

Learn the Signs. Act Early.

State of Alaska > Health & Social Services > Autism Awareness

Overview of Autism Spectrum Disorders

- Autism spectrum disorders are a group of developmental disabilities that can cause social, communication and behavioral challenges for affected children and adults. Autism's effects vary person to person, so these challenges can be mild or significant.
- About 1 percent of all babies born in Alaska each year will develop an autism spectrum disorder, according to CDC nationwide estimates. In other words, about 11,000 Alaskans will be born this year, and 110 of them will be diagnosed with an autism disorder by the age of eight.
- In 2008, more than 600 children were receiving services related to an autism diagnosis in Alaska schools.
- Current research indicates that autism spectrum disorders are present at birth and last throughout a person's life, although symptoms can improve over time. Some children with autism disorders show hints of future problems within the first few months of life. In others, symptoms might not develop until 24 months or later. In still others, the children may develop normally until 18 months or 24 months, and then they stop gaining new skills or they lose the skills they once had.

A person with an autism spectrum disorder may exhibit some or all of the following:

- Not respond to his or her name by 12 months old
 - Not point at objects to show interest by 14 months old (such as pointing at an airplane flying overhead)
 - Not play "pretend" games by 18 months old (such as pretend to feed a doll)
 - Avoid eye contact and want to be alone
 - Have trouble understanding other people's feelings or talking about his or her own feelings
 - Have delayed speech and/or language skills
 - Repeat words or phrases over and over (often called "echolalia")
 - Give unrelated answers to questions
 - Get upset by minor changes
 - Have obsessive interests
 - Flap hands, rock his or her body or spin in circles
 - Have unusual reactions to the way things sound, smell, taste, look or feel
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Types of Autism Spectrum Disorders

There are three types of autism spectrum disorders:

Autistic Disorder

This is sometimes called “classic” autism. It is what most people think of when hearing the word “autism”. People with autistic disorder usually have significant language delays, social and communication challenges, and unusual behaviors and interests. Many people with autistic disorder also have intellectual disability.

Asperger Syndrome

People with Asperger syndrome usually have milder symptoms of autistic disorder. They might have social challenges and unusual behaviors and interests. However, they typically do not have problems with language or intellectual disability.

Pervasive Developmental Disorder – Not Otherwise Specified

This is sometimes called “atypical autism,” or PDD-NOS. People who meet some of the criteria for autistic disorder or Asperger syndrome, but not all, may be diagnosed with atypical autism. These people usually have fewer and milder symptoms than those with autistic disorder. The symptoms might cause only social and communication challenges