

Autism Take Home Messages For Family Physicians

If you suspect a child has autism...

- Refer to Early Childhood Connections or Child Find **1-888-777-4041**.
- Consultation available through JFK Partners or The Child Development Unit **720-777-6630**.

If you are providing primary care for a child with autism...

A good experience at the doctor's office starts in the waiting room.

Some helpful hints for a successful office visit are:

- If the waiting room is full of other families, limit waiting time in this environment so that the child isn't over stimulated.
- Keep TV or music levels low.
- Provide activities that have gross motor movement and/or sensory stimulation. Example: have a box of fidget toys such as squishy balls available in the exam room.
- Work with the family to include "transition time" into the visit. Do expect that everything will take longer than a typical child (check in, weigh and measure, moving to a room, the physical exam etc.)
- You are more likely to successfully examine the child if you are not rushed, you sit and give the child time to adjust, you show the child what you are going to do before you do it, and you limit the duration of unpleasant experiences as much as possible.

Your checklist for preventative services for children with autism should include:

- Routine pediatric healthcare according to established guidelines.
- Screen for dietary concerns or poor growth.
- Screen and management of constipation.
- Screen and management of reflux.
- Screen and referral for dental care.
- Screen and management of sleep disturbance.
- Screen for onset of seizures.
- Ask about changes in behaviors that may signal that something else is going on.
- Note frequency of otitis media and refer for hearing assessments.

- Consider a genetics referral if the child is dysmorphic or doesn't have classic autism.

Your checklist of “red flags” for screening young children for a possible autism spectrum disorder includes a decreased frequency in or lack of behaviors in these areas evidenced as early as 14 mos. of age:

- Shared positive affect (social smiles) & expressiveness
- Social interaction
- Social anticipation
- Eye contact/gaze shifting
- Response to name
- Social babbling
- Use of gestures and words, loss of words
- Imitation
- Joint attention (initiating and responding to)