



October 21, 2013

Non-Insured Health Benefits (NIHB) Program Update

Informing First Nations and Inuit clients, as well as their representative organizations, about their coverage and NIHB policy changes

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New NIHB Coverage of Blood Glucose Test Strips

Testing blood sugar at home using test strips and a meter is common practice for many people with diabetes. However, research has shown that self-monitoring of blood glucose may have limited benefits for many clients who do not take insulin to manage their diabetes.

Based on best evidence, including recommendations from the [Canadian Agency for Drugs and Technologies in Health \(CADTH\)](#), NIHB is introducing changes to the number of blood glucose test strips it will cover for clients with diabetes. The new policy bases the number of test strips on the medications the client is using to manage their diabetes. There will be no change in coverage for clients on insulin. However, clients managing their diabetes only through oral medication and/or diet and lifestyle changes will see their coverage for test strips reduced. NIHB recognizes this is a change in practice for some individuals. The goal is to ensure clients continue to have access to the test strips they need, while encouraging proper blood glucose testing.

This policy change is being introduced in a phased approach, beginning with the Atlantic region on November 4, 2013 and Ontario region on January 6, 2014, with other regions to follow later in 2014. The NIHB Program will provide an update on specific implementation dates in each region when the information becomes available.

NIHB recognizes that there may be circumstances that may require some clients to test more frequently than is normally recommended. Clients are encouraged to speak with their health care providers if they have questions or concerns about how to monitor their blood glucose levels.

New NIHB Coverage of Blood Glucose Test Strips

The number of test strips that will be covered by the NIHB Program will depend on the client’s medical treatment:

| Diabetes Treatment History | Number of test strips allowed | How often can clients test within the strip allowance? |
|---|-------------------------------|--|
| Clients managing diabetes with insulin | 500 / 100 days | 5 times per day |
| Clients managing diabetes with diabetes medication with high risk of causing low blood sugar* | 400 / 365 days | Once daily |
| Clients managing diabetes with diabetes medication with low risk of causing low blood sugar† | 200 / 365 days | 3 to 4 times per week |
| Clients managing diabetes with diet/lifestyle therapy only (no insulin or diabetes medications) | 200 / 365 days | 3 to 4 times per week |

* Examples include: glyburide, gliclazide (Diamicon®) and Starlix®.

† Examples include metformin, Glucobay®, Actos®, Onglyza®, Januvia®, Trajenta® and Victoza®.

Additional Information About Blood Glucose Testing

Clients are encouraged to read *“A Guide for NIHB Clients on Blood Glucose Test Strips,”* adapted from CADTH, attached to this newsletter. This brochure is also available via CADTH’s website: http://www.cadth.ca/media/pdf/smbg-nb_eng.pdf

Questions and Answers About NIHB’s Coverage of Blood Glucose Test Strips

1. Why did NIHB implement this change now?

This change is based on best evidence and recommendations from the Canadian Agency for Drugs and Technologies in Health (CADTH). It is intended to encourage proper blood glucose testing in clients to ensure the best outcomes.

2. What is NIHB’s current policy and what has changed?

Currently, the NIHB Program has a quantity limit of five test strips per day per client, regardless of whether or not the client is receiving insulin therapy. The new policy bases the number of test strips on the medications client is using to manage their diabetes.

3. *I'm taking insulin to manage my diabetes. Will I be able to have the same number of test strips as I did before under this new policy?*

Yes. The number of test strips covered for individuals taking insulin to manage their diabetes does not change.

4. *Will I be eligible for coverage of test strips if I'm not on insulin?*

Yes, clients will be eligible for coverage even if they are not on insulin. However, the number of test strips will be based on the medications the client is using to manage their diabetes. The goal is to ensure clients continue to have access to the test strips they need, while encouraging proper blood glucose testing.

5. *When will this change impact me?*

This policy change is being introduced in a phased approach, beginning with the Atlantic region on November 4, 2013 and Ontario region on January 6, 2014, with other regions to follow later in 2014. The NIHB Program will provide an update on specific implementation dates in each region when the information becomes available.

6. *I have coverage under another plan for blood glucose test strips. What will NIHB cover if I already have coverage under another plan?*

NIHB will coordinate coverage with your alternate health plan coverage up to the maximum allowed quantity.

7. *What if I require more frequent testing, due to my medical needs?*

There may be circumstances that require more frequent testing. For example, when the client:

- Develops pregnancy-related diabetes, or is already diabetic and becomes pregnant
- Has a job where low blood glucose must be strictly avoided (e.g. airline pilot, air-traffic controller)
- Is experiencing an acute illness or infection that is affecting blood glucose control over a sustained period of time
- Has not been meeting targets for blood glucose control for three months or longer
- Is starting new medications, like steroids, that affect blood glucose control
- Is a child or teenager under the age of 21 who uses insulin

Other medical reasons will be considered on a case-by-case basis. NIHB clients are encouraged to speak with their health care providers if they have questions or concerns about how to monitor their blood glucose levels.

Client Inquiries

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| Alberta | 1-780-495-3302 Toll-free: 1-800-232-7301 |
| Atlantic | 1-902-426-2656 Toll-free: 1-800-565-3294 |
| British Columbia | First Nations Health Authority Toll-free: 1-800-317-7878 |
| Manitoba | Toll-free: 1-800-665-8507 |
| Northwest Territories/Nunavut | Toll-free: 1-888-332-9222 |
| Ontario | Toll-free: 1-800-640-0642 |
| Quebec | 1-514-283-1575 Toll-free: 1-877-483-1575 |
| Saskatchewan | Toll free 1-866-885-3933 |
| Yukon | Toll-free: 1-866-362-6717 |