



THE STUDY TO EXPLORE EARLY DEVELOPMENT (SEED)

The Study to Explore Early Development (SEED) is a 5-year, multisite collaborative study. It will help identify what might put children at risk for autism spectrum disorders (ASDs) and other developmental disabilities. Six study sites and a data coordinating center make up the Centers for Autism and Developmental Disabilities Research and Epidemiology (CADDRE) Network. The CADDRE Network was a result of the passage of the Children's Health Act of 2000. That act directed CDC to create regional centers of excellence to study ASDs and other developmental disabilities.

CDC has funded five study sites:

- 1. California** - Kaiser Foundation Research Institute, which will be working with the California Department of Health Services
- 2. Colorado** - Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment, which will be working with the University of Colorado at Denver and Health Sciences Center
- 3. Maryland** - Johns Hopkins University, which will be working with the Kennedy Krieger Research Institute and Drexel University
- 4. North Carolina** - University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill
- 5. Pennsylvania** - University of Pennsylvania, which will be collaborating with Children's Hospital of Philadelphia

CDC will be part of the study as the sixth study site, and provides staff and other resources for a CADDRE site in Atlanta, Georgia. CDC also funds Michigan State University to run the study's Data Coordinating Center and Johns Hopkins University to run the study's central laboratory.

SEED will:

- Be the largest collaborative scientific study to date of the causes of autism. It will include about 2,700 children, 2 through 5 years of age, as well as their parents.
- Include diverse groups from six areas across the country. This will give a more representative sample of all children with ASDs in the United States.
- Use standard clinical procedures to classify children with and those without ASDs
- Give information on the many things that could lead to autism

A number of factors will be studied for their potential link with ASDs. These factors were picked after an in-depth look at existing studies. Each factor was chosen as high priority based on:

- How strongly it seemed to be linked with ASDs
- What new information was needed about it
- How well it could be looked at using this study's methods

SEED is looking at 3 main areas:

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- **Physical and behavioral characteristics of children with autism, children with other developmental disabilities, and children without a developmental delay or disability noted.**

Autism is a complex disorder. SEED wants to know better why people with autism are the way they are—that is, the whys and hows of autism and the people who have it. SEED also wants to know the same things about children without autism, both those who have no developmental problems and those who do.

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- **Health conditions among children with and those without autism.**

SEED is interested in learning more about a range of health conditions and disorders that might affect children with and those without autism. A number of other, smaller studies have noted more of some medical conditions among children with autism and their families. SEED will compare children with autism, children with other developmental disabilities, and children without any developmental delay or disability. This will let us look at how each group compares with the other groups on health conditions and health-related issues, such as the way they sleep and eating.

- **Factors associated with a child's risk for developing autism.**

We hope the study will give us a better idea which of the many possible things that we will be looking at seem to affect or be related to autism. These things are known as *risk factors*. Risk factors might be related to any of the following: genes that children get from their parents, other health conditions they have, or to something that could have affected the mother's pregnancy. These factors might by themselves causes autism, or they might work together with other factors to cause autism.