



Division of Family Health Services
Special Child Health and Early Intervention Services



AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDERS

AUTISM IS PREVALENT: 1 in 166 children are diagnosed with an autism spectrum disorder

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention CDC (2004) 1 in 166 children are diagnosed with an autism spectrum disorder. In the United States alone, there are over 1.5 million Americans with autism. It is estimated that in New Jersey between 12,000 and 18,000 people have an autism spectrum disorder.

What is Autism/Autism Spectrum Disorders?

Autism is a biologically-based disorder that affects the development and functioning of a person's verbal and non-verbal communication skills, social interactions and patterns of behavior. There is no known cause of autism although researchers now believe that several genes, possibly combined with environmental influences, may be responsible. Autism affects people of all races, ethnicities and socio-economic groups and is found throughout the world. Autism is four times more prevalent in boys than girls.

There is no cure for autism and the majority of children and adults with autism will require a lifetime of supportive services (Holmes, 1997). Studies show, however, that early detection and appropriate intervention can have a significant effect on the progress and functioning level of children.

The definition of "autism" has changed little since it was coined by Leo Kanner in 1943, but the terminology used today to describe the disorder has. The terms Pervasive Developmental Disorder, Autism Spectrum Disorder, Autistic Spectrum Disorder and Autism essentially describe the same disorder: significant impairments in the areas of socialization, communication and behavior. Symptoms of autism can vary considerably across children and within an individual child over time. ***There is no single behavior that is always typical of autism and no behavior that would automatically exclude a child from a diagnosis of autism.*** For these reasons, the term autism spectrum disorder (ASD) has been widely adopted in the professional literature as it more accurately describes the continuum of symptom severity and is inclusive of people with varying diagnoses.

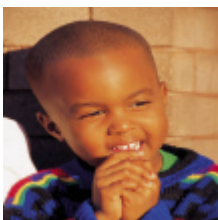


Some signs and symptoms associated with ASD include but *are not limited to*:

- No babbling, pointing or meaningful gestures by 1 year of age;
- No single words by age 16 months;
- Loss of language or other skills at any age;
- Little or no eye contact;
- Lack of pretend, imitative and functional play appropriate to developmental age;
- Stereotypical and repetitive behavior;
- Failure to develop peer relationships appropriate to developmental age; and
- Unusual or inappropriate fears.

What should I do if I suspect my child has an autism spectrum disorder?

If you are the parent or guardian of a child and are concerned about his/her development, contact your family physician as soon as possible for further information and referrals to specialists in your area who are qualified to make a diagnosis. If your child is aged 0-3, he/she may be eligible for Early Intervention Services. For school age children (3-21) Special Education is provided for students through the local school district.



How is a diagnosis made?

Currently there are no biological markers or “tests” that detect autism. Clinicians make a diagnosis based on parental reports along with clinical observations of the child. The national average age of diagnosis is between the ages of 3 and 4, even though a reliable diagnosis can be made by age 2.

What is New Jersey doing about autism?

New Jersey has been a leader in the field of autism for four decades



- Continuing in that tradition, in 2003 Governor McGreevey signed into law A-2601 creating a permanent source of funding for research into the causes, diagnosis and prevention, control and treatment of autism in New Jersey. The funds will go to the Governor’s Council for Medical Research and Treatment of Infantile Autism. The Council was created in 1999.
- One of the country’s oldest advocacy agencies for people with autism, The New Jersey Center for Outreach and Services for the Autism Community Inc. (COSAC) is located in Ewing, NJ. Established in 1965, COSAC offers parent and professional training programs, a toll-free Information and Referral Line, parent support groups, advocacy assistance, public awareness initiatives, legislative programs and more.
- There is established at the University of Medicine and Dentistry- New Jersey Medical School, the Autism Center. The objectives of the Autism Center are to research the biological pathways of ASD, research safe and effective treatments and to provide outreach and support to individuals with autism and their families and healthcare professionals.
- The New Jersey Medical School has partnered with the CDC, the New Jersey Department of Education and the Governor’s Council on Autism to conduct The New Jersey Autism Study. The goals of this study are to determine and monitor the number of children in NJ with an ASD.
- Researchers at the Center for Childhood Neurotoxicology and Exposure Assessment of UMDNJ and Rutgers University are studying the interaction between environmental chemical and the expression of autism in 24-36 month old children.
- The New Jersey Early Intervention System published Service Guidelines for Children with Autism Spectrum Disorders in 2003. These service guidelines assist families and providers in designing appropriate intervention services based on best practice research for children 0-3.



The following is a partial list of state and national resources that provide information on autism spectrum disorders. The inclusion of a website in this list does not explicitly or implicitly imply endorsement of the organization, its philosophy or of the information contained in the site.

State & National Links

Adult Services in New Jersey <http://www.state.nj.us/humanservices/ddd/index.html>

Autism Research Institute www.autism.com/ari/

Autism Society of America www.autism-society.org

Cure Autism Now www.can.org

National Institutes of Health (NIH) www.nih.gov

New Jersey Protection and Advocacy www.njpanda.org

Statewide Parent Advocacy Network (SPAN) www.spannj.org

Web links from the text:

1. Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/dd/ddautism.htm
2. Early Intervention Services - <http://www.state.nj.us/health/fhs/eiphome.htm>
3. Special Education – <http://www.nj.gov/njded/specialled/>
4. New Jersey's Governors Council on Autism www2.umdnj.edu/chinjweb/govcofolder.htm
5. COSAC – www.njcosac.org
6. The New Jersey Autism Study - <http://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/dd/aic/states/nj.htm>
7. **Center for Childhood Neurotoxicology and Exposure Assessment** - <http://www.eohsi.rutgers.edu/childhood/index.shtml>
8. **Service Guidelines for Children with Autism Spectrum Disorders** - <http://www.state.nj.us/health/fhs/autism.htm>

If you have questions please contact Susan Evans Ed.D. at (609) 777-7734.