What to Expect if You Suspect or You Have Been Told Your Child has Autism Spectrum Disorder

If you have a concern about how your child is communicating, interacting or behaving, or your child has been diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) but you have been unable to access services to treat your child, you are likely wondering what to expect now that Behavioral Health Treatment services to treat children with ASD are available in Medi-Cal.

The following guidance is provided to share information about obtaining an evaluation of your child’s development and treatment options, if needed, and the approximate amount of time it will take to obtain evaluations and medically necessary treatment.

1. If you have concerns about your child’s development or your child has been diagnosed with ASD, call your Health Plan’s Call Center and/or make an appointment to see your child’s doctor. Your child’s doctor should offer you an appointment within 10 business days. The evaluation and approval processes for your child to receive Behavioral Health Treatment services could take approximately 60 to 90 days to complete.

2. At the appointment with your child’s doctor, share your concerns about your child, noting how your child is different from other children the same age, or provide any documents you may have from a health care provider that state your child has been diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder.

3. Your child’s doctor will listen to your concerns, review documents that you share, examine your child, and may conduct a developmental screening. The doctor may ask you questions or talk or play with your child during the examination to see how your child learns, speaks, behaves, and moves. This screening provides useful information to identify if your child is developing differently from other children.

4. As a result of this visit with the doctor, your child may be referred to a specialist who will meet with you and your child, conduct further tests/exams of your child, and then prepare a report. The specialist should offer you an appointment within 15 business days after your appointment with your child’s doctor.

5. The specialist will submit his/her report to your child’s Health Plan for review and approval of medically necessary services, if deemed necessary.
6. Your child’s Health Plan will notify you of its determination whether or not to provide Behavioral Health Treatment services to your child in accordance with the recommendations of the specialist.

7. If the Health Plan determines that Behavioral Health Treatment services are medically necessary, your child will be referred to a qualified autism service provider who will meet with you and your child and develop a treatment plan. The qualified autism service provider should offer to meet with you within 15 business days after your Health Plan makes its determination.

8. The proposed treatment plan will be submitted by the qualified autism service provider to the Health Plan and reviewed by your Health Plan to determine whether or not the Behavioral Health Treatment services recommended by the qualified autism service provider are medically necessary.

9. Your child’s Health Plan will notify you of its determination whether or not to provide Behavioral Health Treatment services to your child in accordance with the treatment plan developed by the qualified autism service provider.

10. If the Health Plan determines that Behavioral Health Treatment services recommended by the qualified autism service provider are medically necessary, your child will be referred back to the qualified autism service provider who will meet with you and your child in your home or another community setting, such as a community clinic, to describe the treatment plan and specific services your child will receive. The qualified autism provider should offer you an appointment within 15 days after your Health Plan makes its determination.

11. You have the right to make complaints about your child’s covered services or care. This includes the right to:

   a) File a complaint or grievance or appeal certain decisions made by the Health Plan or health plan provider. For more information on filing a complaint, grievance, or appeal, contact your Health Plan.

   b) Ask for an Independent Medical Review (IMR) of the medical necessity of Medi-Cal Services or terms that are medical in nature from the California Department of Managed Health Care (DMHC). For more information on asking for an IMR, contact DMHC’s Help Center at 1-888-466-2219 or (TDD) 1-877-688-9891 or online at http://www.dmhc.ca.gov/FileaComplaint/ConsumerIndependentMedicalReviewComplaint.aspx
c) Ask for a State Fair Hearing (SFH) from the California Department of Social Services (DSS). You can request a SFH over the phone by contacting DSS at 1-800-952-5253 or (TDD) 1-800-952-8349, by faxing DSS at 916-651-5210 or 916-651-2789, or by sending a letter to DSS. Additional information on the SFH process can be accessed at: [http://www.dhcs.ca.gov/services/medi-cal/Pages/Medi-CalFairHearing.aspx](http://www.dhcs.ca.gov/services/medi-cal/Pages/Medi-CalFairHearing.aspx)

12. The qualified autism service provider will meet with you and your child and describe the behavioral health treatment service type, the number of hours of direct service and the supervision of the service provider, parent or guardian participation needed, the frequency of reporting progress, and identify the individual providers responsible for delivering services to your child. Services will be scheduled at the location and in the frequency approved by the Health Plan.

13. The qualified autism service provider will provide a description of care coordination involving parents, guardians or caregivers, school, state disability programs, and others. The provider will also describe parent, guardian or caregiver training, support and participation that will be required.

14. The effectiveness of Behavioral Health Treatment is dramatically improved when parents or guardians receive training and are actively participating in their child’s treatment. Your participation will ensure the best long term outcomes from the treatments your child is receiving.

15. If you have any questions or concerns about obtaining services for your child at any point in the process, call your Health Plan’s Call Center or your child’s doctor for assistance.

16. If you are concerned about what you can do when your child is not receiving services, the federal government and the Association for Children and Families has put together a guide to help parents facilitate development every day. This guide can be found at [www.acf.hhs.gov/ecd/ASD](http://www.acf.hhs.gov/ecd/ASD). Themes include:

   a. Engaging your child in play through joint attention
   b. Using your child’s interests in activities
   c. Using a shared agenda in daily routines
   d. Using visual cues
   e. Sharing objects and books
   f. Teaching your children to play with each other
   g. Using predictable routines and predictable spaces for your child.