

TennCare Policy Manual	Section: Benefits
Policy No: BEN 06-002 (Rev. 2)	Date: February 8, 2023

Coverage of Dental Services in a Hospital Emergency Department

Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to clarify the circumstances in which dental-related services for a TennCare member may be considered a covered medical service when the member presents at a hospital's emergency department.

Policy

The Emergency Medical Treatment and Labor Act (EMTALA)¹ states that if an individual comes to a hospital's emergency department, the hospital must provide an appropriate medical screening examination within its emergency department's capability, including ancillary services routinely available to the emergency department, to determine whether an emergency medical condition exists. If this individual is a TennCare member, the member's managed care organization (MCO) is required to pay for this examination.

Dental Emergencies:

If a TennCare member presents at a hospital's emergency department with a dental problem and the hospital determines that an EMTALA screen needs to be done, the member's MCO is required to pay for the EMTALA screen. If the screen determines that the individual does have a medical emergency (e.g., cellulitis or sepsis secondary to a dental problem), the MCO must also pay for any treatment necessary to stabilize the patient's condition. The origin of the medical condition (e.g., dental abscess) is irrelevant, and the MCO may not deny payment of the claim on this basis. Once the medical emergency is resolved, claims for any related dental services that may be needed (e.g., extraction of abscessed tooth) should be submitted to the dental benefits manager rather than the MCO. If the hospital emergency department determines that the presenting condition does not constitute a medical emergency, but does require medical treatment, the MCO may—at their discretion and depending on their policies regarding prior authorization of nonemergency treatment—refer the member to outpatient treatment for which the MCO will pay.

Offices of Primary Responsibility

Dental Benefits Manager
Office of the Chief Medical Officer

Additional Reading

42 CFR § 438.114(a)

http://www.ecfr.gov/cgi-bin/text-idx?SID=ca3c950925ff3267fcb9dc007d959441&mc=true&node=pt42.4.438&rgn=div5#se42.4.438_1114

¹ The EMTALA statute is [42 USC § 1395dd](#), with implementing regulations at [42 CFR § 489.24](#).

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TennCare Rules 1200-13-13-.04(1)(b)(5) and 1200-13-14-.04(1)(b)(5)
<https://publications.tnsosfiles.com/rules/1200/1200-13/1200-13.htm>

MCO Statewide Contract

<https://www.tn.gov/content/dam/tn/tenncare/documents/MCOStatewideContract.pdf>

Original: 05/10/06: KML
Revision 1: 01/04/08: KML
Reviewed / No changes: 12/2008: KML
Reviewed / References and hyperlinks updated: 01/20/11: SLM
Hyperlinks updated: 05/04/11: SLM
Hyperlinks updated: 06/22/14: AY
Revision 2: 02/08/23: RB