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Risk of Autoimmune Disease in Research-Identified Cases of Autism Spectrum Disorder: A Longitudinal, Population-Based Birth Cohort Study. J Dev Behav Pediatr 2024 Jan 01;45(1):e46-e53

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Abstract

OBJECTIVE: Determine the risk of autoimmune disease in research-identified cases of autism spectrum disorder (ASD) compared with referents using a longitudinal, population-based birth cohort.

METHODS: ASD incident cases were identified from a population-based birth cohort of 31,220 individuals. Inclusive ASD definition based on DSM-IV-TR autistic disorder, Asperger syndrome, and pervasive developmental disorder, not otherwise specified, was used to determine ASD cases. For each ASD case, 2 age- and sex-matched referents without ASD were identified. Diagnosis codes assigned between birth and December 2017 were electronically obtained. Individuals were classified as having an autoimmune disorder if they had at least 2 diagnosis codes more than 30 days apart. Cox proportional hazards models were fit to estimate the hazard ratio (HR) between ASD status and autoimmune disorder.

RESULTS: Of 1014 ASD cases, 747 (73.7%) were male. Fifty ASD cases and 59 of the 1:2 matched referents were diagnosed with first autoimmune disorder at the median age of 14 and 17.1 years, respectively. ASD cases had increased risk of autoimmune disease compared with matched referents (HR 1.74; 95% confidence interval [CI], 1.21-2.52). The increased risk was statistically significant among male patients (HR 2.01; 95% CI, 1.26-3.21) but not among the smaller number of female subjects (HR 1.38; 95% CI, 0.76-2.50).

CONCLUSION: This study provides evidence from a longitudinal, population-based birth cohort for co-occurrence of ASD and autoimmune disorders. Thus, children with ASD should be monitored for symptoms of autoimmune disease and appropriate workup initiated.

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