

NEWS, SPOTTED

# Spotted around the web: Antidepressants, closing prevalence gaps, cannabis for autism

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## Research roundup

- Sensory processing skills improve over time in some autistic children and worsen in others; monitoring may help clinicians better understand individual variability. *European Child & Adolescent Psychiatry*
- Mice lacking the NRXN1a gene, which has been linked to autism, display changes in neuronal function that differ by circuit. *Cell Reports*
- The BAF complex, which regulates the 3D structure of a cell's genome and is implicated in autism, may serve as a switch, causing developing brain cells to stop multiplying and start maturing. *Genes & Development*
- Autistic adults, to an even greater degree than non-autistic adults, have experienced more symptoms of anxiety and depression during the COVID-19 pandemic. *Molecular Autism*
- Evidence for the **association between antidepressants and autism** is thin, and it seems to hold whether a woman takes the medications prior to or during pregnancy, suggesting the link has little to do with the medications themselves. *Current Neuropharmacology*
- Increasing numbers of Black children are being diagnosed with autism in the United States, and at a younger age, according to data collected from 2014 to 2019. *JAMA Network Open*
- Pups born to mice fed a high-fat diet during pregnancy have altered brain function, particularly in reward pathways, that persists into adulthood. *Translational Psychiatry*
- Toddlers who screen positive for autism but whose parents are young, Hispanic and don't have private insurance, are less likely to receive a diagnostic evaluation than those with older, non-Hispanic, insured parents. *Journal of Developmental & Behavioral Pediatrics*
- Early diagnosis of autism may occur when children show early communication difficulties,

whereas diagnosis seems to be delayed in children with aggressive behaviors. *BMC Pediatrics*

- Intellectual disability may be the biggest risk factor for dying from COVID-19. *NEJM Catalyst*

## Science and society

- The Ohio Medical Board is considering, for the third year in a row, whether to add autism to the list of conditions approved for medical marijuana use; read more about **cannabis and autism** in *Spectrum's* explainer. *Spectrum News 1*
  - The Autism Society of America has lobbied media outlets to call April “Autism Acceptance Month,” instead of “Autism Awareness Month.” *Autism Society*
  - Easterseals Southern California, an advocacy group for people with disabilities, teamed up with a textile company to create a sensory-friendly face mask for people with autism or other disabilities. *Forbes*
  - A U.S. court has ruled that health insurer UnitedHealth Group broke federal law by refusing to cover applied behavior analysis as a therapy for autism. *Reuters*
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