



AMERICAN SOCIETY OF  
PLASTIC SURGEONS

# ASPS Recommended Insurance Coverage Criteria for Third-Party Payers

## Ear Deformity: Prominent Ears

### BACKGROUND

Protruding ears are the most frequent congenital deformity of the head and neck area affecting five percent of the general public. Ear deformities affect both genders equally and may be unilateral or bilateral. The most common causes of prominent ear are an underdeveloped, effaced, or absent antihelix fold; an overdeveloped or excessively deep conchal bowl; or the combination of the two. In many cases protruding ears result in an abnormal appearance. Although hearing may be normal, the individual may suffer significantly from peer ridicule and lowered self-esteem.

Assessment of the ear includes measurement of the distance from the scalp to the helix at three points. In the normal ear, the upper third of the helix is 10-12 mm from the skull, the middle third is 16-18 mm from the skull, and the lobule is 20-22 mm from the mastoid and should not project beyond the upper two thirds of the ear.

Otoplasty may be performed in children or adults although the procedure is more common in children. Surgery is often recommended near an age when ear growth is nearly complete such as between ages 5-7. At this point the child can cooperate in their care, and the social and psychological problems associated with peer ridicule are avoided at a critical time in their social development.

### DEFINITION: COSMETIC AND RECONSTRUCTIVE SURGERY

For reference, the following definition of cosmetic and reconstructive surgery was adopted by the American Medical Association, June 1989:

*Cosmetic* surgery is performed to reshape normal structures of the body in order to improve the patient's appearance and self-esteem.

*Reconstructive* surgery is performed on abnormal structures of the body, caused by congenital defects, developmental abnormalities, trauma, infection, tumors or disease. It is generally performed to improve function, but may also be done to approximate a normal appearance.

### POLICY

Prominent ear(s) is a congenital deformity that can result in social and psychological problems. Otoplasty is medically necessary and considered reconstructive surgery when it is performed to approximate a normal appearance, even if it does not improve function.

The severity of the prominence and any other anomalies of the ear should be documented.

### CODING

#### Diagnosis

Other specified anomalies of the ear

#### ICD-9 Code

744.29

#### Procedure

Otoplasty, protruding ear, with or without size reduction

#### CPT Code

69300 (-50)

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Approved by the ASPS® Executive Committee: December 2005.

