



Birth Defects and Developmental Disabilities

For the millions of Americans with birth defects, disabilities, and blood disorders, a happy, healthy life can be challenging to realize. CDC investigates the causes of birth defects and identifies ways to save babies. CDC researches autism and other developmental disabilities and monitors changes in their occurrence, prevents and manages complications from blood disorders, and improves health services and programs for people with disabilities throughout their lives.



Key Accomplishments 2015

- Advanced global efforts to prevent neural tube defects (serious birth defects of the brain and spine) through Birth Defects COUNT, a partnership to improve tracking for birth defects in nine countries. Published a study on red blood cell folate concentrations to predict population risk of neural tube defects, which received the prestigious Shephard Award.
- Initiated work with academic and professional health organizations to plan new ways to change how healthcare providers prevent, identify, and treat fetal alcohol spectrum disorders, including the promotion of alcohol screening and counseling.
- Helped develop guidelines to test everyone with hemophilia at least once a year for inhibitors, a medical problem that occurs when a person with hemophilia has an immune response to treatment. CDC's monitoring program, Community Counts, offers annual inhibitor screening for participants at no cost to Hemophilia Treatment Centers.
- Published a new report on adults living with disabilities to recognize the 25th anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and a new website to increase awareness about disability and inclusion.



Caden, who was born with a heart defect, is a happy and healthy 6-year-old child.

A Heartbeat Away from Answers: CDC Investigates Heart Defects

After two normal pregnancies, Dawn was surprised to find out in her third pregnancy that her infant had a congenital heart defect (CHD). Her son Caden was diagnosed with hypoplastic left heart syndrome toward the end of her second trimester.

Three open-heart surgeries and many hospital visits later, Caden—now 6 years old—is enjoying a happy, normal childhood. His mother is pleased with his progress but believes continued research is critical to better preventing and treating heart defects.

Heart defects are the most common type of birth defect in America, affecting nearly 1% of births each year. Thanks to improved medical care and treatment, an estimated 2 million children and adults are living normal lives with a heart defect. CDC is using disease tracking and research to develop recommendations and policies to help prevent heart defects and improve the lives of those living with these conditions.

This is important because, as Dawn says, "Caden may look normal and play soccer like any other child—but at any point, the other shoe could drop. Regardless of what he looks like on the outside, he only has half a heart working for him on the inside. And that's why research is so important. If not for the research that's been done, Caden wouldn't even have a story. He wouldn't be here with us today."



5.4 million

5.4 million pregnant women take medications each year, and some can be harmful to the developing fetus.



5 months

Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) are being identified five months earlier, according to a pilot project of preschool children in five communities.



1 in 5

1 in 5 Americans lives with a disability.



1 in 6

1 in 6 children ages 3–17 years has one or more developmental disabilities such as autism or Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder.