

# April is World Autism Month

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And the

St. Ignatius of Loyola

Parish Health Ministry

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As he passed by he saw a man blind from birth. His disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" Jesus answered, "Neither he nor his parents sinned; it is so that the works of God might be made visible through him." *John 9:1-3*

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## What is Autism?

**Autism spectrum disorder** (ASD) and *autism* are both general terms for a group of complex disorders of brain development characterized, in varying degrees, by difficulties in social interaction, verbal and nonverbal communication and repetitive behaviors.

## How common is Autism?

While no studies have been able to confirm the prevalence rate for adults and more research is needed, autism statistics from the **U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention** (CDC) released in March 2014 identify around 1 in 68 American children as on the autism spectrum – a ten-fold increase in prevalence in 40 years. Studies also show that autism is four to five times more common among boys than girls. An estimated 1 out of 42 boys and 1 in 189 girls are diagnosed with autism in the United States. ASD affects over 2 million individuals in the U.S. and tens of millions worldwide. Government autism statistics suggest that prevalence rates have increased 10 to 17% annually in recent years. There is no established explanation for this continuing increase, although improved diagnosis and environmental influences are two reasons often considered.

## What causes Autism?

Not long ago, the answer to this question would have been, "we have no idea." Research is now starting to deliver the answers. First and foremost, we now know that there is no one cause of autism, just as there is no one type of autism. Over the last five years, scientists have identified a number of rare gene changes or mutations associated with autism. Research has identified more than 100 autism risk genes. In around 15% of cases, a specific genetic cause of a person's autism can be identified. However, most cases involve a complex and variable combination of genetic risk and environmental factors that influence early brain development. In other words, in the presence of genetic predisposition to autism, a number of non-genetic or environmental influences further increase an individual's risk.

Some factors that have been identified to increase the risk of autism include parental age, extreme prematurity, difficulties during birth, mothers exposed to high levels of pesticides and air pollution. It is important to keep in mind that these factors, by themselves, do not cause autism. Rather, in combination with genetic risk factors, they appear to modestly increase risk.

# What is autism?

Autism, or autism spectrum disorder (ASD), refers to a range of conditions characterized by challenges with social skills, repetitive behaviors, speech and nonverbal communication. We now know that there is not one autism but many subtypes, caused by a combination of genetic and environmental influences, and many accompanied by medical issues such as GI disorders, seizures, anxiety disorders and sleep disturbances.

autism affects an estimated **1 in 68** CHILDREN in the U.S.

FOR MOST  
**Autism is a**  
lifelong condition.



Boys are nearly **5x** more likely than girls to have autism.



On average, it costs an added

**\$60,000**

The majority of these costs are in special education and lost parental income.

The incremental cost of autism across a lifetime averages

**\$1.4 M**

to

**\$2.4 M**

with costs increasing with intellectual disability.



autism affects more than **70 Million** people worldwide

Nearly **1/2** of children with autism wander or bolt from safety



In 2015 researchers estimated the annual national cost for

caring for Americans with autism

to be **\$268 billion**, rising to **\$461 billion**

by 2025 in the absence of more-effective interventions and lifelong supports.

around **1/3** of people with autism are nonverbal

an estimated **50,000** teens age out of school-based autism services each year



only **1%** of autism research funding went to the study of life span issues



drowning is the leading cause of wandering related deaths for children with autism

