



FAQs about Autism Assessment

Frequently Asked Questions About Autism Assessment

+ Q1: What is autism or autism spectrum disorder (ASD)?

ASD is a lifelong neuro-developmental condition where a child has difficulties in social communication and interaction, as well as some restricted and/or repetitive patterns of behaviour, interests or activities. These may be present in varying severity.

+ Q2: Why did the doctor refer my child for an autism assessment?

The doctor may refer your child if he or she:

- Has difficulty making friends and playing interactively with same-aged peers,
- Has difficulties using non-verbal communication (e.g. gestures, pointing, eye contact),
- Has some unusually intense interests (e.g. interest in car logos), unusual repetitive behaviours (e.g. hand flapping, spinning body) or fixed routines and rituals,
- Has difficulties with imaginative play or plays with toys in unusual manner (e.g. more interested in spinning wheels of cars or lining up cars than rolling or moving cars), and/or
- Has unusual interest or sensitivity to sensory input (e.g., the way things look, smell, taste, feel, or sound like).

Please note that these are some common behaviours and this list is not exhaustive.



+ **Q3: At what age can autism be diagnosed?**

Children can be screened for the disorder from as young as 18 months, and a diagnostic assessment can be done from 31 months. However, it is sometimes difficult to distinguish between autism and global developmental delay at a young age and each child might present differently. Your doctor will thus determine the most suitable age for your child to be assessed.

+ **Q4: How is the diagnosis of autism made? Are there any special tests the doctor can do to determine whether my child is autistic?**

At present, there are no biological tests that can be used to diagnose ASD, unlike certain medical conditions where a blood test or X-ray may provide exact results. Nevertheless, your doctor may recommend a blood test, genetic test, or brain scan to rule out the presence of other medical conditions that can co-occur with autism.

An autism diagnosis is based on a thorough assessment that includes a detailed developmental history from parents, observations made by your child's therapist(s) and/or teacher(s), and direct observations by a psychologist.

+ Q5: What tests will the paediatricians and specialists use in the diagnosis of ASD?

The doctor may give out questionnaires to parents and teachers to ascertain if the child has difficulties at home or in school that may be related to autism. A physical examination will also be performed to exclude other co-existing medical conditions.

Subsequently, a referral may be made to a psychologist to conduct testing using tools developed specifically for diagnosing ASD. The most common tools used are the Autism Diagnostic Interview-Revised (ADI-R) and Autism Diagnostic Observation Schedule (ADOS).

- The ADI-R is a standardised, semi-structured clinical interview for caregivers. The interview takes 2 to 3 hours and it focuses on behaviours in three areas: quality of social interaction; communication and language; and repetitive, restricted and stereotyped interests and behaviour.
- The ADOS is a semi-structured, clinic-based play observation. The observation requires 40 minutes to an hour. It involves activities like playing with toys, looking at pictures, and snack time. The activities assess a child's social communication, social interaction and play or imaginative use of materials.



+ Q6: How is a typical autism assessment like?

A typical autism assessment requires a total of 3 to 4 hours, and is conducted over about three sessions. The assessment sessions will be scheduled based on the availability of the psychologist and parents.

+ Q7: What can I do to prepare before the autism assessment session?

For sessions with the child:

- Allow the child to have plenty of rest the night before.
- Have meals on the day of the test.
- Talk to your child about where he/she will be going, who he/she will meet, and what he/she may do.
- Reach 10 to 15 minutes before the time of test to let your child get used to the clinic environment.
- Please reschedule the session if your child is unwell or feeling tired.



For parent interviews:

- Take leave or ensure you will not be interrupted during the time of the interview.
- Review your child's past medical records or videos to note his/her speech and motor developmental milestones. It will be very helpful to recall and/or observe your child's interactions with familiar and unfamiliar adults and children. Do note any unusual behaviours and interests (e.g. spinning body, lining up objects etc) and how long these behaviours have lasted.
- If your child is above 5 years old, recall his/her behaviours at the particular period when he/she was 4 to 5 years old.

✦ Q8: Why is it important to make the diagnosis? Can I wait till my child is much older?

It is important to identify children with possible ASD early so that they can receive appropriate intervention and support services that are targeted to address their learning needs. Research indicates that early intervention can improve children's developmental outcomes, including improved language, cognitive, social and motor skills.

A diagnosis is also helpful for school-going children. It allows for schools to allocate resources (e.g. Special Educational Needs Officer or special programmes) to support them. Exam accommodations and leniency in marking of some tests may also be applied for should it be deemed necessary by the psychologist and/or school.



NUH Child Development Unit

NUH Child Development Unit is part of the Khoo Teck Puat – National University Children's Medical Institute at National University Hospital. The clinic provides multidisciplinary assessments, therapy and holistic management of children with developmental & behavioural disorders from birth to 7 years old. Please make an appointment if you would like to see our paediatricians.



For health information and resources relating to child development, visit:

<https://www.nuh.com.sg/cdu-resources>

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About the National University Centre for Women and Children

National University Centre for Women and Children (NUWoC) is a national university specialist centre that aims to empower women, children and their families to lead healthier lives. We provide comprehensive medical and surgical services ranging from pre-conception to child and maternal health.

NUWoC comprises the Department of Obstetrics & Gynaecology (O&G) and Khoo Teck Puat – National University Children’s Medical Institute (KTP-NUCMI) of National University Hospital. It focuses on the right-siting of appropriate services in the community and builds complementary services in National University Health System’s (NUHS) centres of excellence – Ng Teng Fong General Hospital and Alexandra Hospital.

Through a generous gift from the Estate of Khoo Teck Puat, KTP-NUCMI established an integrated outpatient facility with medical, diagnostic and rehabilitation services for children. We are also the only public specialist centre in Singapore that offers paediatric kidney and liver transplant programmes.

For more information about us, visit www.nuh.com.sg/NUWoC

Children’s Emergency (24-hr)

Location NUH Main Building, Zone F, Level 1
Contact +65 6772 5000

KTP-NUCMI

Location NUH Main Building, Zone E, Level 2
(Accessible via Kent Ridge Wing, Zone C, Level 2, Lift Lobby C)
Operating Hours 8.30am – 5.30pm (Mon to Fri), 8.30am – 12.30pm (Sat)
General Enquiry +65 6772 5736
Appointment Line +65 6908 2222
Email ktpnucmi_appt@nuhs.edu.sg

9a Viva-University Children’s Cancer Centre

Location NUH Medical Centre, Zone B, Level 9
Operating Hours 8am – 5.30pm (Mon to Fri)
Appointment Line +65 6772 5030
Email cbccappt@nuhs.edu.sg

NUH Children’s Urgent Care Clinic @ Bukit Panjang

Location Junction 10, #01-22
Operating Hours 9am – 11pm daily (including public holidays)
General Enquiry +65 6219 1538
Email childreनुcc@nuhs.edu.sg

NUH Child Development Unit @ JMC

Location Jurong Medical Centre, Level 2
Operating Hours 8.30am – 5.30pm (Mon to Fri)
Appointment Line +65 6665 2530 / 2531
Email cdu@nuhs.edu.sg

NUH Child Development Unit @ Keat Hong

Location Keat Hong Community Club, #03-01
Operating Hours 8.30am – 5.30pm (Mon to Fri)
Appointment Line +65 6769 4537/4637
Email cdu@nuhs.edu.sg

Clinic A22 NUWoC Children’s Clinic @ NTFGH

Location Ng Teng Fong General Hospital
Tower A – NTFGH Clinics, Level 2
Operating Hours 8.30am – 5.30pm (Mon to Fri)
Appointment Line +65 6908 2222
Email appointment@nuhs.edu.sg

Our Patient Care Institutions

National University Hospital

Ng Teng Fong General Hospital &
Jurong Community Hospital

Alexandra Hospital

National University Polyclinics

Jurong Medical Centre

National University Cancer Institute, Singapore

National University Heart Centre, Singapore

National University Centre for Oral Health, Singapore

NUHS Diagnostics

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