



Fast Statistics: It is estimated that an average of 1 in 110 children in the US have Autism – Center for Disease Control

Health Fact Sheet-Autism

More than 1.5 million Americans, including approximately 120,000 school-aged children have been diagnosed with autism, a developmental disability. However, the disorder includes a wide range of disabilities, notably Asperger's, characterized by high intellect, Rett's Disorder, Pervasive Developmental Disorder, (PDD) and autism. The dramatic increase in the number of children diagnosed with autism may be attributed to better diagnosis and a broader definition of the disorder. While the cause remains unclear, theories point to genetics and the environment, or a combination of both, as probable causes.

Young children are usually diagnosed by age three, but some children have been identified as early as 18 months. Autism is characterized by 1) deficits in social interactions, 2) repetitive behaviors, and 3) difficulty communicating. The symptoms range from mild to severe and are individual for each child. Children are known to respond to intensive, year- round therapies, including occupational and speech therapy and behavior modification, often improving outcomes for later life.

Parents are usually the first to notice unusual behaviors in their child. In newborns, autism may be suspected because of the baby's inability to respond to a parent, inability to focus eyes or focusing too intently on one item for a long period of time. Symptoms can also seem to suddenly appear in toddlers, who may stop babbling or become withdrawn and indifferent. Between 12 and 18 months of age, children may begin to lose the social, developmental and language skills they had acquired. Others may reach a plateau so their differences from typical developing children become more noticeable as they grow older.

According to the National Institutes of Mental Health (NIMH), possible indicators of autism include:

- Child does not babble, point, or make meaningful gestures by 1 year of age
- Child does not speak one word by 16 months
- Child does not combine two words by 2 years
- Child does not respond to name
- Child loses language or social skills
- Child has poor eye contact
- Child does not seem to know how to play with toys
- Child excessively lines up toys or other objects

- Child is attached to one particular toy or object
- Child does not smile
- At times, child seems to be hearing impaired

These characteristics can also be attributed to other developmental delays or conditions. Parents concerned about their child's development should consult their pediatrician and seek appropriate evaluations. For early intervention services in Union County, call 908-889-0950.

Additional resources:

Autism New Jersey
www.njcosac.org

American Academy of Pediatrics
www.aap.org/healthtopics/autism.cfm

Autism Coalition
www.autismcoalition.org

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
<http://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/autism/facts.html>