

Early Autism Detection: Are We Ready for Routine Screening?

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KEY WORDS

child development disorder, pervasive screening programs, early diagnosis, health care

ABBREVIATIONS

ASD—autism spectrum disorder

ADI-R—Autism Diagnostic Interview, Revised

CHAT—Checklist for Autism Spectrum Disorders in Toddlers

M-CHAT—Modified Checklist for Autism Spectrum Disorders in Toddlers

SCQ—Social Communication Questionnaire

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abstract

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BACKGROUND. Autism is a serious neurodevelopmental disorder that has a reportedly rising prevalence rate. The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that screening for autism be incorporated into routine practice. It is important to consider the pros and cons of conducting autism screening as part of routine practice and its implications on the community. We have explored this question in the context of screening from a scientific point of view.

METHOD: A literature search was conducted to assess the effectiveness of community screening programs for autism.

RESULTS: Judged against critical questions about autism, screening programs failed to fulfill most criteria. Good screening tools and efficacious treatment are lacking, and there is no evidence yet that such a program would do more good than harm.

CONCLUSIONS: On the basis of the available research, we believe that we do not have enough sound evidence to support the implementation of a routine population-based screening program for autism. Ongoing research in this field is certainly needed, including the development of excellent screening instruments and demonstrating with clinical trials that such programs work and do more good than harm. *Pediatrics* 2011;128:e211–e217