



# Carl R. Darnall Army Medical Center

Public Affairs Office  
254-288-8005

Fort Hood, Texas

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## Month of the Military Child: Studies show autism on the rise

### How to Access Health Care

For nine long months parents anticipate the birth of a new baby. They buy clothes and diapers, assemble furniture, pick out names and dream about a happy, healthy, bright future for their impending arrival.

However, many parents find themselves facing a very different reality when they discover their child is autistic.

The Centers for Disease Control's latest published study in 2006 estimated one in every 110 children was diagnosed with autism spectrum disorders.

The CDC's website states, "Autism spectrum disorders (ASDs) are a group of developmental disabilities characterized by atypical development in socialization, communication, and behavior. The symptoms of ASDs typically are present before age 3 years and often are accompanied by abnormalities in cognitive functioning, learning, attention, and sensory processing."

Autistic children may struggle to maintain or completely avoid eye contact, prefer to play alone, avoid cuddling or touching, have poor speech or communication abilities or not develop speech at all. They may rub surfaces repeatedly, have a heightened or lowered response to pain or display intense tantrums.

Other symptoms of autism may appear to indicate other disorders like Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, Tourettes, Obsessive Compulsive Disorder or Oppositional Defiant Disorder, which can make an accurate diagnosis difficult.

Studies show autism affects boys more often than girls.

The CDC reported one in every 70 males and one in every 315 females are diagnosed with ASDs by the age of 8. The same report said studies in 2002 and 2006 in sample populations show rates of ASDs diagnoses are on the rise.

"Of 10 sites that collected data for both the 2002 and 2006 surveillance years, nine observed an increase in ASD prevalence," the study said.



"The average prevalence of ASDs identified among children aged 8 years increased 57 percent in 10 sites from 2002 to the 2006."

The good news is doctors are getting better at identifying autism, Col. (Dr.) Mark Croley, chief of Pediatrics at Carl R. Darnall Army Medical Center said.

"You know, 20 or 30 years ago children who may have had autism were just considered different. There was no official diagnosis then. It may have always been there, we've just gotten better at identifying it and categorizing it," he said.

Unfortunately, the cause of autism is still a mystery. Some factors that have been considered are diet, digestive tract changes, mercury poisoning, poor vitamin and mineral absorption, or vaccine sensitivity, Croley said.

"A lot of things have been looked at, but researchers don't really know what causes autism," he said.

Croley stressed the importance of regular well baby check-ups especially if parents are concerned about their child's development.

"When parents come in they are usually most concerned about where their child is on the growth chart, but we're looking for developmental milestones like eye contact and babbling," he said. "Even with infants there may be warning signs."

While there is no cure for autism, there are treatment options for the symptoms Croley said.

"The mainstay treatment (for autism) is behavioral therapy because it reinforces behaviors we want to see and it helps desensitize them," he said. "There are other treatments too, like weight vests and medications for problems sleeping. Some parents also try special diets."

Doctors who suspect autism may ask the parents a series of questions about how they interact with their child, or they may provide a questionnaire designed to help determine if a child should be referred to a specialist for further testing.

Once a child is diagnosed with delayed development they may be referred to the Exceptional Family Member Program, Lisa Schimmels, a CRDAMC EFMP case coordinator said.

"The primary care manager is the first step. Then the Family should enroll in EFMP," she said. "The child will most likely then be referred to a developmental pediatrician in the local community for further testing."

If you think your child may have autism or is showing signs of developmental delays talk to your primary care provider or contact CRDAMC's Patient Appointment Service, 254-288-8888.

#### NURSE ADVICE LINE

Speak to a Registered Nurse 24/7

Advice about urgent health issues

Guidance on non-emergency issues. Information about self-care for Injuries and illnesses  
1-254-553-3695

#### APPOINTMENTS ONLINE

Register online to make appointments

And refill prescriptions on the Web at [www.tricareonline.com](http://www.tricareonline.com)

#### EVENING APPOINTMENTS

Thomas Moore Health Clinic  
58th Street & 761st Tank  
Destroyer Blvd.

Appointments from 5—8 p.m.  
On Monday, Tuesday, and Thursday  
Call 254-288-8888

#### WEEKEND WALK-IN CARE

Thomas Moore Health Clinic  
58th Street & 761st Tank  
Destroyer Blvd.

Saturday & Sunday  
From 8—11 a.m. and 1—3 p.m.

#### QUICKCARE

Prompt treatment of minor injuries and sudden illnesses  
Walk-in Care for Families enrolled to

Bennett Health Clinic, Russell Collier Health Clinic, and Thomas Moore Health Clinic  
Monday through Friday  
From 8 a.m.—5 p.m.



## Month of the Military Child: Immunizations protect children and help wipe out diseases

Childhood immunizations may possibly be the worst part of becoming a new parent and they are certainly the low point of all well-baby appointments, but most parents view them as a necessary evil.

But are they really necessary?

Lt. Col. (Dr.) Joseph Llanos, chief of Preventive Medicine at Carl R. Darnall Army Medical Center said yes, immunizations are crucial for children.

"It really is important for people to get vaccines to prevent infection," he said. "Immunizations lower the risk of very serious illnesses like polio, invasive haemophilus influenza type b, and measles, and the vaccines are leading to the eradication of some of these major illnesses."

Poliomyelitis, more commonly known as polio, is one of those eradicated illnesses.

It was the worst pandemic in American history with over 57,000 reported cases in the early 1950's. Polio attacked mostly children killing more than 3,000 and leaving over 21,000 others disabled or paralyzed.

Now polio is more of a distant nightmare than a true threat for Americans. It hasn't been seen in the Western Hemisphere since 1992 and in United States since 1979.

Haemophilus Influenzae Type b (Hib), which was a leading cause of meningitis and pneumonia in children before a vaccination was implemented in the 1980's, is heading in the same direction as polio.

"Since routine vaccination began, the incidence of Hib disease has decreased by greater than 99 percent in children younger than five years old," he said.

Despite these well-known suc-

cess stories, some vaccines still have a bad reputation especially the measles, mumps and rubella (MMR) vaccine.

Some parents, however, are still afraid to give their child the MMR vaccine because of speculation it may be connected to autism in young children.

Parents should not skip this important vaccine Llanos said.

"An increased number of cases of autism in the 80's was thought to be linked to the MMR vaccine, but at this time there is no proven scientific evidence that links immunizations with any neuro-development abnormalities," he said.

Vaccines do have side effects, but for most they are minor and may include tenderness, swelling, redness, itching or bruising at the injection site

or a low-grade fever, headaches or fatigue. More severe reactions like hives, seizures, breathing problems or loss of consciousness require immediate medical attention.

Vaccines have played a major role in the development of an overall healthier and protected public. Vaccines may make for a long fitful night, but at least they shield children from deadly and debilitating illnesses.

Llanos encouraged parents who still have concerns to do their research, and if they still have questions, talk to their child's pediatrician.

Col. (Dr.) Mark Croley, chief of Pediatrics at Carl R. Darnall Army Medical Center agreed.

"If parents bring their children in for their well baby appointments the primary care physician will make sure immunizations get taken care of. If parents have any questions we can address them."



Levi Stevens, new son of Sgt. Joshua and Hollie Stevens, 664th Ordnance Co., 180th Transportation Bn., Fort Hood, Texas, wails in pain as he gets a Hepatitis B vaccine on the day of his birth, April 14, 2011.