

Study estimates one in 91 individuals have autism

4 November 2009, By Laura Smith

(PhysOrg.com) -- Autism spectrum disorders (ASD) are neurodevelopmental disorders marked by impaired social interactions, restricted interests, repetitive behaviors, and communication impairment, which persist throughout a person's lifetime. The ASD prevalence rate--the number of individuals diagnosed with autism--has been steadily increasing over time.

A new report from the U.S. Department of Health's Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA), based on a phone survey of over 78,000 families, set the prevalence rate at nearly one in 91 [children](#). This is an increase from the prior statistic of one in 150 children reported in 2007 by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

According to the HRSA report, more than 1 percent of children are now living with [autism](#). The article, published in this month's issue of *Pediatrics*, found boys were four times more likely to have ASD than girls, a difference consistent with prior population-based studies. Additionally, white and Hispanic children are about twice as likely to have ASD as black and multiracial children.

HRSA attributes the rising prevalence rate to increasing awareness among health care providers and the general public in recent years. Better understanding of the signs and symptoms of ASD exist, and more services are available for diagnosis and treatment leading to increased and earlier diagnosis.

Researchers also believe that there are more people living with ASD than in the past. In other words, clinicians are not only better at diagnosing ASD, but there are also more people to diagnose. Further, [diagnostic criteria](#) for ASD have recently been expanded to include high functioning individuals with autism or Asperger's Disorder, who might not have been identified in the past.

There is a critical need to identify children with autism at a very young age so they can access evidence-based interventions that can significantly improve their outcomes and that will financially benefit society by reducing the need for costly services later in life.

Provided by Pennsylvania State University ([news](#) : [web](#))

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