

Autism spectrum disorders - General information

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Autism spectrum disorders

Autism spectrum disorders are a set of neurodevelopmental disorders that affect how children process information and see the world.

Autism Spectrum Disorders include the following conditions:

- Autistic Disorder (Autism)
- Asperger's Disorder/Syndrome
- Childhood Disintegrative Disorder
- Pervasive Developmental Disorder – Not Otherwise Specified (PDD-NOS)
- Rett Syndrome

ASD can impact children's social relationships, communication skills and behaviors in different ways and to different degrees.

Children with ASD may have fixated interests or repetitive patterns of behavior.

Symptoms can range from very mild to severe. Each child might display a unique combination of characteristics, ranging from low to high functioning forms of ASD.

ASD usually appears during the first three years of a child's life. Most parents first notice the loss of skills or developmental delays when their child is 15 to 18 months old.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimate an average of one in every 88 children in the U.S. has an ASD.

ASD occurs in all racial, ethnic and socioeconomic groups. ASD affects boys five times more often than girls.

Psychological influences, such as parenting, do not cause ASD. Studies show ASD probably involves environmental and/or genetic factors that result in biological and/or neurological differences in the brains of children with Autism Spectrum Disorder.

There are no medical tests that can show the cause of ASD.

Possible signs of autism spectrum disorders

Social symptoms

- No smiles or warm expressions by 6 months or later
- No response to name
- Difficulty making eye contact or reading social cues (facial expressions, body language, etc.)
- Trouble interacting with other people
- Little interest in play or playing with others

Communication difficulties

- Delayed or unusual verbal or nonverbal communication skills
- No babbling or pointing by 12 months or single words by 16 months
- Unusual speech patterns or repetitive phrases
- Loss of early speech, movement or social skills

Repetitive behaviors

- Repetitive behaviors, such as twirling, rocking or flapping/clapping hands
- Rigid insistence on specific routines or rituals

More related resources

Autism – Symptoms (MedlinePlus)

Autism Spectrum Disorders (HealthyChildren.org)

Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASDs) - Signs and Symptoms (CDC)

Help Me Grow / Minnesota Parents Know

Learn the Signs. Act Early (CDC)

What are Some Common Signs of Autism (NINDS)

What are the Symptoms of ASD? (NIMH)

Evaluation / Diagnostic Assessment

There are no physical characteristics or medical tests to determine ASD. Doctors must look at a child's behavior and development to make the diagnosis.

Anyone with concerns about a child's development or behavior should speak with the child's doctor. If necessary, the doctor can provide a referral to a developmental pediatrician, child neurologist or child psychologist/psychiatrist who can conduct further screening, interviews, testing and clinical observation. A thorough evaluation by a qualified professional is necessary to rule out other conditions with similar symptoms.

More related resources

[Autism – Exams and Tests \(MedlinePlus\)](#)

[Autism Spectrum Disorders \(ASDs\) - Screening and Diagnosis \(CDC\)](#)

[How is ASD Diagnosed?](#)

[How is Autism Diagnosed? \(NINDS\)](#)

Treatment

While there is currently no cure for Autistic Spectrum Disorders, research shows that early diagnosis and treatment improve the chances for a child's successful development.

If a child is diagnosed with ASD, then qualified professionals can recommend types of treatment. There is not one best treatment for all children with ASD. There are many different types of effective and promising treatments available. ASD looks so different in each child that it is unlikely one treatment will work for everyone. The ideal treatment plan coordinates therapies and interventions that meet the specific needs of an individual child.

Some children make remarkable gains in language and social development so they can function relatively well at home and in the community. Behaviors may fade or change as a child grows and treatments may relieve specific symptoms but the brain dysfunction does not ever completely go away.

More related resources

[Autism – Treatment \(MedlinePlus\)](#)

[Autism Spectrum Disorders \(ASDs\) - Treatment \(CDC\)](#)

[How is ASD Treated \(NIMH\)](#)

[Therapies for Children with Autism Spectrum Disorders: A Review of the Research for Parents and Caregivers \(PDF\) \(June 2011\)](#)

[Tratamientos para Niños con Trastornos del Espectro Autista \(PDF\) \(November 2011\)](#)

Programs and Services that Assist Children with ASD

In Minnesota, there is no separate, specific program for persons with ASD. Many of the available services are provided through county, tribal and state programs that serve people with disabilities, including children with ASD. County public health or social services or tribal agencies can provide local information and referrals, including advocacy, childcare, community resources, county services, education and medical specialists.

Children with ASD often need supports and services to learn and develop certain skills. Depending on their symptoms and severity, they may benefit from different types of services delivered in different types of places.

The Minnesota Department of Human Services offers many programs, including those for health care, people with physical and developmental disabilities, and children's mental health services.

Children's Mental Health Services

Some children with ASD may also have mental health needs. A mental health professional can do a diagnostic assessment to determine if a child has a mental health diagnosis that would benefit from a mental health treatment plan and services.

Mental health services include:

- Individual, family or group psychotherapy
- Individual, family, or group skills training provided by a mental health professional or mental health practitioner
- Mental health behavioral aide services, which can help a child practice the skills missed because of mental illness

Find a list of eligible Children's Therapeutic Services and Supports (CTSS) mental health providers for children with public health insurance [Current CTSS Providers](#).

More related resources:

- [MACMH \(Minnesota Association for Children's Mental Health\)](#)
- [NAMI Minnesota](#)
- [A Parent's Guide to Autism Spectrum Disorder \(NIMH\) \(PDF\) \(2011\)](#)

Disability Services

Other services may be available to help children with more severe forms of ASD live in the community and receive daily living support:

- Home and community-based services waivers, including the [Developmental Disability Waiver](#), provide service funding and supports to maintain children in their own homes instead of a medical institution. There may be waiting lists for these programs.
- Personal care assistance (PCA) provides services to children who need help with day-to-day activities to allow them to be more independent in their own home.
- Family Support Grant (FSG) Program provides state cash grants to prevent or delay the out-of-home placement of children with disabilities and promote family health and social well-being by facilitating access to family-centered services and supports.

A child may have to meet certain guidelines to be eligible for these programs. More information about these is available at [Disability Programs and Services](#).

More related resources

- [The ARC of Minnesota](#)
- [Disability Linkage Line \(1-866-333-2466\)](#)
- [Minnesota Disability Law Center \(MDLC\)](#)

- [MinnesotaHelp.Info](#)
- [PACER Center](#)

Other Services

In addition to mental health or disability services, a child might benefit from other medical services and treatment options, such as:

- Physical therapy
- Occupational therapy
- Speech/language therapy

Other state agencies and programs also address various needs of children with ASD:

Minnesota Department of Education:

- [Autism Spectrum Disorders](#)
- [Help Me Grow](#)
- [Infant, Toddler, Preschool Special Education](#)
- [Related Services](#)
- [Special Education Programs](#)

Minnesota Department of Health:

- [Children with Special Health Needs – Early Intervention](#)
- [Minnesota Children & Youth with Special Health Needs \(MCYSHN\)](#)
- [MCYSHN Directory of Resources for Children and Families in Minnesota](#)

[Minnesota Governor’s Council on Developmental Disabilities](#)

[Minnesota State Council on Disability](#)

[Minnesota State Office of the Ombudsman for Mental Health & Developmental Disabilities](#)

The Minnesota Department of Human Services works closely with the Minnesota Department of Education and Minnesota Department of Health to coordinate Part B and Part C services of IDEA (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act):

- [Help Me Grow / Minnesota Parents Know](#)
- [Children with Special Health Needs – Early Intervention](#)
- [Intervention Services for Children](#)
- [Part C of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act \(IDEA\)](#)

Health Care Insurance

Programs may have financial or other eligibility requirements. The services a child receives may depend on individual and family circumstances. County public health or social services or tribal agencies can assist with questions about funding, eligibility criteria and limits on services.

Some private insurance companies cover evaluation and therapy services related to care of children with autism spectrum disorders. The family’s insurance company can answer question about benefits.

- [Benefits.gov](#)
- [Eligibility, Application and Coverage Information for Children under 21 who have Disabilities](#)
- [Home and Community-Based Waiver Programs](#)
- [Medical Assistance – TEFRA for Children with Disabilities](#)
- [Minnesota Health Care Programs](#)
- [Supplemental Security Income \(SSI\)](#)
- [Who Pays? Taking the Maze Out of Funding Manual \(possible funding sources for Minnesota children and youth with special health needs\)](#)

Other Statewide Efforts

MN LEND (Leadership Education in Neurodevelopmental and Related Disabilities), a program at the University of Minnesota, is increasing multidisciplinary training opportunities to examine the impact of the growing prevalence of autism spectrum disorders on law and policy.

Federal Policy Initiatives

In addition, there are many federal entities dedicated to developing policies pertaining to ASD, including:

- [Association of University Centers on Disabilities](#)
- [Autism Speaks](#)
- [Interagency Autism Coordinating Committee](#)
- [National Conference of State Legislatures](#)

Other related resources

[The ARC of Minnesota](#)

[Autism \(American Academy of Pediatrics\)](#)

[Autism \(MedlinePlus\)](#)

[Autism and Development Disabilities Monitoring Network](#)

[Autism and the Somali Community](#)

[Autism Information \(U.S. Dept. of Health & Human Services\)](#)

[Autism NOW: The National Autism Resource & Information Center](#)

Autism Society of Minnesota
Autism Speaks in Minnesota
Autism Spectrum Disorders (Centers for Disease Control)
Autism Spectrum Disorders (National Institute of Child Health & Human Development)
Autism Spectrum Disorders (Pervasive Developmental Disorders) (National Institute of Mental Health)
MACMH (Minnesota Association for Children's Mental Health)
Minnesota Disability Law Center
NAMI Minnesota
National Autism Association
National Autism Center
National Dissemination Center for Children with Disabilities - Autism
NINDS Autism Information Page (National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke)
PACER Center
A Parent's Guide to Autism Spectrum Disorder (National Institute of Mental Health) (PDF)
Somali American Autism Foundation