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CDC estimates 1 in 88 children in United States has been identified as having an autism spectrum disorder

CDC data help communities better serve these children

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimates that 1 in 88 children in the United States has been identified as having an autism spectrum disorder (ASD), according to a new study released today that looked at data from 14 communities. Autism spectrum disorders are almost five times more common among boys than girls – with 1 in 54 boys identified.

The number of children identified with ASDs ranged from 1 in 210 children in Alabama to 1 in 47 children in Utah. The largest increases were among Hispanic and black children.

The report, Prevalence of Autism Spectrum Disorders – Autism and Developmental Disabilities Monitoring Network, 14 Sites, United States, 2008, provides autism prevalence estimates from 14 areas. It was published today in the Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report.

"This information paints a picture of the magnitude of the condition across our country and helps us understand how communities identify children with autism," said Health and Human Services (HHS) Secretary Kathleen Sebelius. "That is why HHS and our entire administration has been working hard to improve the lives of people living with autism spectrum disorders and their families by improving research, support, and services."

"One thing the data tells us with certainty – there are more children and families that need help," said CDC Director Thomas Frieden, M.D., M.P.H. "We must continue to track autism spectrum disorders because this is the information communities need to guide improvements in services to help children."

The results of CDC's study highlight the importance of the Obama administration's efforts to address the needs of people with ASDs, including the work of the Interagency Autism Coordinating Committee (IACC) at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. The IACC's charge is to facilitate ASD research, screening, intervention, and education. As part of this effort, the National Institutes of Health has invested in research to identify possible risk factors and effective therapies for people with ASDs.

Study results from the 2008 surveillance year show 11.3 per 1,000 8-year-old children have been identified as having an ASD. This marks a 23 percent increase since the last report in 2009. Some of this increase is due to the way children are identified, diagnosed and served in their communities, although exactly how much is due to these factors is unknown. "To understand more, we need to keep accelerating our research into risk factors and causes of autism spectrum disorders," said Coleen Boyle, Ph.D., M.S.Hyg., director of CDC's National Center on Birth Defects and Developmental Disabilities.

The study also shows more children are being diagnosed by age 3, an increase from 12 percent for children born in 1994 to 18 percent for children born in 2000. "Unfortunately, 40 percent of the children in this study aren't getting a diagnosis until after age 4. We are working hard to change that," said Boyle.

The most important thing for parents to do is to act quickly whenever there is a concern about a child's development.

- Talk to your child's doctor about your concerns.
- Call your local early intervention program or school system for an assessment.
- Remember you do not need a diagnosis to access services for your child.

To learn more about this study, visit www.cdc.gov/autism.

For information on CDC's tools to help families track their child's development, visit www.cdc.gov/actearly

To learn more about the research CDC is doing on autism, visit www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/autism/research.html.

To learn more about the Administration's commitment to combating autism, visit http://www.hhs.gov/autism/factsheet_autism_support.html

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