

**Programme Title: Clinical Policies**

Clinical Policies aim to prevent avoidable harm to patients by only offering treatments on the NHS that are evidence-based, clinically safe and effective, as well as cost effective and a good use of resources.

**Cambridgeshire, Peterborough, Bedfordshire, Luton, Milton Keynes and Hertfordshire**

<b>Title of policy and version:</b>	Open and Upright Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI) Scans
<b>Commissioning position:</b>	Criteria Based Access with prior approval
<b>Scope:</b>	<p><b>Covers</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Patients requiring MRI with claustrophobia and/or obesity</li> </ul> <p><b>Out of Scope:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• This guidance does not apply to open/ upright MRI scans required for:</li> <li>• Patients undergoing investigation for cancer</li> </ul> <p>AND</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• True medical emergencies (managed via emergency departments)</li> </ul> <p>AND</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Urgent or emergency referrals to rule out Cauda Equina Syndrome As per GIRFT guidance - <a href="#">National-Suspected-Cauda-Equina-Pathway-February-2026.pdf</a></li> </ul>
<b>Cohort:</b>	Patients of all ages requiring MRI
<b>Other relevant Clinical Policy</b>	None

<b>Treatments routinely funded:</b>	<p>Open MRI scanning is not routinely available in the NHS. Patients should only be referred to a private scanner when prior authorisation has been provided for one of the below two indications. For both instances, if the radiology team recommend that an open MRI scan is required, the patient will be referred back to their referring clinician where a funding request can be made on behalf of the patient for an open MRI. Wherever possible, wide-bore MRI scanners should be attempted first and it should be noted that the National Back Pain Pathway allows for a CT scan</p>
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when MRI is contraindicated or not tolerated in clinically appropriate cases.

Category 1 – Claustrophobia:

All patients must have attempted a conventional MRI in the first instance before being considered for referral to an open MRI scanner. The need for MRI, as well as the possibility of using other imaging modalities (such as CT scan), should also be considered prior to making a referral.

In the first instance all referrals for MRI citing claustrophobia will be reviewed by a Senior MRI Radiographer. The radiology department can arrange a telephone call or appointment with any patient that has concerns regarding MRI scanning to discuss how fears may be managed. This may include using wider equipment, coaching of the patient over the 2-way intercom between sequences or allowing extra time for reassurance. It may also be possible to alter positioning if appropriate, provide of a choice of music or eye masks, allow patients to bring a friend or relative with them or have sedation or short general anaesthetic where appropriate.

**Category 1: Criteria for Open MRI referral for patients living with severe claustrophobia**

Funding approval will be considered if **ALL** of the following can be demonstrated:

1. Either:

- The patient has attempted but failed a conventional MRI scan within the last 24 months due to claustrophobia

OR

- The patient has attempted but failed a conventional MRI scan longer than 24 months ago due to claustrophobia, and the patient has had a telephone consultation or appointment with a radiographer regarding the current MRI referral to discuss how fears may be managed but are still unable to attempt another conventional MRI scan

2. Confirmation that all other imaging modalities are unsuitable, and that an open MRI scan is sufficient for purpose.

Note: the funding request would need to evidence:

- the need for an MRI scan
- the date of the failed scan
- the recommendations from the Senior MRI Radiographer

Category 2 - Patient Size:

The size of a patient and the restriction of the MRI scanner tunnel will vary depending on the patient and the circumstances. Some patients may be living with obesity but would still be suitable for a conventional closed MRI.

**Category 2: Criteria for Open MRI referral for patients living with obesity**

Funding approval will be considered if **ALL** of the following can be demonstrated:

1. The patient has a recently recorded BMI
2. The patient has attended the radiology department and has been formally assessed by the radiology service for suitability
3. Confirmation that all other imaging modalities are unsuitable, and that an open MRI scan is sufficient for purpose

<b>Treatments not funded:</b>	<b>Upright (or standing MRI)</b>  Upright (or standing MRI) scanning is not routinely available in the NHS. Patients should not be referred to a private scanner unless prior authorisation has been provided via the IFR route
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**Rationale:**

Magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) is a medical imaging technique that may be used to help diagnose or monitor treatment for a variety of conditions. Open MRI machines are not as enclosed as the traditional MRI machines. Whilst traditional MRI machines consist of a circular magnet with a hollow centre, open MRI machines only have magnets at the top and bottom of the machine, leaving it open on all four sides. Upright (or standing MRI) is a type of vertically open MRI. It should be noted that due to their low field strength, open/ upright MRIs may not be suitable for some indications, they also take more time. The evidence base for use of open MRI is limited. Due to increasing demand for MRI scanning as a key part of care pathways, more expensive open and upright MRI should be reserved for patients who would be most likely to benefit.

**IFR Statement Clinical Exceptionality:**

Where a patient does not meet the policy criteria or the intervention is not normally funded by the NHS, an application for clinical exceptionality can be considered via the ICB's Individual Funding Request (IFR) Policy and Process.

<b>Coding list:</b>
OPCS Procedure codes:
U01.2 Magnetic resonance imaging of whole body
U05.2 Magnetic resonance imaging of head
U05.5 Magnetic resonance imaging of spine
U07.2 Magnetic resonance imaging of chest
U08.5 Magnetic resonance imaging of abdomen
U09.3 Magnetic resonance imaging of pelvis
U13.3 Magnetic resonance imaging of bone
U21.1 Magnetic resonance imaging NEC
U37.1 Magnetic resonance imaging of kidneys
Note: OPCS codes relate to conventional MRI scans. No OPCS codes are available specifically for open MRI scans.

Policy document record:	Diagnostics - Open and Upright Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI) Scans v1.0
Ratification date:	1st April 2026
Record of significant change:	v1.0 – New harmonised policy for Central East ICB, based on predecessor ICB policies (C&P, HWE, BLMK)
Planned review date:	TBC

**Document Environmental Impact statement:**  
Neutral environmental impact. Policy to be shared and stored electronically where possible; if printed, use double-sided printing and minimal copies.