

National Children's Health Survey Report Finds Autism Prevalence Now 1 in 91

Monday, October 5, 2009

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Autism Society Calls for Answers to Crisis Now

A national report released today in the journal *Pediatrics* reveals that 1 percent of U.S. children ages 3-17 have an autism spectrum disorder, an estimated prevalence of one in every 91 children. This is a dramatic increase from the one in 150 prevalence rates currently reported.

“This national study charts a dramatic rise in the prevalence of autism in the United States and we applaud this administration’s recognition that autism is an urgent public health priority,” said Autism Society President and CEO Lee Grossman. “But families today are asking: how high must these prevalence rates rise before the nation responds? Significant resources must be directed toward screening and diagnosis, affordable interventions that treat the whole person and comprehensive education plans to foster lifelong skill development so that people with autism will have the ability to work and live independently.”

The report, entitled “Prevalence of Parent-Reported Diagnosis of Autism Spectrum Disorder Among Children in the US,” published in today’s issue of *Pediatrics*, was conducted by the Department of Health and Human Services National Survey of Children’s Health, using data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The report was conducted via a telephone survey of over 78,000 parents, and determined a point prevalence of 110 per 10,000 respondents, roughly 1 percent of the population of children in the United States.

On a constituent call to discuss the report, the CDC reported that its initial analysis of the Autism and Developmental Delay Monitoring project data, due out later this fall, confirm the 1 percent figure. This report will also contain more data on age of diagnosis, groups affected, and access to interventions.

The increasing numbers have long-term economic costs to the country, as autism is a chronic medical condition affecting people across the lifespan. “Lifespan services, particularly for adults, are typically inadequate and inappropriate,” Grossman stated. “This new data should be a call to action to the government to improve and increase services and supports first.”

The Autism Society has been working with Congress on several key bills, which have stalled. “The information in this new report highlights the pressing need for additional services, support and treatments for families affected by autism spectrum disorders,” said Senator Dick Durbin (D-IL). “My bill, the Autism Treatment Acceleration Act, will help children and adults with autism gain better access to coordinated services, improve training for professionals treating these disorders, and will relieve the financial burden on the millions of families struggling with this disability.”

This bill, if funded, would provide funding for applied research into effective interventions, the first ever demonstration grants on adult services, create an adult prevalence study, and fund family support and information networks.

“Autism affects millions of American families, and the cost of diagnosis, early intervention, and treatment imposes a heavy burden on most of them,” said Congressman Mike Doyle (D-PA), co-chair of the Congressional Autism Caucus. “This legislation, the Autism Treatment Acceleration Act of 2009, would improve the dissemination of information between autism researchers and service providers, improve training for professionals treating autism spectrum disorders, and mandate that health insurers cover the diagnosis and treatment of autism spectrum disorders. Enactment of this legislation would do a lot to help millions of American families.”

“The increase in the reported prevalence of autism across the nation testifies to the urgency of executing a comprehensive strategy in response to this public health emergency,” said Congressman Chris Smith (R-NJ), co-chair of the Congressional Autism Caucus. “For its part, Congress must ensure robust funding to support aggressive programs of research, education, and services. Furthermore, Congress needs to enact additional legislation, such as the Autism Treatment Acceleration Act of 2009, that will establish the infrastructure and mechanisms for delivering appropriate services across the lifespan to individuals with autism and their families. We must look to maximize the reach and impact of our investments and activities by closely coordinating government efforts with those of national advocacy organizations, such as the Autism Society.”