

# CDC's Autism Activities

- ASDs affect each person in different ways, and symptoms can range from mild to severe.
- There are three main subtypes of ASDs: autistic disorder, Asperger disorder, and pervasive developmental disorder not otherwise specified (PDD-NOS).
- There is no medical test, such as a blood test or brain scan, to diagnose ASDs. Instead, they are diagnosed by qualified professionals who conduct comprehensive psychological and behavioral evaluations.
- More children are being diagnosed at earlier ages—a growing number of them by age 3. Still, most children are not diagnosed until after they reach age 4.



## Understanding Autism Spectrum Disorders

- **CDC estimates that 1 in 88 children has been identified with an autism spectrum disorder (ASD).**
- **ASDs occur among all racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic groups.**
- **ASDs are almost five times more common among boys than among girls.**
- **Medical costs for children with ASDs are estimated to be six times higher than for children without ASDs.**
- **In addition to medical costs, intensive behavioral interventions for children with ASDs can cost \$40,000 to \$60,000 per child per year.**



Autism spectrum disorders (ASDs) are a group of developmental disabilities that are often diagnosed in early childhood and can cause significant social, communication, and behavioral challenges over a lifetime. At the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), we are working to address ASDs by applying a public health approach—tracking ASDs, researching risk factors and causes, and promoting early identification.

## Tracking the Number of Children Identified with Autism Spectrum Disorders

The Autism and Developmental Disabilities Monitoring (ADDM) Network is a group of programs funded by CDC to estimate the number of children with ASDs and other developmental disabilities in the United States. By studying the number of children with ASDs at different points in time, we at CDC can find out if the number is rising, dropping, or staying the same. We also can compare the number of children with ASDs in different areas of the country and among different groups of people. This information can help direct our research into potential risk factors and can help communities direct their outreach efforts to those who need it most.

## Identifying Risk Factors and Causes

The causes of ASDs are unknown. Understanding what factors make a person more likely to have an ASD will help us learn more about the causes. Through the Study to Explore Early Development (SEED), CDC's Centers for Autism and Developmental Disabilities Research and Epidemiology (CADDRE) are searching for factors that may put children at risk for ASDs and other developmental disabilities. While we know that no one study will have all the answers, SEED will contribute to our understanding of the complex risk factors for ASDs.

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## Improving Early Identification

Early identification and intervention can have a significant impact on a child's ability to learn new skills, as well as reduce the need for costly interventions over time. CDC's "Learn the Signs. Act Early." program promotes awareness among parents, health professionals, and child care providers about healthy developmental milestones during early childhood, the importance of tracking each child's development, and the importance of acting early if there are concerns. CDC offers free online resources, including checklists of developmental milestones, at [www.cdc.gov/ActEarly](http://www.cdc.gov/ActEarly). CDC also works with state and national partners to improve early childhood programs and systems in each state so children and their families can get the services and support they need.

## Looking Back, Moving Forward

Through CDC's work in ASDs over the past 15 years, we know more about which children are more likely to have ASDs, at what age they are likely to be diagnosed, and whether progress has been made in diagnosing children with ASDs early. This is the information communities need to plan for services and understand where improvements can be made to help children.

Although there are still many unanswered questions about what causes ASDs and how to treat them, the data tell us one thing with certainty—more children are being identified as having ASDs than ever before and these children and their families need help.

CDC is committed to the important work of understanding ASDs. We will keep tracking the prevalence of ASDs among US children so healthcare providers, policymakers, parents and communities understand the magnitude of these conditions. We will keep guiding and conducting research into risk factors for ASDs. And we will keep improving early identification, the most powerful tool we have now, in the hope that all children have the opportunity to thrive.



**For more information on CDC's ASD activities,  
visit [www.cdc.gov/autism](http://www.cdc.gov/autism).**

**For more information on CDC's Autism and Developmental Disabilities Monitoring  
(ADDM) Network, visit [www.cdc.gov/addm](http://www.cdc.gov/addm).**

**For more information on CDC's Study to Explore Early Development (SEED),  
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**For more information on CDC's "Learn the Signs. Act Early" program,  
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### **National Center on Birth Defects and Developmental Disabilities**

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