

# Metropolitan Atlanta Developmental Disabilities Surveillance Program (MADDSP)



Since 1968, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has conducted surveillance of birth defects (including structural malformations and genetic diseases) in the five-county metropolitan Atlanta area. However, those birth defects that are evident at birth (for example, cleft palate and spina bifida) represent only part of a spectrum of developmental problems that appear during childhood. Other conditions such as intellectual disability, autism, and cerebral palsy usually are manifested after infancy and can be sufficiently severe to require specialized medical and educational services for many years. Such conditions are referred to as developmental disabilities.

To address the problem of developmental disabilities among children, CDC and the Georgia Department of Human Resources (DHR) initiated the Metropolitan Atlanta Developmental Disabilities Study (MADDS) in 1984. For this study, which was conducted in Atlanta from 1984 through 1990, investigators devised methods to determine the prevalence of mental retardation, cerebral palsy, legal blindness, hearing loss, and epilepsy among children who were 10 years of age. Children who had these conditions were identified by searching record systems of sources that were likely to contain information relating to the evaluation or treatment of children with developmental disabilities (for example, schools, hospitals, and state programs for people who have developmental disabilities). The majority of the children were identified through special education departments within the Atlanta area public school systems. The success of this study prompted CDC to establish the Metropolitan Atlanta Developmental Disabilities Surveillance Program (MADDSP) in 1991, an ongoing system for monitoring the occurrence of selected developmental disabilities.

The primary objective of MADDSP is to provide regular and systematic monitoring of prevalence rates of selected developmental disabilities according to various demographic characteristics of children who reside in metropolitan Atlanta. MADDSP was established to ascertain all children who have one or more of four developmental disabilities (mental retardation, cerebral palsy, hearing loss, and vision impairment) in the five counties of metropolitan Atlanta. Autism spectrum disorders were added as a fifth disability during the 1996 MADDSP surveillance year.

The ascertainment methodology of MADDSP relies on the consequences of Part B of Public Law 94-142 “as amended”, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), which mandates that the public schools provide a free and appropriate education for all disabled children 3 through 21 years. As a result, most children eligible for MADDSP are either enrolled in special education programs at one of nine public school systems serving the metropolitan area or enrolled in other Georgia Department of Education programs for children who have developmental disabilities (for instance, regional psychoeducational centers and state schools for children with hearing loss or vision impairment).

Clinical sources used to identify children for inclusion in MADDSP are DHR facilities that serve children with developmental disabilities, area pediatric hospitals and the clinics associated with these facilities, comprehensive diagnostic and evaluation centers for individuals with developmental disabilities, as well as a number of private physicians and clinicians who provide diagnostic services for children with developmental disabilities. As part of MADDSP surveillance activities, trained data abstractors review the records of children who meet specific criteria in order to collect information related to evaluation, diagnosis, and demographic characteristics. Measures are in place to protect the confidentiality of the information CDC collects.

For more information about MADDSP, go to [www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/dd/ddsurv.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/dd/ddsurv.htm) or call 404-498-3860.

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