April Is Autism Awareness Month

Center for Persons With Disabilities

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APRIL IS AUTISM AWARENESS MONTH

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Current research shows that one in every 110 individuals is diagnosed each year with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and that number is rising steadily, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

Autism is the fastest growing developmental disability, more common than pediatric cancer, diabetes and AIDS combined. Recent studies done by the CDC have shown that there was a staggering 57 percent increase of children identified with autism from 2002 to 2006, and a 600 percent increase in just the past 20 years.

Last week, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Secretary Kathleen Sebelius released a statement regarding the designation of April as the National Autism Awareness Month. “During National Autism Awareness Month, we reflect on an urgent public health challenge and rededicate ourselves to addressing the complex needs of people with autism and their families.”

Autism - or more precisely the autism spectrum disorders (ASDs) - represents a broad group of developmental disorders that can significantly impair social interactions, verbal and nonverbal communication, and behavior. ASDs affect each person in different ways, and can range from being very mild to severe. They begin before the age of three and last throughout a person’s life, although symptoms may improve over time.

The root cause of autism is still unknown and there is no conclusive scientific evidence to indicate that there is something very specific that can be linked to causing it. While there is not a cure, autism is treatable. Children do not “outgrow” autism, but studies show that early diagnosis and intervention lead to significantly improved outcomes.

Parents need to be aware of the symptoms of autism, which can be seen in a child as young as 18 months old.

The CDC Learn the Signs-Act Early Campaign provides an in-depth list of the early symptoms of ASD and “red flags” to watch for.

If parents suspect that their child may have ASD they should contact their local physician to request a developmental screening. Depending on the age of the child, this may be done by an Early Intervention program (serving infants and toddlers, birth to age three) or the local school district (serving children with disabilities from three to age 21).

Take time this month to learn more about autism so you can support the individuals and families who face the challenges that come with ASD.