
Autism Spectrum Disorder 'Special' Bulletin

April 10, 2009

This week's bulletin provides an overview of Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASDs) including recent news, current research and reports, events, initiatives, and useful links. It includes a selection of information based on a preliminary scan and is not exhaustive. ***We invite you to share other relevant information about this topic.***

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----- I. OVERVIEW: AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDER -----

1. Definition of Autism Spectrum Disorders

(also available in French)

According to Health Canada, *Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)* “is a complex, lifelong condition that affects individuals from all walks of life, as well as their families, friends, and caregivers. Autism is a spectrum disorder, defined by certain behaviours which come in combinations and in degrees of intensity that vary in each child and adult affected” (Health Canada, 2008).

English: <http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/dc-ma/autism/index-eng.php>

French: <http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/dc-ma/autism/index-fra.php>

2. How is the term *autism* used?

(also available in French)

The term *autism* is referred to in two different ways: (1) to the autistic disorder and (2) in general to all ASDs (Autism Society of Canada, 2007).

English: http://www.autismsocietycanada.ca/understanding_autism/what_are_asds/index_e.html

French: http://www.autismsocietycanada.ca/understanding_autism/what_are_asds/index_f.html

3. How is the term *spectrum* used?

(also available in French)

The term *spectrum* refers to a range of severity or developmental impairment. Both children and adults vary in terms of: severity (from mild to severe), number and types of symptoms, age of onset, functioning levels, and social interaction challenges (Autism Society of Canada, 2007). However, both children and adults with ASDs share certain common communication and social characteristics (Autism Society of Canada, 2007).

English: http://www.autismsocietycanada.ca/understanding_autism/what_are_asds/index_e.html

French: http://www.autismsocietycanada.ca/understanding_autism/what_are_asds/index_f.html

4. What types have been identified?

(also available in French)

Some of the different diagnoses include: *Autistic Disorder*, *Asperger's Disorder*, *Pervasive Developmental Disorder - Not Otherwise Specified (PDD-NOS)*, *Rett's Disorder*, and *Childhood Disintegrative Disorder (CDD)* (Autism Ontario, 2009).

For more information see:

Autism Ontario:

<http://www.autismontario.com/client/aso/ao.nsf/web/ASD+2?OpenDocument>

Autism Society Canada:

http://www.autismsocietycanada.ca/understanding_autism/what_are_asds/index_e.html

French: http://www.autismsocietycanada.ca/understanding_autism/what_are_asds/index_f.html

5. Autism Quick Facts:

(also available in French)

- By age 3, studies show that the signs of autism are typically present
- Boys are four times more likely to develop autism than girls
- ASD is characterized along a spectrum where symptoms range in severity from mild to severe
- Symptoms include repetitive behaviour, and difficulties with social interaction, learning, and communication
- International studies show that an estimated 1 in 150-160 children has autism
- The prevalence of ASD nationally is approximately 1 in 200 people
- Autism is diagnosed by a variety of measures and careful observation by a team of health professionals (Health Canada, 2008)

English: <http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/dc-ma/autism/index-eng.php>

French: <http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/dc-ma/autism/index-fra.php>

6. Prevalence of Autism in Canada

Autism Society of Canada (2007) provides information on the prevalence of ASDs in Canada. The most common neurological disorder and developmental disability impacting children today is autism. According to current epidemiological studies, the prevalence of autism has increased from 40 to 60 per 10,000 (about 190,000 Canadians). Around 1 in 165 children have an ASD in Canada and the number of new cases of children with ASDs is increasing around the world. The following statistics are taken from the Autism Society of Canada website (2007):

- CDD Rare: ~ 0.2 in 10,000= ~ 500 Canadians
- Rett's Rare: ~ 1 in 10,000= ~ 3,150 Canadians
- Asperger's Disorder: ~ 5 in 10,000= ~ 15,000 Canadians
- PDD-NOS: ~ 15 in 10,000= ~ 47,000 Canadians
- Autistic Disorder: ~ 20 in 10,000= ~ 73,000 Canadians

http://www.autismsocietycanada.ca/asd_research/research_prevalence/index_e.html

----- II. AUTISM IN THE NEWS -----

CANADA

7. Autism Society Canada Responds to the Federal Government's 2009 Budget

Christine Dade, President of Autism Society Canada, responded to the federal budget that was released January 27, 2009. "The federal budget did not include investment in ASD treatment, resources, or services" (Dade, 2009). Autism Society Canada is hoping the Federal Government will consider autism as a national priority and support a National Autism Strategy. Steps to achieve this goal would include: (1) a universal screening process and improved diagnosis provided by skilled professionals; (2) addressing glaring gaps in the availability to treatments, services, and accommodations because the lifespan needs facing communities are complex and multi-faceted; and (3) continuing to foster research with an investment to fund targeted autism research.

http://www.autismsocietycanada.ca/pdf_word/Open_letter_ASC_Budget%202009_response.pdf

8. Animated Series Helped Children with Autism Recognize Emotions: Study

This article (CBC News, 2009, January 13) reports the findings of a study conducted by the Autism Research Centre at Cambridge University in conjunction with the U.K. government. The article was published in the *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*. A total of 20 children between the ages 4 to 7 years participated in the study. The researchers found that a number of children with autism had considerable improvements in understanding and recognizing emotion after watching an animated series called *The Transporters*. It features trains, trolleys, ferries, and cable cars, with real faces of actors expressing emotions.

News Article: <http://www.cbc.ca/health/story/2009/01/13/autism-dvd.html>

More on the transporters: <http://www.thetransporters.com/research.html>

INTERNATIONAL

9. More Evidence Pre-Term Birth Tied to Autism: Study

This article (Dunham, 2009) reports the findings from a study conducted by Dr. Karl Kuban of Boston University School of Medicine and Boston Medical Center. The study examined children who were born more than three months prematurely and looked at the link between preterm birth and autism. The study found that children born prematurely were about two to three times as likely to show signs of autism at age 2 compared to other children (Dunham, 2009). Dr. Karl Kuban explained: "the increased risk for autism indicated in these children may not be directly caused by being born prematurely... Instead, it is possible that whatever causes a child to have autism also may force an early birth".

News Article: <http://www.nationalpost.com/life/health/story.html?id=d2d499b0-145a-4892-adad-5b742318336a>

10. California's Autism Increase Not Due to Improved Diagnosis

According to this article (Ewing, 2009), since the 1990s, there has been a seven- to eight-fold increase in the number of autism cases in California. UC Davis M.I.N.D. Institute researchers conducted a study and suggest that the increase can not be associated with the changes in how the condition is diagnosed or counted. Their results suggest shifting research from genetics, to looking at environmental factors (e.g., chemicals and infectious microbes). UC Davis M.I.N.D. Institute researcher Irva Hertz-Picciotto explains: "It's time to start looking for the environmental culprits responsible for the remarkable increase in the rate of autism in California".

News Articles: <http://www.digitaljournal.com/article/264798>

<http://www.ucdmc.ucdavis.edu/newsroom/newsdetail.html?key=1861&svr=http://www.ucdmc.ucdavis.edu&table=published>

11. Ten Myths about Autism

ABC news (Salahi & Chitale, 2008, October) provides answers about the 10 most common myths about autism in an effort to help the public better recognize the range of symptoms of ASDs.

<http://abcnews.go.com/Health/ColdandFluNews/story?id=6089162&page=1>

----- III. CURRENT RESEARCH AND REPORTS -----

ONTARIO

12. Autism Ontario: Current Research

Autism Ontario has a Research Committee that provides direction to the organization by identifying priority areas and advising where support and funds should be directed. Funding is

provided through research scholarships, which encourage students to pursue a career in the field, and particularly in the area of ASD research. This webpage also provides summaries of current research studies conducted in Canada.

<http://www.autismontario.com/client/aso/ao.nsf/web/Research>

13. Autism Research

Autism Research aims to enhance the understanding of the causes, origins, and effects of autism spectrum disorders and the effects of treatment of persons with an ASD or a related disorder. Resources, relevant links, research, a virtual community of autism stakeholders, and autism training are available.

<http://asdcarc.com/index.php/publisher/articleview/frmArticleID/346/staticId/118/>

CANADA

14. Autism Society of Canada: Research into Causes of Autism

Research around the world focuses on the possible causes of autism such as: genetics/heredity, prenatal factors, differences in biological brain function, exposure to environmental toxins, nutritional factors, viral infections, and immune system deficiencies (Autism Society of Canada, 2007). This website provides a summary of some of the current research in these areas.

http://www.autismsocietycanada.ca/asd_research/causes_of_autism/index_e.html

15. Canadian Autism Intervention Research Network (CAIRN)

This website provides current summaries of research findings on the cause, diagnosis, prevalence, prognosis, and treatment of autism. It also includes international literature reviews.

<http://www.cairn-site.com/en/research1.html>

16. Geneva Centre for Autism: Research in Progress

This webpage provides up-to-date information about current research in Canada. A section of the website has also been designated for researchers who are looking for participants to assist in their studies.

<http://www.autism.net/content/blogcategory/66/233/>

17. Report on the National Autism Research Symposium

(also available in French)

On November 8th and 9th, 2007, the National Autism Research Symposium was held at the Sheraton Hotel in Toronto, Ontario. The purpose of the symposium was to educate and inform participants about present knowledge on autism and to gather ideas and assist the research community in conducting future research on autism. This report provides an account of these informative presentations and discussions.

English: <http://www.cihr-irsc.gc.ca/e/36237.html#intro>

French: <http://www.cihr-irsc.gc.ca/f/36237.html>

18. Pay Now or Pay Later: Autism Families in Crisis

(also available in French)

The Standing Senate Committee on Social Affairs, Science and Technology (2007) conducted a detailed report on funding for the treatment of ASDs. The report acknowledges the challenges that families affected by ASD experience and provides “suggestions and recommendations that offer a positive direction for current and future considerations on the issue” (The Standing Senate Committee on Social Affairs, Science and Technology, 2007).

Final report: <http://www.parl.gc.ca/39/1/parlbus/commbus/senate/com-e/soci-e/rep-e/repfinmar07-e.htm>

French: <http://www.parl.gc.ca/39/1/parlbus/commbus/senate/Com-f/SOCI-F/rep-f/repfinmar07-f.htm>

Government of Canada response: http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/dc-ma/pubs/auti-crisis_crise/index-eng.php

French: http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/dc-ma/pubs/auti-crisis_crise/index-fra.php

INTERNATIONAL

19. International Society for Autism Research (INSAR)

INSAR is a professional and scientific organization focused on advancements in autism knowledge and research. Areas of focus are neurobiological, genetic, and psychological and how these impact developmental processes in ASDs.

<http://www.autism-insar.org/>

20. Vaccines and Autism: Many Hypotheses, But No Correlation Found

This extensive new review (Gerber & Offit, 2009) summarizes studies that refute the claim of a link between vaccines and autism. The authors conclude that 20 epidemiologic studies have shown that neither thimerosal nor MMR vaccine (for measles, mumps, and rubella) cause autism. They suggest that “these studies, in concert with the biological implausibility that vaccines overwhelm a child’s immune system, have effectively dismissed the notion that vaccines cause autism. Further studies on the cause or causes of autism should focus on more-promising leads” (Gerber & Offit, 2009).

<http://www.journals.uchicago.edu/doi/pdf/10.1086/596476>

News Article: <http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2009/01/090130093407.htm>

More on the issue: <http://www.healthzone.ca/health/article/586552>

21. ASDs Following In Utero Exposure to Antiepileptic Drugs

This article (Ivanhoe Newswire, 2008) reports the findings of a study conducted by The Liverpool and Manchester Neurodevelopment Group, which found a link between a drug for treating epilepsy (Valproate) and a higher risk of a child developing autism (Bromley, Mawer, Clayton-Smith, & Baker, 2008). The data showed that women who took Valproate during pregnancy were seven times more likely to give birth to a child with autism, than those women who never took the drug during pregnancy. Other studies show that Valproate, more than other epilepsy drugs, has been known to cause birth defects.

News Article: http://www.ivanhoe.com/channels/p_channelstory.cfm?storyid=20323

Correspondence: <http://www.neurology.org/cgi/eletters/71/23/1923#38351>

----- IV. UPCOMING EVENTS -----

22. Autism Society Canada: Event Listings

Local events can be located by clicking on the province of residence. In Ontario, parent support groups, workshops, information sessions, conferences, and training sessions/courses are available.

http://www.autismsocietycanada.ca/upcoming_events/canadian/index_e.html

23. Geneva Centre for Autism - Calendar

Current training opportunities and events for parents/caregivers and service providers are listed and updated regularly. Upcoming events are listed below.

Training opportunities: <http://www.autism.net/content/blogcategory/71/90/>
Events: http://www.autism.net/component/option,com_events/Itemid,583/

Autism and Anxiety: Techniques That Help

April 14, 2009: Toronto, ON

Hosted by: Training Institute Faculty, Geneva Centre for Autism

http://www.autism.net/component/option,com_events/task,view_detail/agid,357/year,2009/month,04/day,14/Itemid,197/catids,76|73|74|193|201/

Incorporating the Principles of Applied Behavioural Analysis ABA into the Individual Education Program (IEP)

April 23, 2009: Toronto, ON

Hosted by: Training Institute Faculty, Geneva Centre for Autism

http://www.autism.net/component/option,com_events/task,view_detail/agid,358/year,2009/month,04/day,23/Itemid,197/catids,76|73|74|193|201/

Communication Strategies for Non-Verbal to Minimally Verbal Individuals with ASD

May 6, 2009: Toronto, ON

Hosted by: Training Institute Faculty, Geneva Centre for Autism

http://www.autism.net/component/option,com_events/task,view_detail/agid,359/year,2009/month,05/day,06/Itemid,197/catids,76|73|74|193|201/

Discipline and the Exceptional Child

May 7, 2009: Toronto, ON

Presenter: Lindsay Moir, Educational Consultant, Comhnadh Consulting

http://www.autism.net/component/option,com_events/task,view_detail/agid,361/year,2009/month,05/day,07/Itemid,197/catids,76|73|74|193|201/

Sensory Gifts and Challenges

May 20, 2009: Toronto, ON

Presenters: Ellen Yack, M.Ed., B.Sc. O.T., Reg. (ONT) Director, Ellen Yack & Associates, Training Institute Faculty, Geneva Centre for Autism, Featuring Michael Moon

http://www.autism.net/component/option,com_events/task,view_detail/agid,364/year,2009/month,05/day,20/Itemid,197/catids,76|73|74|193|201/

Introduction to ASDs

May 25, 2009: Toronto, ON

Hosted by: Training Institute Faculty, Geneva Centre for Autism

http://www.autism.net/component/option,com_events/task,view_detail/agid,342/year,2009/month,05/day,25/Itemid,197/catids,76|73|74|193|201/

Introduction to Asperger Syndrome

May 27, 2009: Toronto, ON

Hosted by: Training Institute Faculty, Geneva Centre for Autism

http://www.autism.net/component/option,com_events/task,view_detail/agid,348/year,2009/month,05/day,27/Itemid,197/catids,76|73|74|193|201/

----- V. INITIATIVES -----

24. World Autism Awareness Day: April 2, 2009

This UN resolution is one of only three official disease-specific United Nations Days. World Autism Awareness Day aims to bring the world's attention to autism. "The World Autism Awareness Day resolution encourages all Member States to take measures to raise awareness about autism throughout society and to encourage early diagnosis and early intervention. It

further expresses deep concern at the prevalence and high rate of autism in children in all regions of the world and the consequent developmental challenges" (Autism Speaks, 2009)".
<http://www.worldautismawarenessday.org/site/c.egLMI2ODKpF/b.3917065/k.BE58/Home.htm>

25. Autism Speaks Canada Marks Autism Awareness Month with Launch of Website

The website www.autismspeaks.ca was launched on April 1, 2009, marking the first day of Autism Awareness Month. The website contains information on the early warning signs of autism, what to do if you suspect your child has autism, treatments and interventions, access to Family Services products and programs, news highlights from across Canada and the latest research findings. The information is currently provided in English with plans to translate to French in the near future.
<http://www.autismspeaks.ca/>

----- VI. USEFUL LINKS -----

26. Autism Ontario - Publications

- *Children Diagnosed with Autism: What to Expect and Where to Get Help*
- *Strategies and Information for Ontario Families and Care Providers*
- *Bullying and Proactive Inclusion*
- *The Autism Spectrum in Our Lives*

<http://www.autismontario.com/client/aso/ao.nsf/web/Publications2>

27. Funding and Services

This section of the Autism Ontario website provides information about funding opportunities.
<http://www.autismontario.com/client/aso/ao.nsf/Durham/Funding+Services?OpenDocument>

28. Autism Ontario-Services Covered by OHIP

This website provides an overview of services covered by OHIP.
<http://www.autismontario.com/client/aso/ao.nsf/Durham/Services?OpenDocument>

29. Geneva Centre for Autism - Toronto Partnership for Autism Services (TPAS)

The TPAS provides Intensive Behavioural Intervention (IBI) for children with a diagnosis of ASD, who live in the Toronto area.
<http://www.autism.net/content/view/97/260/>

30. Registered Disability Savings Plan (RDSP)

The RDSP allows funds to be invested tax-free until withdrawal and is intended to help parents and others to save for the long-term financial security of a child with a disability. The plan is similar to the Registered Education Savings Plan (RESP).

English: <http://www.cra-arc.gc.ca/tx/ndvdl/tpcs/rdsp-reei/menu-eng.html>

French: <http://www.cra-arc.gc.ca/tx/ndvdl/tpcs/rdsp-reei/menu-fra.html>

SUPPORT FOR PARENTS/CAREGIVERS AND CHILDREN

31. ABASCUS: Help for Parents

This website is a source of information for parents, caregivers, and the general community about Applied Behavioural Analysis (ABA) services for individuals with ASD in Ontario.
<http://www.abacuslist.ca/>

32. Autism Ontario: Support for Families

Autism Ontario provides services and information to families about how they can be supported in their own communities.

<http://www.autismontario.com/client/aso/ao.nsf/RCP/support+for+families?OpenDocument>

33. Geneva Centre for Autism

The Geneva Centre for Autism offers a wide range of clinical services customized for each person with ASD.

<http://www.autism.net/content/blogcategory/168/207/>

34. Autism Society Canada: Resources and Links

This website provides links to resources and information for families and caregivers. It includes information about screening, intervention, and treatment.

English: http://www.autismsocietycanada.ca/index_e.html

French: http://www.autismsocietycanada.ca/index_f.html

35. Health Canada: ASD

This website (Health Canada, 2008) provides information about ASDs.

English: <http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/dc-ma/autism/index-eng.php>

French: <http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/dc-ma/autism/index-fra.php>

36. Autism Canada Foundation

This website (2008) provides information about autism, treatments, research, recent news, how to get involved, and a calendar of events.

<http://www.autismcanada.org/>

37. Canadian National Autism Foundation (CNAF)

CNAF was formed by parents and caregivers of children with autism and is dedicated to promoting autism awareness, assisting families with information they require, and raising funds to support Canadian based autism research.

<http://www.cnaf.net/>

38. Ministry of Children and Youth Services: Autism Programs and Services

This website (Ministry of Children and Youth Services, 2007) provides information about programs and services for children with autism in Ontario.

English: <http://www.gov.on.ca/children/english/programs/needs/autism/index.html>

French: <http://www.gov.on.ca/children/french/programs/needs/autism/index.html>

39. Persons with Disabilities Online: Services

This website (2009) provides access to services and information for persons with disabilities, family members, caregivers, and all Canadians.

English: <http://pwd-online.ca/pwdh.4m.2@.jsp?lang=eng>

French: <http://www.ph-endirect.gc.ca/pwdh.4m.2@.jsp?lang=fra>

40. Together for Autism-Ontario

Together for Autism increases awareness about autism and raises funds for autism research.

English: <http://www.togetherforautism.ca/client/aso/TFA.nsf/web/What+is+TFA?OpenDocument>

French: <http://www.togetherforautism.ca/client/aso/TFA.nsf/web/Materials?OpenDocument>

41. Abilities.ca

This website provides useful links to resources and allows people with disabilities and the broader community to engage in dialogue.

http://abilities.ca/accessibility/2004/04/15/autism_from_a_to_z/