Today’s piece was prepared by Liz Killien, MD and is based on a story in Time Magazine, “Growing Evidence that Autism is Linked to Pollution”

<http://time.com/#25424/growing-evidence-that-autism-is-linked-to-pollution/>

This article reviews a study published in PLOS Computational Biology, stating that the study “offers strong evidence that environmental toxins play a role” in the development of autism spectrum disorders (ASD). It briefly summarizes that insurance claims from 100 million people in the US were analyzed, and that congenital malformations in boys was used as an indicator for exposure to environmental toxins. The article describes that a 1% increase in birth defects corresponded to a 283% increase in autism, and concludes by qualifying that the findings are new, but “offer support for the theory that environmental pollutants, in addition to genetics, play a role in autism development.”

This article does a relatively good job of summarizing the main findings of the study in a very short piece. It is accurate in its brief description of the methods, the central finding, and the conclusion that environmental toxins could be contributing to autism development. It is limited, however, by its brevity and incomplete discussion of the implications of the findings. The article neglects to fully discuss that the correlation between ASD incidence and environmental toxins was indirect, with congenital malformations used as a surrogate marker for environmental insults, or why this surrogate marker was used. It would have been helpful if the author had included some comparison to prior studies or other ongoing work to better describe where the evidence currently stands in the correlation between autism incidence and environmental factors.

**Resources:**

* Autism Speaks: Environmental Factors in Autism Initiative

<http://www.autismspeaks.org/science/research-initiatives/environmental-factors-autism-initiative>

Describes current knowledge and ongoing research regarding environmental factors in the development of autism.

* Autism Society

<http://www.autism-society.org/about-autism/causes>

Provides overview of genetic verses environmental causes of ASD, with a downloadable 72-page journal issue focused on environmental health and autism.

And that’s today’s Developmental & Behavioral Pediatrics: IN THE NEWS!