

# Nearly 1 in 10 U.S. children has a developmental disability: CDC

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More kids in the United States are getting a developmental disability

diagnosis, with prevalence close to 9% in 2021, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reports.

Among 3- to 17-year-olds, 8.56% have ever been diagnosed with a [developmental disability](#), compared to 7.4% in 2019, according to the agency's National Health Interview Survey.

The diagnoses are far more common among boys than girls. More than 1 in 10 boys had an [intellectual disability](#), autism spectrum disorder or any other developmental delay in 2021, the researchers reported.

Most of the increase fell into the category of "any other developmental delay," a broader category that includes speech disorders and learning disabilities.

[This report](#) is the first released by the CDC's National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS) since it looked at trends between 2009 and 2017.

"Timely estimates are necessary to assess the adequacy of services and interventions that children with [developmental disabilities](#) typically need," wrote [Benjamin Zablotsky](#), a statistician for the NCHS, and colleagues.

The report also noted that boys were more than three times as likely as girls to be diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder.

From 2019 to 2021, researchers found that rates of intellectual disability or [autism spectrum disorder](#) did not have a statistically significant increase, with almost 2% of children having an intellectual disability and 3% having autism. But reports of children having any "other developmental delay" rose from about 5% in 2019 to about 6% in 2021.

"A lot of times developmental delays might be temporary diagnoses that

evolve into something like autism, potentially, or intellectual disability. But also a lot of times children do age out of those," Zablotsky said in a *CBS News* report.

Among the other findings:

- Asian children had less prevalence of any developmental disability compared to other races and ethnicities.
- Prevalence of intellectual disability increased with age. Prevalence of "other [developmental delay](#)" decreased with age.
- Rates of developmental disability for girls were just over 5%, much lower than for boys at nearly 11%.

[Maureen Durkin](#), chair of University of Wisconsin-Madison's department of population health sciences, noted the constant increase in diagnoses with each survey. Durkin has previously pointed to improvements in diagnosing children, *CBS News* noted.

"In that sense, it could be a sign of progress, and a good thing. But it still opens up an entire agenda of things we need to do to prevent disability and improve outcomes overall," Durkin said.

Durkin noted improvements in care for newborns and increases in life expectancy for children born with Down syndrome.

Among the changes seen in recent years are that [white children](#) no longer have the highest rates of autism. In 2021, Black children had the highest rates.

"There's been an almost sea change in that in the last decade," said Durkin, who is also a primary investigator for the CDC's Autism Disabilities Monitoring Network in Wisconsin.

"For every time before there was this persistent disparity, with higher prevalence in white [children](#), and in high socioeconomic status communities, which is unlike any other disability," Durkin said, noting [risk factors](#) in poorer and disadvantaged communities, including preterm birth and lead poisoning.

"It makes sense that there is higher prevalence, and points to things we could do to prevent it. But for a while, I think we were under-identifying autism," Durkin said.

**More information:** The U.S. National Library of Medicine has more on [developmental disabilities](#).

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