Adolescents With Autism Face Multiple Unmet Health Needs

Although mental and physical health problems are far more common among adolescents with autism spectrum disorder, a recent study showed that they’re about half as likely as their peers without autism to be given guidance on transitioning from pediatric to adult health care.

The data are from a follow-up study of adolescents who participated in the Study to Explore Early Development when they were aged 2 to 5 years. About a decade later, 21% of the youths with autism had physical difficulties such as problems using their hands or hearing loss compared with less than 2% of the control group. Nearly two-thirds of the young people with autism also had a mental health or other condition such as Tourette syndrome compared with about one-third of the control group. The most common mental health conditions among adolescents with autism were attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder and anxiety.

About 42% of the youths with autism received mental health services compared with 22% of their peers. However, 11% of those with autism still had unmet health needs, including dental or vision care, compared with 3% of the control group.

Few adolescents in either group received guidance recommended by federal health agencies to help them transition to adult care. Three transition planning components evaluated in the study were the physician’s active engagement in the adolescent’s care, 1-on-1 time with the physician without a parent present, and the parent’s knowledge of how the child will be insured as an adult.

The study showed that about 8% of adolescents with autism and 14% of their peers received assistance in all 3 transition planning recommendations. But 31% of those with autism compared with 57% of their peers received transition planning that included at least 2 components. The disparity increased as planning assistance decreased: 69% of youths with autism compared with 43% of their peers had no transition planning or planning that included only 1 component.

Tick Bites Send Concerned Patients to the Emergency Department

US residents averaged nearly 50,000 annual emergency department (ED) visits—or 1 out of every 2000 trips to the ED—for tick bites between 2017 and 2019, according to CDC surveillance data.

Ticks are on the move, fueled by complex factors including changing climate patterns and growing suburban developments in forested areas that have boosted their numbers, varieties, and territorial range. These trends have led to an increase in tickborne disease cases, which have more than doubled from about 23,000 in 2004 to nearly 49,000 in 2016. Although Lyme disease accounts for more than 80% of US tickborne illnesses, 7 new disease-causing pathogens spread by ticks have been found over the past 2 decades.

The CDC’s new surveillance data indicate that about 1 in 900 ED visits in the Northeast was for a tick bite, which the authors attribute to highly concerned patients in a region where Lyme disease is prevalent. ED visits for tick bites peaked in the spring and early summer and again in the fall, which corresponds with black-legged ticks’ most active seasons, suggesting the species may be driving these trends. Children aged 9 years or younger accounted for most of the visits, while adults aged 70 to 79 years made up the second largest group. Men were also disproportionately affected.

“Educational campaigns that provide information to the public about how to safely remove ticks at home and when prophylactic antibiotics are indicated might be beneficial to reduce the impact on health care, associated health care costs, and personal risk for exposure to tickborne diseases,” the authors wrote. — Bridget M. Kuehn, MSJ

Note: Source references are available through embedded hyperlinks in the article text online.