

# The North Carolina Center for Autism and Developmental Disabilities Epidemiology



The Children's Health Act of 2000 directed the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to establish regional centers of excellence for autism spectrum disorders (ASDs) and other developmental disabilities. CDC is now funding **Centers of Excellence for Autism and Developmental Disabilities Research and Epidemiology (CADDRE)** in California, Colorado, Maryland/Delaware, North Carolina, and Pennsylvania. For information:

<http://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/dd/ddautism.htm>.

The North Carolina Center for Autism and Developmental Disabilities Epidemiology is the CADDRE program studying ASDs and mental retardation in North Carolina. The project will include the following counties: Alamance, Chatham, Davidson, Durham, Forsyth, Guilford, Johnston, Orange, Randolph, and Wake.

The center will conduct four major projects:

## Monitoring Activities

It is not currently known how many children living in North Carolina have an ASD. In the 2000-2001 school year, 136 8-year-old children were classified as having autism under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). IDEA is the federal law that supports special education and related services for children and youth with disabilities. However, there are additional children with ASDs who are classified in other disability categories under IDEA. There are also other children with ASDs and mental retardation who are in regular education classes, who attend private school, or who are home schooled.

The North Carolina center will use multiple sources to obtain a more complete estimate of the number of children aged 3 to 8 years in the project area with an ASD or mental retardation. The center will study whether these disabilities are more common in some groups of children than in others and whether the rates are increasing.

## CADDRE Case Cohort Study

The center will work with the other CADDRE programs to find causes of ASDs or factors that make it more likely that a child will have an ASD. Families who take part in the study will answer survey questions; children with ASDs will be tested, and staff will look at children's birth records. Children aged 3 to 5 years will be included in the combined centers study. Children with ASDs will be compared with children who do not have an ASD.

## Special Studies

The North Carolina center is interested in studying the roles of genetic and environmental factors that could act during pregnancy to contribute to ASDs. The North Carolina center is specifically interested in identifying genetic factors that might affect the mother's and infant's ability to respond to infection during pregnancy.

## Sharing Information

The North Carolina center plans to train nurses, physicians, educators, and other providers of health and educational services to screen children for signs of developmental disabilities and ASDs. Information will be shared through mailings to parents and support groups, the media, scientific publications, and presentations at professional conferences. A Web site, currently under development, will include links to information for parents, educators, and clinicians.

## For further information, please contact:

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