



FACT SHEET

CDC Autism Research

May 4, 2006

Autism and related conditions (ASDs) are lifelong developmental disabilities characterized by repetitive behaviors and social and communication problems. ASDs include autistic disorder, pervasive developmental disorder - not otherwise specified (PDD-NOS, including atypical autism), and Asperger disorder. People with ASDs tend to have problems with social and communication skills. Many people with ASDs also have unusual ways of learning, paying attention, or reacting to different sensations. ASDs begin during childhood and last throughout a person's life.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has been tracking and monitoring the prevalence of developmental disabilities since the 1980s and autism since 1996.

Previous CDC ASD Prevalence studies

- The Metropolitan Atlanta Developmental Disabilities Surveillance Program (MADDSP) using data from a large surveillance system in metropolitan Atlanta, Georgia – 1996 metro Atlanta (MADDSP) – 3.4 per 1,000 3-10 year olds (Published in Journal of the American Medical Association, January 1, 2003)
- Community Study - 1998 Brick Township, NJ – 6.7 per 1,000 3-10 year olds (Published in Pediatrics, November 2001)

Today's Study

- The May 4, 2006 MMWR study will be providing prevalence estimates. This study presents parent-reported data from two national surveys. Estimates of diagnosed autism were 5.7 per 1,000 school-aged children from the National Health Interview Survey and 5.5 per 1,000 school-aged children from the National Survey of Children's Health. Together, these two national surveys of parents suggest that at least 300,000 school-aged children had autism in 2003-04.

Upcoming Studies (expected later this year and in 2007)

- An update on the prevalence of Atlanta at 2 time points (1996 and 2000) from the Metropolitan Atlanta Developmental Disabilities Surveillance Program (MADDSP)
- The first multi-site report from six Autism and Developmental Disabilities Monitoring (ADDM) Network sites (Atlanta - MADDSP, Arizona, Maryland, New Jersey, South Carolina, and West Virginia)
- In 2007, we will be able to report results from the 2002 study year for up to 14 ADDM sites.
- In addition, coming out later this month, a report in the Supplement of the Journal of Developmental and Behavioral Pediatrics on the time between the age at first evaluation and diagnosis of autism. (Title - Evaluation of the Time between First Evaluation and First Autism Spectrum Diagnosis in a Population-Based Sample, Authors - Lisa Wiggins [Batelle], Jon Baio, Catherine Rice)

CDC has used a variety of methods to examine the prevalence of autism and related disabilities.

- Today's MMWR about parent reporting of an autism diagnosis uses surveys that asked a parent or caregiver, "Has a doctor or health care provider ever told you that (child's name) has autism?"
- The MADDSP and the ADDM Network use different methods from the one used in the paper published today. The ongoing efforts to determine and track rates of ASD and other developmental disabilities used by the MADDSP and ADDM programs will provide prevalence rates and specific information about the characteristics of children with ASD in different areas of the U.S. and uses health and other records to identify children with autism, who may or may not have a reported diagnosis. Such information can be used to direct future research activities.
- CDC also has a research program for autism, the Centers of Excellence for Autism and Developmental Disabilities Research and Epidemiology (CADDRE). This collaborative study involves 6 research sites in the U.S. and will collect data on possible causes of autism on over 2,000 children and their families.