

# Prevalence Rate

*Is there an increase in  
ASD?*

# Prevalence Rate:

## Prevalence vs. Incidence

**Prevalence:** the proportion of individuals in a population who suffer from a defined disorder

**Incidence:** the number of new cases occurring in a population over a period of time

# Prevalence Rate:

## Autistic Disorder

**CDC estimates the  
prevalence rate to be  
1 in 88**

# Prevalence Rate:

## Across the spectrum

- Autistic Disorder: 20.6 per 10,000
- PDD-NOS: 37.1 per 10,000
- AS: 6 per 10,000
- All PDDs combined: 60 to 70 per 10,000

**Translates to 1 in 150**

# Prevalence Rate

So - Is there an increase?

**Possibly.**

- More likely that there is an increase in the *prevalence* (existing cases) of ASD rather than the *incidence* (new cases) of ASD.

# Prevalence Rate

## Reasons for Increase

- Changes in Dx criteria/assessment
- Inaccurate diagnosis
- Research methodology
- Changes in Sp.Ed. policies
- Increasing availability of services
- Heightened public awareness
- Cultural factors

# Prevalence Rate

## Changes in Dx criteria/assessment

- Criteria introduced in DSM-III (1980)
- DSM and ICD discrepancies
- Periodic revisions to criterion definitions and characteristics of participants
- Changes in diagnostic instruments
- Age of diagnosis has steadily dropped

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## Inaccurate Diagnosis

- Variations in diagnostic instruments
- Range of clinicians conducting evaluations
- Overlapping symptoms with communication disorders
- More likely to receive ASD than ID diagnosis than in the past



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## Research Methodology

- Different diagnostic criteria and assessment methods over time = studies utilizing different criteria for prevalence
- Increased access to data sources
  - e.g., CDC studies using medical and educational records found higher prevalence rates in regions with access to both
- Autistic regression impacts numbers later in childhood

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## Change in Special Education Policies

- Addition of autism special education classification in the **IDEA** funding and reporting mechanism (1992-1993 school year).
- As a result of addition, post 1994, rates of Autism experienced an increase from 0.6 to 3.1 per 1,000
- At the same time, rates of ID(MR) and LD, post 1994 decreased to 2.8 and 8.3 per 1,000

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## Increasing availability of services

- Resources and attention focused on ASD
- Services have increased and improved
- Greater acceptability by parents and clinicians

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## Heightened Public Awareness

- Frequently discussed in the media
- Concerns over vaccines increased awareness

# Prevalence Rate

## Cultural Factors

- Acculturation and social factors
- Prevalence rates have risen in most of the developed and western nations
  - e.g., Compared to rates from Ethiopia, Israeli children of Ethiopian extraction revealed higher prevalence of ASD
- ASD is a new concept in the Eastern World



# **Summary: Prevalence Rate**