

WHY IT'S IMPORTANT TO LEARN ABOUT CEREBRAL PALSY TODAY

Learn the signs and what to do if you think your child might have it



We all know the importance of making sure a child is healthy, but parents may not be aware of the signs and symptoms of major developmental disabilities, such as cerebral palsy (CP). CP, the most common cause of motor disability in childhood, is a group of disorders that affect a person's ability to move and keep their balance and posture. *Cerebral* means having to do with the brain. *Palsy* means weakness or problems with using the muscles. The symptoms of CP vary from person to person. A child may simply be a little clumsy or awkward or unable to walk at all.

CP is caused by damage or abnormal development to one or more parts of the brain that control movement. The damage or abnormality happens before birth or after birth. The part of the brain that is damaged determines what parts of the body are affected. CP itself is not progressive -- the brain function does not get worse as the child gets older; however, the physical characteristics can change over a person's lifetime. Depending on which areas of the brain are affected, one or more of the following may occur: muscle tightness; involuntary movement; difficulty in walking; difficulty in swallowing and problems with speech.

A recent study supported by Centers for Disease Control and Prevention shows the average prevalence of CP as 3.6 per 1,000 children or about 1 in 278 children. This first report from this study of the prevalence and characteristics of CP are from Georgia, Alabama and Wisconsin. All sites reported the highest prevalence among boys, Blacks and those living in low- and middle-income neighborhoods. Prevalence rates were lowest among Hispanic children.

The signs of CP vary greatly because there are many different types and levels of disability. The main sign that your child might have CP is a delay reaching the motor or movement milestones. If you see any of these signs, call your child's doctor or nurse.

A child over two months with CP might:

- have difficulty holding head upright when picked up
- have stiff legs that cross or "scissor" when picked up

A child over six months with CP might:

- have difficulty bringing hands together
- reach with only one hand while keeping the other in a fist

A child over 10 months with CP might:

- crawl by pushing off with one hand and leg while dragging the opposite hand and leg
- not sit by himself or herself

A child over 12 months with CP might:

- not crawl
- not be able to stand with support

A child over 24 months with CP might:

- not be able to walk
- not be able to push a toy with wheels

If you or your doctor has concerns about CP, you can seek the help of a specialist such as a developmental pediatrician or child neurologist, and you can contact your local early intervention agency (for children under 3) or public school (for children 3 and older). To find out who to speak to in your area, you can contact the National Dissemination Center for Children with Disabilities by logging on to <http://www.nichcy.org> or calling 1-800-695-0285, or you can log onto www.reachingforthestars.org or the CDC website, http://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/autism/ActEarly/cerebral_palsy.html for more information on CP.