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Media Contacts:
Leslie W. Taylor, 501-686-8998
Wireless phone: 501-951-7260
leslie@uams.edu

Liz Caldwell, 501-686-8995
Wireless phone: 501-350-4364
liz@uams.edu

One in 66 Arkansas 8-Year-Olds Has Autism Spectrum Disorder, Says New CDC/UAMS Report

LITTLE ROCK — A new report shows the number of 8-year-old Arkansas children identified as having Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is significantly higher than data released two years ago by the University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences (UAMS).

An estimated one in 66 Arkansas 8-year-olds have ASD, according to information collected by the Arkansas Autism and Developmental Disabilities Monitoring (AR ADDM) Program at UAMS. The numbers are part of national data released March 26 by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention that was gathered from the national ADDM network.

The new Arkansas numbers are from 2016, the latest data available. They are based on information collected from health and special education records of more than 40,000 8-year old children living in Arkansas in 2016.

In the 2014 estimated count released in 2018, one in 77 Arkansas 8-year-olds were identified with autism.

"Some of the increase in autism prevalence may be due to improvements in diagnostic and treatment services for children with autism in the state. The way children are identified, diagnosed and the mechanism for accessing treatment can impact prevalence," said Maya Lopez, M.D., associate professor in the UAMS College of Medicine's Department of Pediatrics.

Nationally, the CDC found that 1 in 54 8-year-old children in 2016 were identified with ASD, based on tracking in 11 communities across the United States.

Estimates in the 11 communities ranged widely, from 1 in 76 children in Colorado to 1 in 32 children in New Jersey. Some of this variation might be due to geographic differences in early detection and evaluation, diagnostic practices, and other differences in documentation of ASD symptoms.

The Arkansas monitoring program includes investigators with UAMS and operates in collaboration with the Arkansas Department of Health and the Arkansas Department of Education to track the number and characteristics of 8-year-olds with ASD and/or intellectual disability.

White children were 1.4 times more likely to be identified with ASD than black children, and white children were 1.7 times more likely to be identified with ASD than Hispanic children. Arkansas is one of two network sites where white children were significantly more likely to be identified than black children as well as Hispanic children.

"The national network data showed no overall difference in the number of black children identified with ASD compared to white children," said Lopez. "Black and Hispanic children often are diagnosed and evaluated later than white children. Stakeholders in Arkansas might consider different ways to increase awareness of ASD among black and Hispanic families and identify and address barriers to evaluation and diagnosis to decrease the age at which all children are evaluated and diagnosed."

UAMS' Dennis Developmental Center and Schmieding Developmental Center, both in the College of Medicine Department of Pediatrics, offer diagnostic multidisciplinary team evaluations for children with developmental and behavioral concerns from birth to 21 years of age.

The Arkansas monitoring program's findings also can be used to inform educational outreach initiatives, especially those targeting minority and underserved populations to promote early identification, plan for services and training, guide future ASD research and inform policies promoting improved health outcomes for individuals with the disorder.

AR ADDM provides individualized presentations on the number and characteristics of children with ASD to state and community agencies. The Arkansas monitoring program also co-sponsors educational events for families and educators, such as the Team Up state conference on autism, and collaborates on developmental disabilities awareness events such as Arkansas Walk Now for Autism Speaks.

UAMS is the state's only health sciences university, with colleges of Medicine, Nursing, Pharmacy, Health Professions and Public Health; a graduate school; hospital; a main campus in Little Rock; a Northwest Arkansas regional campus in Fayetteville; a statewide network of regional campuses; and seven institutes: the Winthrop P. Rockefeller Cancer Institute, Jackson T. Stephens Spine & Neurosciences Institute, Harvey & Bernice Jones Eye Institute, Psychiatric Research Institute, Donald W. Reynolds Institute on Aging, Translational Research Institute and Institute for Digital Health & Innovation. UAMS includes UAMS Health, a statewide health system that encompasses all of UAMS' clinical enterprise including its hospital, regional clinics and clinics it operates or staffs in cooperation with other providers. UAMS is the only adult Level 1 trauma center in the state. *U.S. News & World Report* named UAMS Medical Center the state's Best Hospital; ranked its ear, nose and throat program among the top 50 nationwide; and named six areas as high performing — cancer, colon cancer surgery, heart failure, hip replacement, knee replacement and lung cancer surgery. UAMS has 2,727 students, 870 medical residents and five dental residents. It is the state's largest public employer with more than 10,000 employees, including 1,200 physicians who

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