A CUP OF HEALTH WITH CDC

Autism Awareness

Autism Awareness Month — April 2011
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[Announcer] This podcast is presented by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. CDC — safer, healthier people.

[Dr. Gaynes] Welcome to *A Cup of Health with CDC*, a weekly feature of the *MMWR*, the Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report. I'm your host, Dr. Robert Gaynes.

Autism is a developmental disability. A recent CDC study found that one in a hundred and ten children in the US is affected by a form of autism.

Katie Green is a health communications specialist with CDC's National Center on Birth Defects and Developmental Disabilities. She's joining us today to discuss ways to recognize autism in children. Welcome to the show, Katie.

[Ms. Green] Thank you.

[Dr. Gaynes] Katie, what is autism?

[Ms. Green] Well, as you've mentioned, autism is a developmental disability. It causes challenges socially, in the way that people interact with one another; in communication, the way people express their needs and their wants; and in behavior. Autism is actually part of a group of developmental disabilities that most professionals refer to as autism spectrum disorders, or ASDs. And these disorders include autistic disorder, which is what most people know of as autism; Asperger's syndrome; and what is called PDD-NOS, or pervasive developmental disorder - not otherwise specified. But in very basic terms, people with ASDs handle information in their brains differently.

[Dr. Gaynes] How would a parent know if their child has autism?

[Ms. Green] Well the key to knowing if a child has autism, and doing so early, lies in being able to identify a developmental delay at a very early age. So, for parents, knowing what developmental milestones a child *should* reach at different ages, starting even as early as *two* months, can help a parent to see when a child is delayed.

CDC has some great resources. They offer a campaign called "Learn the Signs. Act Early." and it has great free tools and other resources for parents to learn about important developmental milestones. The website itself offers complete and really easy-to-use milestone checklists from two months of age to five years that a parent can use to track how their child's developing and share that information directly with their child's doctor at every appointment.

[Dr. Gaynes] What should a parent do if they suspect their child is having developmental problems?

[Ms. Green] The most important thing a parent should do is act early to do something about their concerns. So if they suspect that their child might be experiencing a delay, they should make a special appointment to talk with their child's doctor right away. If they or the doctor is concerned, a parent can ask for a referral to a specialist who can do some more in-depth evaluation of their child. And at the same time, the parent should reach out to their state's public, early childhood system to request a free evaluation to find out if the child qualifies for intervention services. And early intervention services are basically services to help a child with a delay before the age of three. They can have a significant impact on a child's ability to learn new skills, and they also reduce the need for costly interventions later on in life. So acting early is critical.

[Dr. Gaynes] Katie, where can listeners get more information about autism?

[Ms. Green] They can visit CDC's Learn the Signs. Act Early. campaign website at www.cdc.gov/actearly, and that's all one word.

[Dr. Gaynes] Thanks, Katie. I've been talking today with CDC's Katie Green about ways to recognize autism in children.

Remember, identifying autism *early* is key to getting children the help they need to reach their full potential. If you have concerns about your child's development, talk to a health care provider. Don't wait. Acting early can make a real difference!

Until next time, be well. This is Dr. Robert Gaynes for *A Cup of Health with CDC*.

[Announcer] For the most accurate health information, visit www.cdc.gov or call 1-800-CDC-INFO, 24/7.