

## Team Approach and Early Diagnosis Key to Autism Treatment

Question: What is autism?

Answer: Autism is one of five developmental disorders. Autism is in the autistic spectrum disorder (ASD) “umbrella” which includes milder forms of developmental disorders like Asperger’s syndrome.

Q: At what age will parents notice signs of autism?

A: Children as young as 18 months can show early signs of autism. In general, children are diagnosed with autism around 3 years of age.

Q: What are early signs of autism?

A: A child may be sensitive to the tiniest stimuli in the environment; can perform repetitive behaviors; fails to keep eye contact with a parent; appears withdrawn; feels easily overwhelmed; or “rages” when over stimulated.

Q: How is autism diagnosed?

A: There is no blood test, brain scan, or physical exam that diagnoses autism. The provider uses a screening tool like M-CHAT or Modified Checklist for Autism in Toddlers.

Q: How common is autism in the United States? Is autism increasing in frequency?

A: The CDC estimates autism affects 1 in 150 live births or about 1.25 million Americans. Autism is increasing in frequency probably due to factors including public and provider awareness, viral infections, and environmental toxins.



Q: Is there a link between vaccines and autism?

A: The Institute of Medicine in 2004 concluded there is no association between autism and childhood vaccinations.

Q: How is autism treated?

A: A team approach along with early diagnosis offers the best outcome for a child with autism. A team may include a primary care physician who prescribes medication; an occupational therapist to help with activities of daily living; a physical therapist to assist with motor skill development; and a mental health counselor. A counselor can use strategies like Floortime to encourage imaginative play and problem solving; psychoeducation to teach family members about autism; and social storytelling to rehearse social skills.

Q: What resources are available to learn more about autism?

A: You may visit [www.firstsigns.org](http://www.firstsigns.org); [www.autism-help.org](http://www.autism-help.org) ; or [www.thegraycenter.org](http://www.thegraycenter.org) for more information.



Jim Hunt, LPC