Today’s piece was prepared by James Lee, MS4 and comes from Bloomberg Businessweek, entitled Autism Tests for Preemies May be Faulty, Study Suggests. [www.businessweek.com/lifestyle/content/healthday/652444.html](http://www.businessweek.com/lifestyle/content/healthday/652444.html)

The article reports that doctors erroneously diagnose autism in many former premature 18-month-old children, based on findings of a small study of such children later determined instead to have language or cognitive delays. An interviewed physician suggests that preterm children may be undergoing autism testing too early, resulting in high false positive rates on autism screening. The article emphasizes a balance between importance of early diagnosis and increased parental anxiety, and suggests possibly deferring diagnosis.

While a false-positive autism screen may increase a parent’s anxiety, a delay in diagnosis may undermine the importance of early detection and referral for Early Intervention services. The article’s cited study reports a small sample size of 152 children and this and other research limitations must be considered. At the same time, other research suggests infants as young as 12 months can show signs strongly suggestive autism. Often there is a delay between initial parental concern for autism and seeking professional evaluation. Even after diagnosis, there are often barriers to timely evidence-based interventions. Screening is currently recommended at18- and 24-month well-child visits, and optimally, parents of prematurely born and term infants feel comfortable in raising developmental concerns to their child’s primary health care provider. An optimal age at initial autism screen remains controversial. However, parents and providers reading Bloomberg may find direction with the following resources:

**RESOURCES FOR PARENTS & PROVIDERS FOR EARLY AUTISM SCREENING:**

<www.aap.org/healthtopics/autism.cfm> American Academy of Pediatrics resource website for autism.

<www.autism-society.org/> A national autism advocacy and awareness organization.

<www.autismspeaks.org/> A national advocacy group.

**References:**

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evidence on early signs, early identification tools, and early diagnosis.” Jounrnal of Developmental and Behavioral Pediatrics. 2009 Oct; 30(5):447-459.

Pierce, Karen et al. “Detecting, Studying, and Treating Autism Early: The One-Year Well-

Baby Check-Up Approach” Journal of Pediatrics. [doi:10.1016/j.jpeds.2011.02.036](http://dx.doi.org.offcampus.lib.washington.edu/10.1016/j.jpeds.2011.02.036)