Autism Spectrum Disorders and Other Developmental Disabilities

About one in six children in the U.S. has one or more developmental disabilities or delays, such as attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder, autism spectrum disorder, cerebral palsy, hearing loss, intellectual disability, and vision impairment. Developmental disabilities are a group of conditions characterized by an impairment in physical, learning, language, or behavior areas.

Autism spectrum disorders are a type of developmental disability that can cause significant social, communication, and behavioral challenges. CDC estimates that 1 in 88 children has been identified as having an autism spectrum disorder.

NCBDDD’s Division of Birth Defects and Developmental Disabilities tracks and researches autism spectrum disorders and other developmental disabilities. Tracking monitors the change in the number of children with these conditions, while research identifies risk factors. Overall, these activities better inform prevention policy and programs. In addition, through the “Learn the Signs. Act Early.” health education program for parents, health care providers, and early educators, we promote early identification of children with autism and other developmental disabilities so children and families can receive services and supports as early as possible.

2012 Accomplishments

- Released updated prevalence report from the Autism and Developmental Disabilities Monitoring (ADDM) Network estimating that 1 in 88 children has been identified as having an autism spectrum disorder.

- Engaged new and existing partners and worked with media to promote important public health messages around the ADDM data.

- Developed a Community Report so that communities can use the ADDM data to plan for services and understand where improvements can be made to help these children.

- Completed the first phase of the Study to Explore Early Development (SEED) and launched a second phase to gather additional data and be able to answer more questions about autism spectrum disorder.

- Disseminated a summary of the proceedings and recommendations from the February 2011 “Workshop on U.S. Data to Evaluate Changes in the Prevalence of Autism Spectrum Disorders” and began new data analyses based on recommendations.
2012 Accomplishments (continued)

- Provided ongoing scientific consultation and data benchmarks for the Healthy People 2020 objectives around developmental disabilities, including objectives on developmental delay, cerebral palsy, and autism spectrum disorder.

- Released an online continuing education version of the Autism Case Training (ACT) Curriculum. This course provides information on fundamental components of identifying, diagnosing, and managing autism spectrum disorders through real-life scenarios for healthcare professionals.

- Expanded the reach of “Learn the Signs. Act Early.” and strengthened capacity in states for early identification through the Act Early Ambassadors Program. In 2012, 25 Ambassadors focused on improving early identification of developmental disabilities in their state. For example, one worked with partners to print and distribute customized English and Spanish “Learn the Signs. Act Early.” materials, which were made available to families in Head Start and Early Head Start programs statewide; others worked to integrate the ACT Curriculum into residency training at children’s hospitals, medical schools and Leadership Education in Neurodevelopmental and Related Disabilities (LEND) programs.

Looking to the Future

Like the many families living with autism spectrum disorders and other developmental disabilities, NCBDDD’s Division of Birth Defects and Developmental Disabilities considers these conditions an important public health concern.

We are committed to the important work of understanding these conditions. The ADDM Network will continue tracking the prevalence of autism spectrum disorders among 8-year and 4-year-old children to understand more about which children are more likely to have autism spectrum disorders, at what age they are likely to be diagnosed, and whether progress has been made in diagnosing children with autism spectrum disorders early. We will continue leveraging the infrastructure of the ADDM Network to track other developmental disabilities, such as cerebral palsy, the most common motor disability of childhood.
NCBDDD’s Division of Birth Defects and Developmental Disabilities will also engage with partners to understand more about disparities in the identification of autism spectrum disorders among different groups of children and to explore parents’ experiences with autism spectrum disorders screening, identification, and referral to services.

NCBDDD’s Division of Birth Defects and Developmental Disabilities will continue to learn about factors that may put children at risk for autism spectrum disorders and other developmental disabilities through SEED.

NCBDDD’s Division of Birth Defects and Developmental Disabilities will continue to work with federal agencies and other partners to disseminate materials on early identification to healthcare professionals, early childhood educators, and parents of young children. Working with partners experienced in developing training for early childhood professionals, we will develop and implement a continuing education, web-based training for early childhood educators to help facilitate their role in early identification of autism spectrum disorders and other developmental disabilities.

Notable Scientific Publications


Notable Scientific Publications (continued)


To view the annual report online, visit: www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/2012AnnualReport

For more information, visit: www.cdc.gov/Autism www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/DevelopmentalDisabilities