Autism Spectrum Disorder Fact Sheet

**What are Autism Spectrum Disorders?**

* Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) refers to a group of neurodevelopmental disorders including: autism disorder, atypical autism, childhood disintegrative disorder, Asperger's disorder, Rett’s Syndrome and Pervasive Developmental Disorder Not Otherwise Specified (PDD-NOS)
* ASD is characterized by deficits in verbal and non-verbal communication, social interaction, imagination and consequently, the establishment of relationships with others.
* ASD occurs in all racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic groups and is more common in boys than girls.

**How common is ASD?**

* ASD is the second most common serious developmental disability.
* According to the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, about 1 in 110 children have an ASD.
* Studies show that rates of ASD have increased.
  + Increase in prevalence of ASD is attributed to a combination of factors, including better identification and broader definition of ASD.

**What causes ASD?**

* While ASD is considered a biologically-based neurodevelopmental disorder, the exact cause or causes of ASD have not been identified.
* Studies have shown that ASD has a strong genetic basis.
* Environmental factors, such as prenatal exposure to viruses or birth complications, may play a causal role in children who have a genetic predisposition.
* There is no scientific evidence for a link between childhood vaccines and ASD.

**How is ASD diagnosed and assessed?**

* Physicians and psychologists rely on a core set of behaviors to make a diagnosis of ASD:
* Impairments in social interaction
* Impairments in verbal and nonverbal communication
* Restricted interests and repetitive behaviors
* American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) recommends that all children be screened for ASD at 18 and 24 months.
* Parents are encouraged to talk to their child’s doctor about their child’s development and discuss any concerns.
* Early identification is important so the child can begin receiving intensive intervention.

**What interventions are helpful for children with ASD?**

* Children with ASD benefit from intensive educational programs that meet their unique developmental, learning, and behavioral needs.
* Some commonly used educational and behavioral interventions:
* Applied behavior analysis (ABA)
* Special education and supported inclusion
* Speech-language, occupational, and physical therapies
* Social skills training
* Visual supports
* Medications may be used to treat severe challenging behaviors, such as aggression and self-injury, that make it difficult for the child to function effectively at home and school.
* Most alternative therapies, including special diets, nutritional supplements, and chelation do not have adequate scientific data to support their use as interventions for ASD.

**What about adults with ASD?**

* ASD is a lifelong developmental disability and cannot be “outgrown,” though significant improvements can occur
* Parents, teachers, and professionals should begin transition planning long before the child ages out of school to ensure the child is prepared for adult life.
* Home and work situations for adults with ASD vary:
* Some adults with ASD have mainstream jobs and live completely independently.
* Some are able to live and work on their own if they have support during stressful events (e.g., changing jobs) or with complicated tasks (e.g., managing finances).
* Others can be successful in quality, supported living and work environments, but continue to need moderate to high levels of assistance throughout their lives.
* The emphasis should always be on independence and quality of life. As much as possible, work and living situations should incorporate the person’s interests and goals.

**Where can parents and professionals go for more information?**

**National organizations and websites**

* Autism and PDD Support Network <http://www.autism-pdd.net>
* Autism Society of America <http://www.autism-society.org>
* Autism Speaks <http://www.autismspeaks.org>
* Centers for Disease Control and Prevention - Autism Information Center

<http://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/autism>

* Special Education Law and Advocacy <http://www.wrightslaw.com>

**State organizations and websites**

* Autism Society of Michigan <http://www.autism-mi.org>
* Bridges 4 Kids <http://www.bridges4kids.org>
* Michigan Dept. of Community Health - Developmental Disabilities

<http://www.michigan.gov/mdch/0,1607,7-132-2941_4868_4897---,00.html>

* Michigan Dept. of Education - Office of Special Education and Early Intervention Services <http://www.michigan.gov/mde/0,1607,7-140-6530_6598---,00.html>
* The Arc Michigan <http://www.arcmi.org>