
CDC Finds 'Significant Increase' In Kids With Developmental Disabilities

by Michelle Diamant | July 17, 2023

The number of children with developmental disabilities is on the rise with new data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention showing that nearly 1 in 11 kids are diagnosed with autism, intellectual disability or developmental delay.

Between 2019 and 2021, incidence of developmental disabilities grew from 7.4% to 8.56% among children ages 3 to 17 across the country, according to a report issued this month from the CDC's National Center for Health Statistics.

During that time, the prevalence of autism and intellectual disability remained relatively flat, but the uptick was driven by an increase in kids diagnosed with other developmental delay, the federal agency said.

The findings come from data collected through the government's National Health Interview Survey, a routine poll soliciting information about health matters from people across the country. Participants were asked if a doctor or other health professional had ever told them that their child had autism, intellectual disability or any other developmental delay.

Overall, the researchers found a "significant increase" in diagnosis of developmental disabilities. Boys were twice as likely to have the conditions as compared to girls and the diagnoses were least common among Asian children.

Prevalence of developmental disabilities remained fairly steady across the age groups studied, but the report indicated that intellectual disability was more common as kids grew older while cases of other developmental delay were more concentrated in younger age groups.

Benjamin Zablotsky, the main author of the CDC report, said that it's unclear what's driving the growth in diagnoses.

"We measure the prevalence of developmental disabilities in the population to help gauge the adequacy of available services and interventions," he said. "The increase seen in this report could potentially require a corresponding increase in available services and interventions."

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