

Study confirms the utility of screening to identify autism in toddlers born preterm

August 21 2024



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New research [published](#) in *Developmental Medicine & Child Neurology* reveals that children born preterm are more likely to screen positive for autism than full-term children.

For the study, 9,725 toddlers were screened at 15-, 18-, or 24-month well child visits using a test called the Modified Checklist for Autism in Toddlers, Revised.

Screening results that were positive for [autism](#) were most common among children born extremely preterm (51.35%) and least common among those born full-term (6.95%). Subsequent evaluations after positive screening revealed the following rates of autism diagnoses: 16.05% of extremely preterm, 2.00% of very preterm, 2.89% of moderately preterm, and 1.49% of full-term births.

Utilizing the screening test at ages unadjusted for early birth was effective for identifying autism, as only a small number of preterm children (1.90%) who screened positive with the test did not receive a diagnosis of autism or other [developmental delay](#) following evaluation.

"With this research, we are hoping to help dissipate doubts that clinicians might have about the utility of screening for autism in [toddlers](#) born preterm," said corresponding author Georgina Perez Liz, MD, of the AJ Drexel Autism Institute. "Low-cost, universal public health strategies such as screening can lead to less disparity in autism detection and help [children](#) on the spectrum start specific intervention and supports earlier in life."

More information: Autism screening and diagnostic outcomes among toddlers born preterm, *Developmental Medicine & Child Neurology* (2024). [DOI: 10.1111/dmcn.16045](https://doi.org/10.1111/dmcn.16045)

Provided by Wiley

Citation: Study confirms the utility of screening to identify autism in toddlers born preterm

(2024, August 21) retrieved 21 August 2024 from

<https://medicalxpress.com/news/2024-08-screening-autism-toddlers-born-preterm.html>

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