

Autism Spectrum Disorder Fact Sheet

What are Autism Spectrum Disorders?

- Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) refers to a group of neurodevelopmental disorders including: autism disorder, atypical autism, childhood disintegrative disorder, Asperger's disorder, Rett's Syndrome and Pervasive Developmental Disorder Not Otherwise Specified (PDD-NOS)
- ASD is characterized by deficits in verbal and non-verbal communication, social interaction, imagination and consequently, the establishment of relationships with others.
- ASD occurs in all racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic groups and is more common in boys than girls.

How common is ASD?

- ASD is the second most common serious developmental disability.
- According to the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, about 1 in 110 children have an ASD.
- Studies show that rates of ASD have increased.
 - Increase in prevalence of ASD is attributed to a combination of factors, including better identification and broader definition of ASD.

What causes ASD?

- While ASD is considered a biologically-based neurodevelopmental disorder, the exact cause or causes of ASD have not been identified.
- Studies have shown that ASD has a strong genetic basis.
- Environmental factors, such as prenatal exposure to viruses or birth complications, may play a causal role in children who have a genetic predisposition.
- There is no scientific evidence for a link between childhood vaccines and ASD.

How is ASD diagnosed and assessed?

- Physicians and psychologists rely on a core set of behaviors to make a diagnosis of ASD:
- Impairments in social interaction
- Impairments in verbal and nonverbal communication
- Restricted interests and repetitive behaviors
- American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) recommends that all children be screened for ASD at 18 and 24 months.
- Parents are encouraged to talk to their child's doctor about their child's development and discuss any concerns.
- Early identification is important so the child can begin receiving intensive intervention.

What interventions are helpful for children with ASD?

- Children with ASD benefit from intensive educational programs that meet their unique developmental, learning, and behavioral needs.
- Some commonly used educational and behavioral interventions:
- Applied behavior analysis (ABA)
- Special education and supported inclusion
- Speech-language, occupational, and physical therapies
- Social skills training
- Visual supports
- Medications may be used to treat severe challenging behaviors, such as aggression and self-injury, that make it difficult for the child to function effectively at home and school.
- Most alternative therapies, including special diets, nutritional supplements, and chelation do not have adequate scientific data to support their use as interventions for ASD.

What about adults with ASD?

- ASD is a lifelong developmental disability and cannot be “outgrown,” though significant improvements can occur
- Parents, teachers, and professionals should begin transition planning long before the child ages out of school to ensure the child is prepared for adult life.
- Home and work situations for adults with ASD vary:
- Some adults with ASD have mainstream jobs and live completely independently.
- Some are able to live and work on their own if they have support during stressful events (e.g., changing jobs) or with complicated tasks (e.g., managing finances).
- Others can be successful in quality, supported living and work environments, but continue to need moderate to high levels of assistance throughout their lives.
- The emphasis should always be on independence and quality of life. As much as possible, work and living situations should incorporate the person’s interests and goals.

Where can parents and professionals go for more information?

National organizations and websites

- Autism and PDD Support Network <http://www.autism-pdd.net>
- Autism Society of America <http://www.autism-society.org>
- Autism Speaks <http://www.autismspeaks.org>
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention - Autism Information Center
<http://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/autism>
- Special Education Law and Advocacy <http://www.wrightslaw.com>

State organizations and websites

- Autism Society of Michigan <http://www.autism-mi.org>
- Bridges 4 Kids <http://www.bridges4kids.org>
- Michigan Dept. of Community Health - Developmental Disabilities
http://www.michigan.gov/mdch/0,1607,7-132-2941_4868_4897---,00.html
- Michigan Dept. of Education - Office of Special Education and Early Intervention Services http://www.michigan.gov/mde/0,1607,7-140-6530_6598---,00.html
- The Arc Michigan <http://www.arcmi.org>

