

Vision Impairment Among Children

FACT: Nearly 1 in every 1,000 U.S. children has low vision or is legally blind.

Not being able to see alters how a child understands and functions in the world. Impaired vision can affect a child's emotional, neurological, and physical development by potentially limiting the range of experiences and the kinds of information a child is exposed to.



Nearly two-thirds of children with vision impairment also have one or more other developmental disabilities, such as mental retardation, cerebral palsy, hearing impairment, or epilepsy. About one-third of these children had low birth weights (less than about 5½ pounds).

Children with vision impairment very often need services such as special education programs to assist in their development. A recent study of the extra economic costs associated with vision impairment showed that the lifetime costs per person was about \$470,000 (in 2000 dollars).

At CDC, we have one of the few programs in the world that conducts active, ongoing monitoring of the number of children with vision impairment in a large, multiracial metropolitan area.

In 1991, CDC started the **Metropolitan Atlanta Developmental Disabilities Surveillance Program (MADDSP)** to monitor the number of 3- to 10-year-old children living in the metropolitan Atlanta area who have one or more of the following conditions: vision impairment, cerebral palsy, mental retardation, and hearing impairment. CDC added autism spectrum disorders to the program in 1998.

MADDSP also provides opportunities for special studies through which CDC staff members can identify risk factors for these disabilities and determine whether steps taken to prevent disabilities have been effective.

Related CDC Activities:

The Children's Longitudinal Development Study, an ongoing study of risk factors for developmental disabilities among children identified through MADDSP.

- The Follow-up Study of Children with Developmental Disabilities, which examines current functioning and the presence of secondary conditions among young adults with vision impairment and other developmental disabilities.