

Cases of childhood autism increasing in UK

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Autism in Britain is three times more common than previously thought, affecting 1 in every 100 children, a study found.

In an article in the British medical journal *The Lancet*, researchers said they are not sure if the higher numbers are due to better diagnoses or if the condition is increasing.

The researchers examined 9- and 10-year-olds in Britain and found that 39 out of 10,000 had autism and 77 out of 10,000 had autistic-spectrum disorder, suggesting the total prevalence of the neurodevelopmental disorder was around 1 percent of the British child population.

"This new study establishes that autism-spectrum conditions are no longer rare," Professor Simon Baron Cohen of the Autism Research Centre in Cambridge told the BBC.

He said health, education and related services must change to "meet the needs of people on the autistic spectrum."

The increased autism rate may be tied to changes in the definition of the disorder, greater awareness of the condition or the growing types of services for patients, researchers said.

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