

Healthcare access and services use among US children with autism spectrum disorder

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We used survey data on U.S. children with autism who were 2-17 years old to better understand how problems getting healthcare contribute to their services use. Problems getting healthcare included delays getting healthcare, challenges affording healthcare, and trouble finding a general doctor. Services included 4 or more doctor's office visits, 1 or more well-child visit, flu vaccine receipt, and 1 or more emergency department visit in the past year. Prescription medication use in the past 3-months was also included. Results showed many children with autism had 1 or more problem getting healthcare, and those who did were less likely to have 1 or more well-child visit or were less likely to use prescription medication. They were also more likely to have 4 or more doctor's office visits or 1 or more emergency department visit(s) compared to children with autism who did not have problems getting healthcare. Children with autism who were part of more advantaged groups, such as those who were White and non-Hispanic, were the most likely to have 1 or more emergency department visit if they had 1 or more healthcare access problem. These findings reinforce the idea that healthcare access problems are widespread for U.S. children with autism and are linked to suboptimal services use, like emergency department visits. Policy- and practice-oriented interventions such as insurance expansion and telemedicine may help to reduce problems getting needed healthcare and promote more optimal services use for children with autism in the United States.