

Questionnaire completed by parents may help identify one-year-olds at risk for autism

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Grace Baranek, Ph.D., at left is the study's senior author. Lauren Turner-Brown, Ph.D., is the study's first author. Both are from the University of North Carolina School of Medicine. Credit: UNC School of Medicine

A new study by University of North Carolina School of Medicine researchers found that 31 percent of children identified as at risk for autism spectrum disorders (ASD) at 12 months received a confirmed diagnosis of ASD by age 3 years.

In addition, 85 percent of the [children](#) found to be at risk for [ASD](#) based on results from the First Year Inventory (FYI), a 63-item questionnaire filled out by their parents, had some other developmental disability or concern by age three, said Grace Baranek, PhD, senior author of the study and an [autism](#) researcher with the Program for Early Autism, Research, Leadership and Service (PEARLS) in the Department of Allied Health Sciences at the UNC School of Medicine.

"These results indicate that an overwhelming majority of children who screen positive on the FYI indeed experience some delay in development by age three that may warrant [early intervention](#)," she said.

Lead author of the study, Lauren Turner-Brown, PhD, also a researcher with PEARLS and the Carolina Institute for [Developmental Disabilities](#) said, "Identification of children at risk for ASD at 12 months could provide a substantial number of children and their families with access to intervention services months or years before they would otherwise receive a traditional diagnosis."

The First Year Inventory was developed by Grace Baranek, PhD, Linda Watson, EdD, Elizabeth Crais, PhD and J. Steven Reznick, PhD, who are all researchers with PEARLS. All are also co-authors of the study with Turner-Brown, published online ahead of print on July 10, 2012 by *Autism: The International Journal of Research & Practice*.

In the study, parents of 699 children who had completed the FYI when their child was 12 months old completed additional screening questionnaires when their child reached age 3. In addition, children who were found to be at risk for ASD based on these measures were invited for in-person diagnostic evaluations.

"These findings are encouraging and suggest promise in the approach of using parent report of infant behaviors as a tool for identifying 12-month-olds who are at risk for an eventual diagnosis of ASD," Turner-Brown said.

Provided by University of North Carolina Health Care

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