

Tackling the Top-Five: Population-based Vitamin D Screenings

WHAT



Population-based screening for vitamin D deficiency is rarely necessary and a commonly overused blood test, based on a Choosing Wisely recommendation from the American Society of Clinical Pathology.

WHY

- Up to 90 percent of Vitamin D tests may be clinically useless, as findings are not needed to guide care (vitamin D screening is a high “waste-index” service).
- Only patients with a handful of higher-risk clinical conditions should receive this service, including osteoporosis and kidney disease.
- Serious deficiency is rare and supplements and sun exposure can help, if suspected.
- Vitamin D screening has a high “waste-index” (commonly used wastefully when used).

BURDEN

- An estimated 6.3 million Vitamin D tests that were not clinically indicated were performed nationally in 2014, at an estimated cost of more than \$800 million.
- Excellus measured \$33 million in wasteful screenings in upstate New York.
- Virginia measured approximately \$24 million in wasteful Vitamin D screenings.
- Extra tests lead to extra tests and treatment that are not captured in these estimates.

How to measure:

- [Specifications for claims-based analyses](#) to measure wasteful utilization and spending in-house, based on previous studies to measure Top Five.
- [The Milliman MedInsight Health Waste Calculator](#)

Clinical Evidence and Guidelines

- [Journal of the American Medical Association](#)
- [National Institutes of Health](#)
- [Choosing Wisely](#)
- [US Preventive Services Task Force](#)

Reading list:

- [Excellus infographic on vitamin D screenings](#)
- [Washington state report on low-value care spending](#)
- [Virginia report on low-value care spending](#)
- [Most People Don't Need Vitamin D Tests](#)

Barriers to action: vitamin D blood tests are commonly bundled together with other lab tests, regardless of the clinical relevance, and are therefore billed together.

Counter-points: Vitamin D is important for a person’s body to absorb calcium and promote healthy bone growth; certain skeletal diseases would indicate a necessary vitamin D test. If there is a suspected deficiency, cheap supplements and increased sun exposure will be helpful without the need for a blood test.

Case studies and model language:

- [Cigna created a medical policy](#) to reduce population-based Vitamin D screening. Cigna plans to release a report on reduced utilization and appeals rate in 2019.
- [Excellus](#) created a similar medical policy.
- [RFI language to discuss low-value care with your TPA or carrier.](#)