

## AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDER

### **Definition**

Autism spectrum disorder is a neurobehavioral disorder which affects the way the brain functions. As a result, individuals with autism have difficulties with communication and social interaction, and unusual patterns of behaviour, activities and interests. Autism is a spectrum disorder, which means that each individual can be affected differently from mild to severe impairments.

### **Common Behaviours in Autism**

While these are some common behaviours seen in children with autism, they can also be seen in developmentally normal children. It is the combination of behaviours that makes autism a possible diagnosis.

#### *Language & Communication*

- No babbling by 11 months
- No gestures by 12 months
- No words by 18 months
- Doesn't respond to name
- Poor turn-taking in conversation
- Echolalia or repetitive words/phrases
- Odd gestures or body movements

#### *Social Skills*

- No or poor eye contact
- Preference for solitary play
- No or limited shared interest/enjoyment
- Delayed pretend or imaginative play
- Lines up toys or interested in moving parts
- Specific ways/rituals to perform activities
- Tends to take things literally

Autism is a multifactorial disorder. This means there is no "one cause" for autism but rather there are various genetic and environmental factors that interact and contribute to autism. If your child is diagnosed with autism, your pediatrician will order some bloodwork to investigate for some medical and genetic causes.



Autism is not caused by MMR or any other immunizations. For more information on this topic, please visit:

[www.immunize.ca/en/publications-resources/questions/autism.aspx](http://www.immunize.ca/en/publications-resources/questions/autism.aspx)  
[www.cdc.gov/vaccinesafety/Concerns/Autism/antigens.html](http://www.cdc.gov/vaccinesafety/Concerns/Autism/antigens.html)

## Diagnosis

Autism can look very different for different people at different ages. Early diagnosis can lead to early treatments, which can help to maximize the future potential of any child.

An ASD diagnosis depends on the number and pattern of typical characteristics, and the observation of specific behaviours and disabilities. It takes a multi-disciplinary team of qualified autism specialists to make a clinical diagnosis. The team typically includes: a pediatrician, a registered psychologist, a psychiatrist, and a speech-language pathologist. Many different measures and screening tools such as the DSM-IV and the M-Chat-R are used in the process to ensure accuracy.

Diagnosis can be done through the British Columbia Autism Assessment Network (BCAAN) at no cost to the family, or privately for a fee. It is so important that you request a referral from your family doctor as soon as you recognize signs of ASD in your child. Some specialized preschools also offer private assessments.

## Treatment

Autism is a life-long condition for which there is no cure. However, with intensive early intervention, some individuals improve their language and social skills. This involves a multidisciplinary team that can include: speech language pathologist (SLP), occupational therapist (OT), physiotherapist (PT), behavioural therapist, psychologist and/or other trained professional. Treatment is often done as a combination of program-based and in-home supports. In Calgary, there are a variety of specialized preschools and schools.



More information on this can be obtained from your local school board. Alternative treatments for autism include things such as specific diets or supplements. These are not widely recommended in autism as most do not stand up to scientific standards. Many families will explore alternative treatments, and it is important to ensure that you are making an informed decision.

More information on evidence-based alternative treatments are available on our website: “Navigating Information on Intervention” handout. The pediatricians at Vernon Pediatrics do not promote or endorse a specific alternate treatment for autism. But it is important to tell your child’s pediatrician if you have chosen to explore an alternative treatment.

### **Funding & Support**

In British Columbia, we have access to provincial government funding through the Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD) for autism services. Persons aged 18 and under are entitled to funding after receiving a diagnosis of Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). Please note: Method and locations of diagnosis may require a different registration process or paperwork.

#### FUNDING UNDER AGE 6

Families can access up to \$22,000 per year per child to help pay for eligible autism services, therapies or equipment. Parents are required to select professional service providers from the Registry of Autism Service Providers (RASP).

#### FUNDING FOR AGES 6-18

Families can access up to \$6,000 per year per child to help pay for eligible out-of-school autism intervention services and therapies. Parents are not required to select professional service providers from the (RASP).



For more information on funding and eligibility please visit

- Autism BC <https://www.autismbc.ca/>
- Ministry of Children & Family Development  
<https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/governments/organizational-structure/ministries-organizations/ministries/children-and-family-development>
- Registry of Autism Service Providers  
<https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/health/managing-your-health/child-behaviour-development/special-needs/autism-spectrum-disorder/build-your-support-team/registry-autism-service-providers>