

AAPOS POLICY STATEMENT: Determination of Refractive Error by Refraction in Infants and Children

Childhood eye disease and vision abnormalities can impact a child's ability to learn, see the world, and impact development. To ensure a child's vision is not impaired they may require periodic ophthalmologic evaluations as they grow. In addition to a complete examination of the structures of the eyes and assessment of vision, diagnostic testing may be required. One important test needed for a comprehensive evaluation is called Refraction. Refraction (CPT* code 92015) is an important diagnostic test in the evaluation and treatment of eye disease in children. Refractive error can cause amblyopia, permanent vision loss, and strabismus (misalignment of the eyes) as well as impaired school performance. These problems can be treated successfully in childhood with corrective lenses when determined by refraction.

Refractive error changes rapidly during childhood, and must be frequently repeated, sometimes changing several times in a year. This test result needs to be reviewed with medical and eye history, physical exam and other testing for informed medical decision making, leading to an appropriate prescription and treatment plan. In the pediatric population, medically necessary refractions should not have frequency limits, but determined by the child's condition.

Refractions are a limited benefit, often with coverage insufficient for the needs of pediatric patients. For medical claims purposes refraction is a separate test in CPT* and excluded as a component of ophthalmology examination codes (92002-92014) or part of an Evaluation/ Management (E/M) codes (99202-99253). Refraction is reported with CPT* code 92015 in addition to the appropriate ophthalmologic or E/M service provided.

In summary, the American Association for Pediatric Ophthalmology and Strabismus (AAPOS) considers refraction in children to be a medically necessary, separately identifiable, and a reimbursable service to be used as determined by the provider. Measurement of refractive error and prescribing glasses or contacts are integral steps in management of children with strabismus, amblyopia, and other medical eye conditions (See the policy statement of "Glasses as a medical necessity" AAPOS policy statements at AAPOS.org).

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