



# IT'S YOUR HEALTH



## Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD)

### THE ISSUE



Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is a term used to describe a group of developmental disorders that include:

- Autism
- Asperger Syndrome
- Pervasive Developmental Disorders (PDD)
- Rett's disorder
- Childhood Disintegrative Disorder (CDD)

Most people with ASD have trouble with social interaction and communication. They may also have unusual interests, activities, and behaviours.

Researchers are working to find answers about the causes and most effective treatments for ASD, but there is still much that is unknown.

### SIGNS OF ASD

Because signs of ASD become noticeable in early childhood, parents are often the first to notice signs of the condition. Approximately **one in every 150–160 children** has autism spectrum disorder. Signs of autism are

usually detected in early childhood, and boys are four times more likely to have the condition than girls.

Autism affects the way the brain develops, causing the individual to have difficulty with communication and social interaction, and unusual patterns of behaviour, activities and interests. "Symptoms" or disabilities caused by ASDs can vary from very mild in one person and quite severe in another.

People affected by ASD almost always have:

- trouble communicating
- problems with social interaction
- repetitive behaviours
- unusual, or severely limited interests



Possible signs of Autism Spectrum Disorders:

- trouble with pointing or making meaningful gestures by 1 year
- can not speak one word by 16 months
- can not combine two words by 2 years
- doesn't smile
- does not respond to their name

- noticeable delays in language or social skills
- avoids making eye contact
- strongly resists changes in routines
- has problems with, or is not interested in playing with toys
- at times seems to be hearing impaired
- has problems interacting with other children or adults

ASD develops differently in every individual. There is no such thing as a typical autism disorder. Symptoms vary and can range from mild to severe.

## CAUSES OF ASD

Although the exact cause of ASD is unknown, there is strong evidence that genetics may play a role. Other possible causes include:

- pre- and post-natal development
- environmental factors
- immune deficiencies

ASD is **not**:

- infectious
- contagious
- caused by parental behaviour or parenting style
- caused by vaccines



## DIAGNOSIS AND TREATMENT OF ASD

A team of health professionals will use various standardized tests to make the diagnosis.

These are lifelong conditions that have significant impacts on families. While there is no cure for ASD, many children benefit from early diagnosis and treatment.

## REDUCE YOUR RISK

While research continues on prevention and causes of ASD, early diagnosis and treatment can benefit children. If you see signs of ASD in a family member, talk to your health care provider.

If a family member is diagnosed with ASD, learning about the condition can help you prepare for—and cope with—the challenges ahead.

- Get information from reliable sources. Many [autism organizations](#) have websites with information for parents and caregivers.
- Seek support and advice from other families dealing with ASD.
- Talk to your health care provider about support groups in your community.

## THE GOVERNMENT OF CANADA'S ROLE

[Health Canada](#) works with the [Public Health Agency of Canada](#) and the [Canadian Institutes of Health Research](#) to co-ordinate ASD research and surveillance. Health Canada also supports Canada's capacity to address autism through efforts to enhance awareness and knowledge about this condition. Federal activities include:

- Health Canada is working with the Canadian Institutes of Health Research to launch a National Chair for Autism Research and Intervention.
- The Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR) has invested and committed \$39.5 million to [autism-related research](#) since 2000.
- CIHR's [Institute of Neurosciences, Mental Health and Addiction](#) is supporting autism-related research and working with partners in the autism community to set research priorities, coordinate action, and accelerate the speed at which knowledge is translated into improved health for Canadians with autism and their families.
- The Public Health Agency of Canada is working with stakeholders and key experts to develop and implement a [national surveillance system](#) for developmental disorders, including autism.



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## FOR MORE INFORMATION

- Health Canada's [Autism web section](http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/hc-ps/dc-ma/autism-eng.php) at: [www.hc-sc.gc.ca/hc-ps/dc-ma/autism-eng.php](http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/hc-ps/dc-ma/autism-eng.php)
- [National Autism Spectrum Disorders Surveillance System](http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/hc-ps/dc-ma/autismsurv-eng.php) at: [www.hc-sc.gc.ca/hc-ps/dc-ma/autismsurv-eng.php](http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/hc-ps/dc-ma/autismsurv-eng.php)
- Public Health Agency of Canada, [Thimerosal in Vaccines and Autism - Questions and Answers](http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/im/q_a_thimerosal-eng.php) at: [www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/im/q\\_a\\_thimerosal-eng.php](http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/im/q_a_thimerosal-eng.php)
- *It's Your Health*—[Misconceptions about Vaccine Safety](http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/hl-vs/iyh-vsv/med/misconception-eng.php) at: [www.hc-sc.gc.ca/hl-vs/iyh-vsv/med/misconception-eng.php](http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/hl-vs/iyh-vsv/med/misconception-eng.php)
- *It's Your Health*—[Childhood Immunizations](http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/hl-vs/iyh-vsv/med/immuniz-eng.php) at: [www.hc-sc.gc.ca/hl-vs/iyh-vsv/med/immuniz-eng.php](http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/hl-vs/iyh-vsv/med/immuniz-eng.php)
- [Autism Society Canada](http://www.autismsocietycanada.ca/) at: [www.autismsocietycanada.ca/](http://www.autismsocietycanada.ca/)
- [Autism Speaks Canada](http://www.autismspeaks.ca/) at: [www.autismspeaks.ca/](http://www.autismspeaks.ca/)
- [Geneva Centre for Autism](http://www.autism.net/) at: [www.autism.net/](http://www.autism.net/)

## FOR INDUSTRY AND PROFESSIONALS

- Government of Canada Response to the Report of the Standing Senate Committee on Social Affairs, Science and Technology, *Pay Now or Pay Later — Autism Families in Crisis* at: [www.hc-sc.gc.ca/hc-ps/dc-ma/anti-crisis\\_crise-eng.php](http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/hc-ps/dc-ma/anti-crisis_crise-eng.php)
- [Canadian Autism Intervention Research Network](http://www.cairn-site.com/en/index.html) at: [www.cairn-site.com/en/index.html](http://www.cairn-site.com/en/index.html)

## RELATED RESOURCES

- [Centre of Knowledge on Healthy Child Development](http://www.knowledge.offordcentre.com/) at: [www.knowledge.offordcentre.com/](http://www.knowledge.offordcentre.com/)
- For safety information about food, health and consumer products, visit the [Healthy Canadians](http://www.healthycanadians.gc.ca) website at: [www.healthycanadians.gc.ca](http://www.healthycanadians.gc.ca)
- For more articles on health and safety issues go to the *It's Your Health* web section at: [www.health.gc.ca/iyh](http://www.health.gc.ca/iyh)

You can also call toll free at 1-866-225-0709 or TTY at 1-800-267-1245\*

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