**Variant 1:** Suspected lower extremity deep vein thrombosis. Initial imaging.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Procedure</th>
<th>Appropriateness Category</th>
<th>Relative Radiation Level</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>US duplex Doppler lower extremity</td>
<td>Usually Appropriate</td>
<td>O</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CT venography lower extremity and pelvis with IV contrast</td>
<td>May Be Appropriate</td>
<td>☢☢☢</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MR venography lower extremity and pelvis without and with IV contrast</td>
<td>May Be Appropriate</td>
<td>O</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MR venography lower extremity and pelvis without IV contrast</td>
<td>May Be Appropriate</td>
<td>O</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catheter venography pelvis and lower extremity</td>
<td>Usually Not Appropriate</td>
<td>☢☢☢</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Introduction/Background

Lower extremity deep venous thrombosis (DVT) has an estimated annual incidence of approximately 5 per 10,000 in the general population, with the incidence increasing with advancing age [1]. DVT typically starts distally below the knee but can extend proximally above the knee and potentially result in life-threatening pulmonary embolism. Pulmonary embolism can occur in 50% to 60% of patients with untreated DVT, with an associated mortality rate of 25% to 30% [2,3]. See the ACR Appropriateness Criteria® topic on “Suspected Pulmonary Embolism” [4] for further details. Mortality associated with venous thromboembolism is higher in patients who present with pulmonary embolism or have advanced age, cancer, or underlying cardiovascular disease [5].

It is clinically important to determine the location and extent of DVT [3,6]. DVT that is limited to the infrapopliteal calf veins (ie, below-the-knee or distal DVT) often resolves spontaneously and is rarely associated with pulmonary embolism or other adverse outcomes [3,7,8]. Above-the-knee or proximal DVT, on the other hand, is strongly associated with an increased risk for pulmonary embolism. The treatment of choice for DVT is anticoagulation to reduce the risk of DVT extension, recurrent DVT, pulmonary embolism, and post-thrombotic syndrome. It is generally accepted that the benefits of anticoagulation therapy in patients with proximal DVT outweigh its risks [3,6]. Because below-the-knee DVT rarely results in pulmonary embolism, the role of anticoagulation therapy in patients with distal DVT remains controversial [3,6,9]. However, because one-sixth of patients with distal DVT experience extension of thrombus proximally above the knee, serial imaging to exclude proximal DVT extension is recommended at 1 week if anticoagulation therapy is not initiated at presentation [3,6]. This issue is complicated by the variability in evaluation for below-the-knee DVT as part of a routine examination.

Classically, a patient with symptomatic lower extremity DVT presents with either local pain or tenderness or with edema and swelling of the lower extremity. However, approximately one-third of patients with DVT do not have any symptoms [10]. Often, symptoms are not apparent until there is involvement above the knee [3]. The clinical diagnosis of DVT using clinical risk-stratification scores (eg, Wells score) alone has, therefore, been less than ideal [10]. Wells et al [11,12] suggested using a clinical DVT-prediction score (aka, Wells score) in combination with a blood evaluation for plasma D-dimer, a degradation product of cross-linked fibrin that is elevated during thromboembolic events. DVT is unlikely if the clinical prediction score is low and the D-dimer levels are normal [3,6,10-12]. However, the highly variable nature of DVT presentation, numerous potential pathologic mimics for DVT, and variations in D-dimer assay performances in certain populations limit the reliability of diagnosis solely on the clinical DVT prediction score and D-dimer testing. DVT screening of select high-risk patients in intensive care units because of prolonged immobility has also shown benefit [13,14]. Lower extremity ultrasound (US) has also been included in an algorithm for the workup of patients who have a fever of unknown origin after more common causes have been excluded [15,16].

Imaging is frequently required to definitively exclude DVT and properly document the extent of venous thrombosis, which is critical for proper therapeutic management of DVT. Moreover, the clinical-prediction score

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ACR Appropriateness Criteria®

Suspected Lower Extremity DVT
and D-dimer level are often unreliable for diagnosing recurrent DVT and are not useful for diagnosing alternative conditions, such as an intact or ruptured Baker cyst, cellulitis, lymphedema, chronic venous disease, and various musculoskeletal disorders that can clinically mimic DVT.

**Discussion of Procedures by Variant**

**Variant 1: Suspected lower extremity deep vein thrombosis. Initial imaging.**

**Catheter Venography Pelvis and Lower Extremity**

Contrast catheter venography is the historic and de facto gold standard for diagnosing DVT [3,6,10,11]. With this technique, proximal compression tourniquets are applied, and a series of overlapping radiographs are obtained following an iodine-containing contrast medium injection into a dorsal vein in the foot. DVT is present if a distinct filling defect is present in a deep vein, typically in the calf or thigh, but it can often extend to or involve more proximal veins, such as those in the pelvis. Less specific findings for DVT include an abrupt contrast cutoff, the absence of contrast filling, or the presence of collateral venous vessels. Although the techniques have evolved to catheter-directed venography using fluoroscopy, the risks and benefits are felt to be the same.

**US Duplex Doppler Lower Extremity**

US is widely recognized as the preferred imaging modality for diagnosing proximal DVT [2,3,6-8,10-12]. Real-time duplex US is noninvasive, portable, and can be reliably used for serial evaluation. It is, however, less consistent in diagnostic performance above the inguinal canal and below the knee. The major sonographic criterion is to identify the failure of complete compression of vein walls when pressure is applied to the skin during real-time imaging. US evaluation for DVT is often combined with real-time Doppler imaging, such as duplex, continuous-wave, and color-flow Doppler imaging. Color-flow Doppler imaging can assist in characterizing a clot as obstructive or partially obstructive. Using duplex US for the augmentation of venous flow rarely provides additional information when diagnosing DVT, but it can be useful as a secondary diagnostic tool [17]. A recent meta-analysis found US to have a high sensitivity (range, 93.2%–95.0%; pooled sensitivity, 94.2%) and high specificity (range, 93.1%–94.4%; pooled specificity, 93.8%) for diagnosing proximal DVT [6]. In the same study, US was found to have a much lower sensitivity (range, 59.8%–67.0%; pooled sensitivity, 63.5%) for diagnosing distal DVT, which confirmed a widely known diagnostic limitation for this technique [6]. Although there are suggestive US findings, using imaging alone to distinguish acute from chronic DVT can be difficult [18].

**MR Venography Lower Extremity and Pelvis**

MR venography (MRV) is a noninvasive alternative to contrast catheter venography. MRV does have inherent advantages over US, especially in its ability to delineate extravascular anatomy. MRV can help identify potential sources of extrinsic venous compression (ie, May-Thurner syndrome or a mass) that can be an underlying cause for DVT or suggest alternative diagnoses that mimic DVT.

MRV has been shown to successfully diagnose DVT using any variety of pulse sequences or techniques [19-23]. Patency or DVT can typically be determined without contrast media by using a variety of MRI techniques, such as spin echo, fast-spin echo, time-of-flight, phase contrast, steady-state free precession, or flow-independent imaging. Cardiac-gated cine bright blood MRI can be used to differentiate transient flow artifacts from true filling defects that persist over the cardiac cycle, but it requires real-time review and expertise. Contrast media–enhanced MRV, however, is more reproducible and less susceptible to artifacts. Despite the wide variety of techniques, however, a recent meta-analysis found MRV to have both high sensitivity (range, 87.5%–94.5%; pooled sensitivity, 92%) and specificity (range, 92.6%–96.5%; pooled specificity, 95%) [22]. When evaluating for proximal DVT, MRV is as sensitive and specific as US or contrast catheter venography. MRV has the advantage over US in evaluating veins above the inguinal ligament, as 20% of DVTs are isolated to the pelvic veins [24]. As such, MRV has been used for evaluating patients with cryptogenic stroke [25].

**CT Venography Lower Extremity and Pelvis**

CT venography (CTV) can also be used to diagnose DVT [6,23,26]. CTV can be performed either as direct CTV using a venous injection of iodinated contrast media in a pedal vein similar to contrast catheter venography or, more commonly, as an indirect CTV using an antecubital vein for a contrast media injection and a delayed imaging acquisition suitable for deep venous opacification. CTV, like MRV, has the inherent advantages of cross-sectional imaging for identifying extravascular sources of extrinsic compression that could be underlying causes for DVT. In patients who have a suspected pulmonary embolism, a meta-analysis found CTV to have high sensitivity (range, 71%–100%; pooled sensitivity, 95.9%) and high specificity (range, 93%–100%; pooled...
specíficidad, 95.2%) comparable a la de US para diagnosticar DVT proximal [23]. CTV también se puede incorporar en una prueba diagnóstica que incluye CT angiografía pulmonar para evaluar embolias pulmonares y DVT proximal [26], pero no debe realizarse rutinariamente en todos los pacientes que se están evaluando para embolias pulmonares [27]. No hay suficiente evidencia para apoyar el uso de CTV para diagnosticar DVT; no obstante, dada la experiencia publicada con embolias pulmonares, CTV puede considerarse una alternativa razonable al MRV para diagnóstico de DVT pelviana o cuando US no es diagnóstico.

**Summary of Recommendations**

- **Variant 1**: US dúplex Doppler de extremidades inferiores es la recomendación inicial en exámenes de imagen para pacientes con sospecha de DVT en extremidades inferiores.

**Summary of Evidence**

De los 28 estudios citados en el documento **ACR Appropriateness Criteria® Suspected Lower Extremity Deep Vein Thrombosis**, 2 son referencias terapéuticas que incluyen 1 estudio bien diseñado. Adicionalmente, 24 referencias son categorizadas como testimonios diagnósticos que incluyen 5 estudios de alta calidad, y 5 estudios que pueden tener limitaciones de diseño. Hay 15 referencias que no son útiles como evidencia primaria. Hay 2 estudios meta-análisis.

Los 28 estudios citados en el documento **ACR Appropriateness Criteria® Suspected Lower Extremity Deep Vein Thrombosis** fueron publicados desde 1990 a 2013.

Aunque hay referencias que reportan estudios con limitaciones de diseño, 6 estudios bien diseñados o de alta calidad proporcionan evidencia precisa.

**Appropriateness Category Names and Definitions**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Appropriateness Category Name</th>
<th>Appropriateness Rating</th>
<th>Appropriateness Category Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Usually Appropriate</td>
<td>7, 8, or 9</td>
<td>El procedimiento o tratamiento es indicado en los escenarios clínicos, con un beneficio-rizado favorable para los pacientes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May Be Appropriate</td>
<td>4, 5, or 6</td>
<td>El procedimiento o tratamiento puede ser indicado en los escenarios clínicos, como alternativa a procedimientos o tratamientos con un beneficio-rizado favorable, o el beneficio-rizado equivocado para los pacientes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May Be Appropriate (Disagreement)</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Los resultados individuales son demasiado dispersados desde el valor medio del panel. El distintivo de etiqueta proporciona transparencia respecto a la recomendación del panel. “Debería ser apropiado” es la categoría de calificación y un calificación de 5 se asigna.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Usually Not Appropriate</td>
<td>1, 2, or 3</td>
<td>El procedimiento o tratamiento no es probablemente indicado en los escenarios clínicos, el beneficio-rizado para los pacientes es probablemente desfavorable.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Relative Radiation Level Information**

Los efectos potenciales adversos asociados con la exposición al radiación son un factor importante a considerar al seleccionar el procedimiento de imagen apropiado. Debido a un amplio rango de exposiciones de radiación asociado con diferentes procedimientos diagnósticos, un nivel indicador de radiación relativa (RRL) se ha incluido para cada examen de imagen. Los RRLs basados en dosis efectiva, que es una cantidad de radiación que se utiliza para estima el riesgo total de exposición de radiación en la población. Los pacientes de la edad pediátrica están inherentemente en mayor riesgo por la exposición, debido a mayor sensibilidad del órgano y esperanza de vida más larga (relavante a la latencia larga que parece acompañar a la exposición a la radiación). Por estas razones, los RRL estimaciones de los estás pediátricas son menores en comparación con los especificados para adultos (vea la tabla).
information regarding radiation dose assessment for imaging examinations can be found in the ACR Appropriateness Criteria® Radiation Dose Assessment Introduction document [28].

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Relative Radiation Level*</th>
<th>Adult Effective Dose Estimate Range</th>
<th>Pediatric Effective Dose Estimate Range</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0 mSv</td>
<td>0 mSv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☢</td>
<td>&lt;0.1 mSv</td>
<td>&lt;0.03 mSv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☢☢</td>
<td>0.1-1 mSv</td>
<td>0.03-0.3 mSv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☢☢☢</td>
<td>1-10 mSv</td>
<td>0.3-3 mSv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☢☢☢☢</td>
<td>10-30 mSv</td>
<td>3-10 mSv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☢☢☢☢☢</td>
<td>30-100 mSv</td>
<td>10-30 mSv</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*RRL assignments for some of the examinations cannot be made, because the actual patient doses in these procedures vary as a function of a number of factors (e.g., region of the body exposed to ionizing radiation, the imaging guidance that is used). The RRLs for these examinations are designated as “Varies”.

Supporting Documents
For additional information on the Appropriateness Criteria methodology and other supporting documents go to www.acr.org/ac.

References

The ACR Committee on Appropriateness Criteria and its expert panels have developed criteria for determining appropriate imaging examinations for diagnosis and treatment of specified medical condition(s). These criteria are intended to guide radiologists, radiation oncologists and referring physicians in making decisions regarding radiologic imaging and treatment. Generally, the complexity and severity of a patient’s clinical condition should dictate the selection of appropriate imaging procedures or treatments. Only those examinations generally used for evaluation of the patient’s condition are ranked. Other imaging studies necessary to evaluate other co-existent diseases or other medical consequences of this condition are not considered in this document. The availability of equipment or personnel may influence the selection of appropriate imaging procedures or treatments. Imaging techniques classified as investigational by the FDA have not been considered in developing these criteria; however, study of new equipment and applications should be encouraged. The ultimate decision regarding the appropriateness of any specific radiologic examination or treatment must be made by the referring physician and radiologist in light of all the circumstances presented in an individual examination.