

Autism Spectrum Disorder

A guide for community physicians

Source: Canadian Paediatric Society

www.cps.ca/uploads/issues/CPS_Autism-EN-clinical-tool_1.pdf

Adapted with permission.

The estimated prevalence of ASD is 1 in 66 Canadians aged 5 to 17 years

Autism spectrum disorder (ASD) is a life-long neurodevelopmental disorder, characterized by impairments in social communication, repetitive and restricted patterns of behaviour, and unusual sensory sensitivities or interests. ASD significantly impacts the lives of children and their families. Timely diagnosis of ASD, and referral for intensive behavioural and educational interventions at the earliest age possible, may lead to better long-term outcomes by capitalizing on the brain's neuroplasticity at younger ages.

This tool is a companion to 3 Canadian Paediatric Society statements that provide clear, comprehensive, evidence-informed recommendations and tools to help community paediatricians and other primary care providers monitor for the earliest signs of ASD—an important step toward an accurate diagnosis and comprehensive needs assessment for intervention planning.

Key Points

Early detection

- All Canadian children should be monitored for early behavioural signs of ASD as part of general developmental surveillance.
- Children identified as being at increased risk for ASD should receive an early, focused evaluation to determine need for further diagnostic assessment.

Diagnostic assessment

- Three diagnostic pathways are described, to address the continuum of complexity of clinical presentation of children with suspected ASD, and also to be flexible to community strengths and collaboration between community paediatricians, other developmental health professionals, and specialty centers.

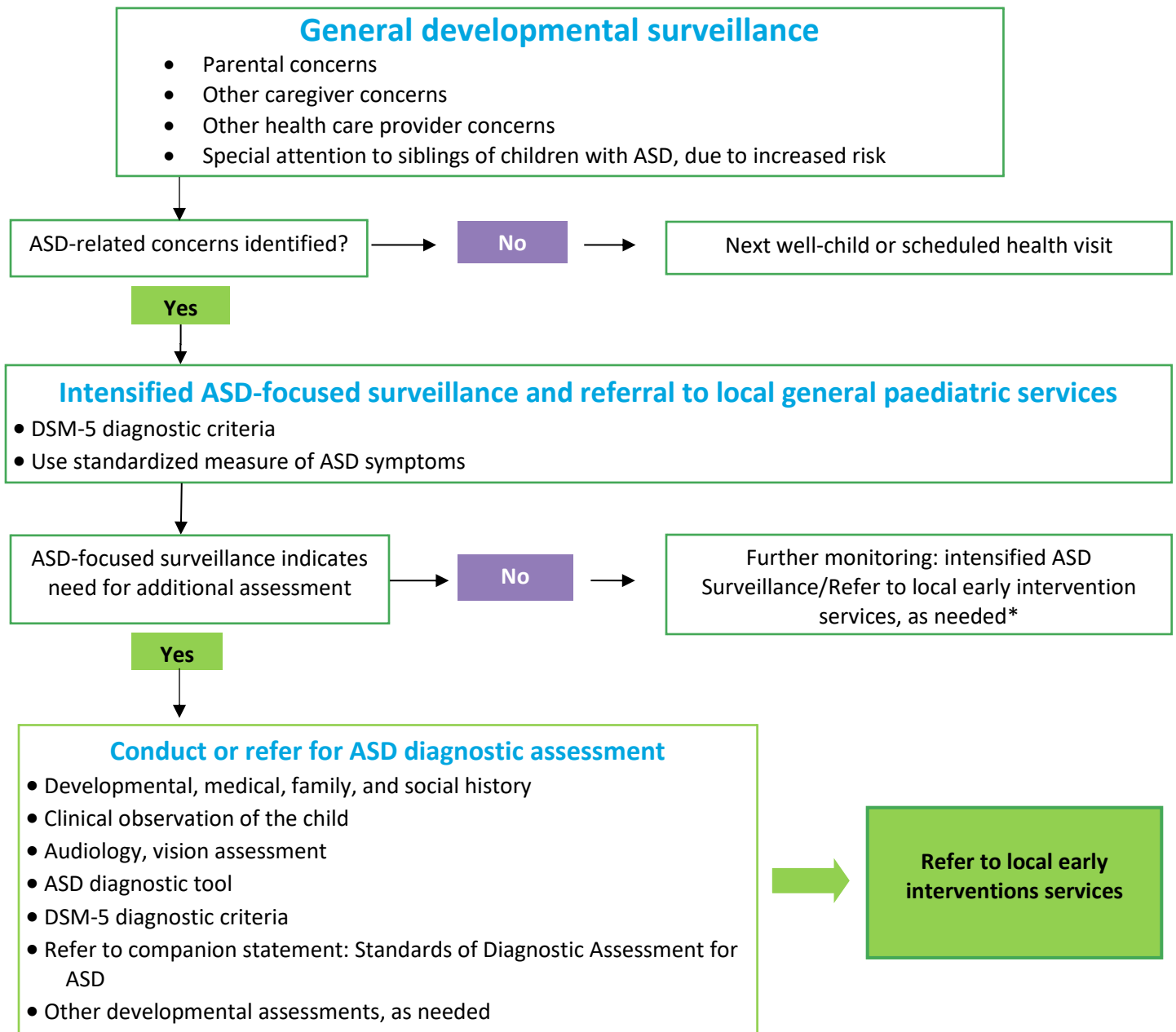
Post-diagnostic management

- Paediatricians and other primary care providers are well-positioned to provide or coordinate ongoing medical and psychosocial care and support services for children with ASD.
- Managing ASD includes treating medical and psychiatric co-morbidities, behavioural and developmental interventions, and providing supportive social care services to enhance quality of life for affected children and families.

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Developmental surveillance and screening for ASD

When developmental surveillance indicates a possible risk for ASD, further in-depth assessment is needed. This stage of assessment, which is more intensively ASD-focused, should include a standardized measure of ASD symptoms. Children who meet scoring criteria according to this first screening tool, or whose clinical presentation indicates a high index of suspicion to their health care provider, should proceed to a diagnostic assessment, either by a community paediatrician or a specialized team.



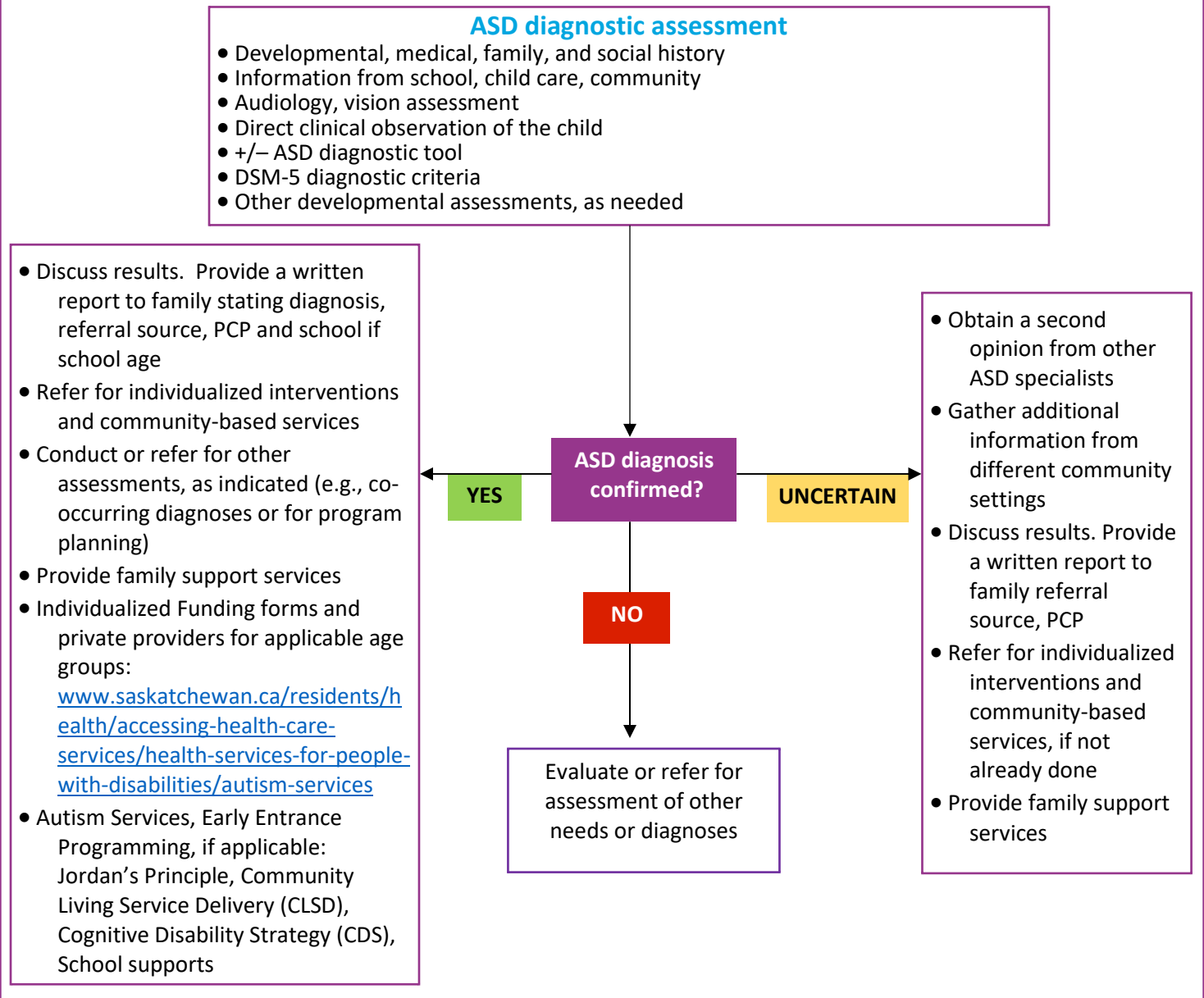
ASD Autism spectrum disorder; DSM-5 Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, 5th edition

*Referral for an audiology assessment could occur at this stage

Source: Canadian Paediatric Society: www.cps.ca/uploads/issues/CPS_Autism-EN-clinical-tool_1.pdf. Adapted with permission. Source: Canadian Paediatric Society, Autism Spectrum Disorder Guidelines Task Force (Principal author: Lonnie Zwaigenbaum). Early detection for autism spectrum disorder in young children. Paediatr Child Health. 2019;24(7):424-432.

Diagnostic evaluation: Three approaches

Children with suspected ASD are often first identified by a paediatrician, family physician, parent or another caregiver, and can present with a wide range and severity of symptoms. A “one-size-fits-all” multidisciplinary team diagnostic approach is inefficient and contributes to long wait times. The CPS proposes three ASD diagnostic approaches, the choice of which depends upon the paediatric care provider’s clinical experience and judgment, and the complexity of symptom presentation. Regardless of the approach taken, open communication, collaboration, and consent to share information among professionals may help to achieve diagnostic accuracy and avoid duplication of effort.



Source: Canadian Paediatric Society: www.cps.ca/uploads/issues/CPS_Autism-EN-clinical-tool_1.pdf. Adapted with permission. Source: Canadian Paediatric Society, Autism Spectrum Disorder Guidelines Task Force (Principal author: Jessica Brian). Standards of diagnostic assessment for autism spectrum disorder. Paediatr Child Health. 2019;24(7):444-451.

Checklist Post Diagnostic management of Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)

<p>1. Etiological testing for associated medical conditions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Physical and neurological exam <input type="checkbox"/> Hearing assessment <input type="checkbox"/> Vision assessment <input type="checkbox"/> Dental assessment <input type="checkbox"/> Genetic testing including microarray assessment; other investigations if indicated <input type="checkbox"/> Metabolic testing is indicated 	<p>2. Management of Comorbid conditions Refer to specialist when appropriate</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Gastrointestinal conditions <input type="checkbox"/> Nutrition <input type="checkbox"/> Sleep <input type="checkbox"/> Anxiety, depression, and other mood and psychiatric disorders <input type="checkbox"/> Attention deficit and hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) <input type="checkbox"/> Other child-specific conditions
<p>3. Other assessments and therapies that address ASD-associated functional challenges</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Speech-language therapy <input type="checkbox"/> Psycho-educational assessment <input type="checkbox"/> Occupational therapy <input type="checkbox"/> Physical therapy <input type="checkbox"/> Individualized education supports <input type="checkbox"/> Behavioral intervention 	<p>4. Behavioural and developmental interventions for core and associated features of ASD. Refer to specialists when appropriate</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Become familiar with available community programs <input type="checkbox"/> Provide information about essential components and effectiveness of treatment interventions and programs <input type="checkbox"/> Facilitate enrollment into behavioral and developmental intervention programs (therapist-delivered or parent-mediated approaches)
<p>5. Management of challenging behaviours</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Offer anticipatory guidance on safety issues (e.g. wandering, bolting, vulnerability to bullying or abuse) <input type="checkbox"/> Identify and assess target behaviors <input type="checkbox"/> Assess existing and available supports <input type="checkbox"/> Offer first-or-second-line treatment, as appropriate <input type="checkbox"/> Refer for parent training 	<p>6. Complementary and alternative medicine (CAM) approaches</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Become familiar with CAM therapies <input type="checkbox"/> Inquire and provide guidance about using CAM therapies
<p>7. Family and other support interventions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Provide parents with educational resources about ASD and local community supports <input type="checkbox"/> Provide information about in-home supports and interventions and help with securing respite care and social assistance <input type="checkbox"/> Inquire about family and sibling support and parental and physical and mental health issues and unmet needs, and refer appropriately <input type="checkbox"/> Assist with application for Disability tax Credit and provide information regarding opening a Registered Disability Savings plan <input type="checkbox"/> Advocate for local services and education programs <input type="checkbox"/> Obtain and share information, with parental consent, with schools, program staff, and health and social service personnel (especially during major transition periods) 	

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 Source: Canadian Paediatric Society, Autism Spectrum Disorder Guidelines Task Force (Principal author: Angie Ip). Post-diagnostic management and follow-up care for autism spectrum disorder. Paediatr Child Health. 2019;24(7):461-468.



Resources and References

For more information and additional Resources: www.cps.ca/autism
https://www.cps.ca/uploads/issues/CPS_Autism-EN-clinical-tool_1.pdf

References

Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders: DSM-5. 5th ed. Autism Spectrum Disorder, American Psychiatric Association. Arlington, VA: American Psychiatric Association, 2013. Available from <https://www.psychiatry.org/psychiatrists/practice/dsm>

Zwaigenbaum L, Brian JA, Ip A. Early detection for autism spectrum disorder in young children, Paediatrics & Child Health 2019; 24 (7):424-432. Available from <https://www.cps.ca/en/documents/position/asd-early-detection>

Brian JA, Zwaigenbaum L, Ip A. Standards of diagnostic assessment for autism spectrum disorder, Paediatrics & Child Health 2019; 24 (7): 444-451. Available from <https://www.cps.ca/en/documents/position/asd-early-detection>

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