

What Causes ASD?



We do not know all of the causes of ASD. However, we have learned that there are likely many causes for multiple types of ASD. There may be many different factors that make a child more likely to have an ASD, including environmental, biologic and genetic factors. Here is what we know:

Most scientists agree that genes are one of the risk factors that can make a person more likely to develop ASD.

- Children who have a sibling with ASD are at a higher risk of also having ASD.
- Individuals with certain genetic or chromosomal conditions, such as fragile X syndrome or tuberous sclerosis, can have a greater chance of having ASD.
- When taken during pregnancy, the prescription drugs valproic acid and thalidomide have been linked with a higher risk of ASD.
- There is some evidence that the critical period for developing ASD occurs before, during, and immediately after birth.
- Children born to older parents are at greater risk for having ASD.

ASD continues to be an important public health concern. Like the many families living with ASD, CDC wants to find out what causes the disorder. Understanding the factors that make a person more likely to develop ASD will help us learn more about the causes. We are currently working on one of the largest U.S. studies to date, called Study to Explore Early Development (SEED). SEED is looking at many possible risk factors for ASD, including genetic, environmental, pregnancy, and behavioral factors.