

## Research shows wide age gap between possible and actual autism diagnosis (w/Video)

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"Timely identification and diagnosis of an autism spectrum disorder (ASD) can impact a child's development and is the key to opening the door to the services and therapies available to children with autism," says Paul Shattuck, Ph.D., assistant professor at the George Warren Brown School of Social Work at Washington University in St. Louis.

"Unfortunately, our research shows that the average age of autism diagnosis is nearly six years old, which is three to four years after diagnosis is possible."

Shattuck is the lead author of an article on the timing of ASD identification in the current issue of the *Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry*.

He and study co-authors used data from 13 sites around the country that were funded by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to collect information from the health and education records of eight year olds with a wide variety of developmental problems in 2002.

Shattuck's research found that females were identified later than males and that early diagnosis was usually linked to a more severe or obvious cognitive impairment. There were no disparities in the age of diagnosis by race when the data are pooled from all 13 sites. However, in further analyses reported elsewhere, Shattuck and colleagues have found that Black and Hispanic children who meet diagnostic criteria for [autism](#) are

much less likely to actually have a documented diagnosis in their records.

"This data shows that there is a critical need for further research, innovation, and improvement in the diagnosis and treatment of autism," he says.

Shattuck's upcoming research will look at the next series of CDC health and education data from 2004 and 2006 to see if there is an improvement in the average age of diagnosis. He has also received funding to study another important transition in the lives of children with autism — leaving high school and entering young adulthood.

"With the increased awareness about ASDs, I hope that we will start to see this gap shrink," he says.

Shattuck says that parents need to trust their instincts. "If there is something about your child's development that concerns you, or if your child is exhibiting some symptoms of autism such as a failure to make eye contact, not speaking one word by 16 months, or not responding to their name, talk to your child's pediatrician," he says. "If the doctor ignores your concerns, seek a second opinion."

Source: Washington University in St. Louis ([news](#) : [web](#))

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