicaid.

## II. Continued Therapy

### A. All Indications in Section I (must meet all):

1. Member meets one of the following (a or b):
  - a. Currently receiving medication via Centene benefit or member has previously met initial approval criteria;
  - b. Member is currently receiving medication and is enrolled in a state and product with continuity of care regulations (*refer to state specific addendums for CC.PHARM.03A and CC.PHARM.03B*);
2. Member meets one of the following (a or b):
  - a. For SLE: Member is responding positively to therapy;
  - b. For LN: Member is responding positively to therapy as evidenced by one of the following (i, ii, or iii):
    - i. Reduced level of proteinuria measured by UPCR  $\leq 0.5$  mg/mg from baseline with low dose steroids (e.g., prednisone);
    - ii. No reduction from baseline in eGFR of greater than 20% with low dose steroids (e.g., prednisone);
    - iii. eGFR  $\geq 60$  mL/min/1.73 m<sup>2</sup> with low dose steroids (e.g., prednisone);
3. Prescribed in combination with standard therapy for SLE that includes one or more of the following agents, unless all agents are contraindicated: glucocorticoids (e.g., prednisone), antimalarial (e.g., hydroxychloroquine or chloroquine), non-biologic immunosuppressants (e.g., azathioprine, methotrexate, mycophenolate);
4. Benlysta is not prescribed concurrently with Lupkynis<sup>®</sup> or a biologic (e.g., Saphnelo<sup>®</sup>, rituximab);
5. If request is for a dose increase, request meets one of the following (a or b):
  - a. IV: Dose does not exceed 10 mg/kg per every 2 weeks for the first 3 doses and every 4 weeks thereafter;
  - b. SC (i or ii):
    - i. SLE (a or b):
      - a) For pediatric members weighing  $\geq 40$  kg and adults: 200 mg once weekly;
      - b) For pediatric members weighing 15 kg to  $< 40$ kg: 200 mg once every 2 weeks;
    - ii. LN in adults ( $\geq 18$  years of age): 200 mg per week.

### Approval duration:

**Medicaid/HIM** – 12 months

**Commercial** – 6 months or to member's renewal date, whichever is longer

### B. Other diagnoses/indications (must meet 1 or 2):

1. If this drug has recently (within the last 6 months) undergone a label change (e.g., newly approved indication, age expansion, new dosing regimen) that is not yet reflected in this policy, refer to one of the following policies (a or b):
  - a. For drugs on the formulary (commercial, health insurance marketplace) or PDL (Medicaid), the no coverage criteria policy for the relevant line of business:

- CP.CPA.190 for commercial, HIM.PA.33 for health insurance marketplace, and CP.PMN.255 for Medicaid; or
- b. For drugs NOT on the formulary (commercial, health insurance marketplace) or PDL (Medicaid), the non-formulary policy for the relevant line of business: CP.CPA.190 for commercial, HIM.PA.103 for health insurance marketplace, and CP.PMN.16 for Medicaid; or
2. If the requested use (e.g., diagnosis, age, dosing regimen) is NOT specifically listed under section III (Diagnoses/Indications for which coverage is NOT authorized) AND criterion 1 above does not apply, refer to the off-label use policy for the relevant line of business: CP.CPA.09 for commercial, HIM.PA.154 for health insurance marketplace, and CP.PMN.53 for Medicaid.

**III. Diagnoses/Indications for which coverage is NOT authorized:**

- A. Non-FDA approved indications, which are not addressed in this policy, unless there is sufficient documentation of efficacy and safety according to the off label use policies – CP.CPA.09 for commercial, HIM.PA.154 for health insurance marketplace, and CP.PMN.53 for Medicaid, or evidence of coverage documents.
- B. Autoantibody negative SLE.

**IV. Appendices/General Information**

*Appendix A: Abbreviation/Acronym Key*

ANA: anti-nuclear antibody	FDA: Food and Drug Administration
Anti-dsDNA: anti-double-stranded DNA	LN: lupus nephritis
Anti-Sm: anti-Smith	SC: subcutaneous
DNA: deoxyribonucleic acid	SLE: systemic lupus erythematosus

*Appendix B: Therapeutic Alternatives*

*This table provides a listing of preferred alternative therapy recommended in the approval criteria. The drugs listed here may not be a formulary agent for all relevant lines of business and may require prior authorization.*

Drug Name	Dosing Regimen	Dose Limit/ Maximum Dose
glucocorticoids (e.g., prednisone)	Varies	Varies
antimalarial agents (e.g., hydroxychloroquine, chloroquine)	Varies	Varies
non-biologic immunosuppressants (e.g., azathioprine, methotrexate, mycophenolate)*	Varies	Varies

*Therapeutic alternatives are listed as Brand name<sup>®</sup> (generic) when the drug is available by brand name only and generic (Brand name<sup>®</sup>) when the drug is available by both brand and generic.*

*\* For LN, cyclophosphamide is also an acceptable immunosuppressant.*

*Appendix C: Contraindications/Boxed Warnings*

- Contraindication(s): previous anaphylaxis to belimumab
- Boxed warning(s): none reported

*Appendix D: Autoantibody Positive Versus Negative SLE*

Only one of the five Benlysta pivotal trials included patients with autoantibody negative SLE; no significant differences between any of the Benlysta groups and the placebo group were observed. However, on further analysis Benlysta appeared to offer benefit to a subgroup of autoantibody positive patients. Benlysta’s efficacy was confirmed in the remaining four trials which included only autoantibody positive patients. Because of the apparent lack of efficacy in autoantibody negative patients and because the FDA has approved Benlysta in only autoantibody positive patients, Benlysta coverage will not be authorized for patients with autoantibody negative SLE.

**V. Dosage and Administration**

Indication	Dosing Regimen	Maximum Dose
SLE, LN	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• IV:                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ 10 mg/kg at 2-week intervals for the first 3 doses and at 4-week intervals thereafter</li> </ul> </li> <li>• SC:                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ For SLE:                                     <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Pediatric patients weighing ≥ 40kg and adults: 200 mg once weekly</li> <li>▪ Pediatric patients weighing &lt; 40kg: 200 mg once every 2 weeks</li> </ul> </li> <li>○ For LN (adults only):                                     <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ 400 mg once weekly for 4 doses, then 200 mg once weekly</li> </ul> </li> </ul> </li> <li>• Transition from IV to SC therapy*:                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ May transition from IV to SC therapy any time after the first 2 IV doses; administer first SC dose 1 to 2 weeks after the last IV dose</li> </ul> </li> </ul> <p><i>*Not applicable for pediatrics with LN</i></p>	IV: 10 mg/kg/dose SC: 200 mg/week

**VI. Product Availability**

- Single-dose vial: 120 mg and 400 mg lyophilized powder for reconstitution
- Single-dose prefilled autoinjector/syringe: 200 mg/mL

**VII. References**

1. Benlysta Prescribing Information. Research Triangle Park, NC: GlaxoSmithKline; June 2024. Available at <http://www.benlysta.com>. Accessed January 16, 2025.
2. Kidney Disease: Improving Global Outcomes (KDIGO) Lupus Nephritis Work Group. KDIGO 2024 Clinical Practice Guideline for the management of lupus nephritis. *Kidney Int.* 2024;105(1S):S1-S69.
3. Fanouriakis A, Kostopoulou M, Alunno A, et al. 2019 update of the EULAR recommendations for the management of systemic lupus erythematosus. *Ann Rheum Dis.* 2019; ;78(6):736-745.

4. Fanouriakis A, Kostopoulou M, Andersen J, et al. EULAR recommendations for the management of systemic lupus erythematosus: 2023 update. *Ann Rheum Dis.* 2024;83(1):1529.
5. Petri M, Orbai AM, Alarcón GS, et al. Derivation and validation of the Systemic Lupus International Collaborating Clinics classification criteria for systemic lupus erythematosus. *Arthritis Rheum.* 2012; 64:2677.
6. Weening J, Vivette D, Schwartz M, et al. The Classification of Glomerulonephritis in Systemic Lupus Erythematosus Revisited. *JASN* February 2004, 15(2)241-250.
7. Gordon C, Amissah-Arthur MB, Gayed M, et al. The British Society for Rheumatology guideline for the management of systemic lupus erythematosus in adults. *Rheumatology.* 2018;57:e1-e45.
8. Furie R, Rovin B, Houssiau F, et al. Two-year randomized, controlled trial of belimumab in lupus nephritis. *N Engl J Med.* 2020;383(12):1117-1128.

**Coding Implications**

Codes referenced in this clinical policy are for informational purposes only. Inclusion or exclusion of any codes does not guarantee coverage. Providers should reference the most up-to-date sources of professional coding guidance prior to the submission of claims for reimbursement of covered services.

HCPCS Codes	Description
J0490	Injection, belimumab, 10 mg

Reviews, Revisions, and Approvals	Date	P&T Approval Date
RT4: added criteria to reflect new indication for lupus nephritis in adults and aligned with Lupkynis (voclosporin); updated reference for HIM off-label use to HIM.PA.154 (replaces HIM.PHAR.21).	02.16.21	05.21
Added IV dosing option for LN per FDA labeling.	06.08.21	
Added cyclophosphamide as allowed standard of care treatment for LN; clarified dosing for transitioning from IV to SC.	07.22.21	
2Q 2022 annual review: no significant changes; references reviewed and updated.	02.04.22	05.22
RT4: updated FDA approved indications to expand age down to 5 years of age for LN; updated LN dosing for SC to apply only in adults; revised limitations of use to align with prescribing information. Template changes applied to other diagnoses/indications and continued therapy section.	08.22.22	
2Q 2023 annual review: no significant changes; references reviewed and updated.	02.08.23	05.23
2Q 2024 annual review: added exclusion for concurrent treatment with Lupkynis or a biologic for all indications; references reviewed and updated.	02.22.24	05.24

Reviews, Revisions, and Approvals	Date	P&T Approval Date
RT4: updated SLE dosing for SC to reflect expanded indication to patients 5+ years old	05.27.24	
2Q 2025 annual review: no significant changes; clarified SLE SC dosing for weight ≥ 40 kg applies to pediatric members; references reviewed and updated.	02.26.25	05.25

**Important Reminder**

This clinical policy has been developed by appropriately experienced and licensed health care professionals based on a review and consideration of currently available generally accepted standards of medical practice; peer-reviewed medical literature; government agency/program approval status; evidence-based guidelines and positions of leading national health professional organizations; views of physicians practicing in relevant clinical areas affected by this clinical policy; and other available clinical information. The Health Plan makes no representations and accepts no liability with respect to the content of any external information used or relied upon in developing this clinical policy. This clinical policy is consistent with standards of medical practice current at the time that this clinical policy was approved. “Health Plan” means a health plan that has adopted this clinical policy and that is operated or administered, in whole or in part, by Centene Management Company, LLC, or any of such health plan’s affiliates, as applicable.

The purpose of this clinical policy is to provide a guide to medical necessity, which is a component of the guidelines used to assist in making coverage decisions and administering benefits. It does not constitute a contract or guarantee regarding payment or results. Coverage decisions and the administration of benefits are subject to all terms, conditions, exclusions, and limitations of the coverage documents (e.g., evidence of coverage, certificate of coverage, policy, contract of insurance, etc.), as well as to state and federal requirements and applicable Health Plan-level administrative policies and procedures.

This clinical policy is effective as of the date determined by the Health Plan. The date of posting may not be the effective date of this clinical policy. This clinical policy may be subject to applicable legal and regulatory requirements relating to provider notification. If there is a discrepancy between the effective date of this clinical policy and any applicable legal or regulatory requirement, the requirements of law and regulation shall govern. The Health Plan retains the right to change, amend or withdraw this clinical policy, and additional clinical policies may be developed and adopted as needed, at any time.

This clinical policy does not constitute medical advice, medical treatment, or medical care. It is not intended to dictate to providers how to practice medicine. Providers are expected to exercise professional medical judgment in providing the most appropriate care, and are solely responsible for the medical advice and treatment of members. This clinical policy is not intended to recommend treatment for members. Members should consult with their treating physician in connection with diagnosis and treatment decisions.

Providers referred to in this clinical policy are independent contractors who exercise independent judgment and over whom the Health Plan has no control or right of control. Providers are not agents or employees of the Health Plan.

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**Note: For Medicaid members**, when state Medicaid coverage provisions conflict with the coverage provisions in this clinical policy, state Medicaid coverage provisions take precedence. Please refer to the state Medicaid manual for any coverage provisions pertaining to this clinical policy.

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