

## Harvard researchers find gene link for autism

Controlled research by respected scientists has confirmed what parents have known for years: Each case of autism is very individualized, with positive treatment for one child not necessarily having the same result for another.

Harvard University researchers also think they found out why. They studied Middle Eastern families where large families and married cousins are the norm, increasing their odds of

discovering damaged genes that stand out from the homogenous pack. They identified six genes they believe are crucial in forming connections within the brain.

Aside from helping to determine what factors might cause autism, the research also points to treatment options. Researchers say they found evidence that certain genes can be "turned on" whereas they have been stuck

in the "off" position. That means with the right treatment – individualized for a particular child – the symptoms of autism may be overridden.

The website of national CBS News has [a summary](#) about this Harvard study. The journal Science published [complete results](#) in today's edition, but accessing the report requires membership or a \$10 one-day pass.

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categories (education, land use, trusts & estates, real estate and business litigation). You'll need the Broder Law Group address and phone number, plus his email address (details below), plus his age (37). **Polling ends Tuesday!**

## As part of a nationwide push, Pennsylvania will require insurance companies to cover treatments for autism

A revamped bill to guarantee insurance coverage for people with autism has earned Pennsylvania Gov. Ed Rendell's signature to become law. Rendell signed the bill Wednesday after a year of House vs. Senate debate and a frantic week of rewrites to restore original language to the version a committee had stripped down.

The law defines what treatments must be covered by private insurance and guarantees coverage of up to \$36,000. It mandates coverage up to age 21 and does not set a lifetime maximum, taking it a step further than provisions in most other states. The changes, which take effect July 2009, include coverage for Applied Behavioral Analysis, which many practitioners say helps prevent regression.

Insurance companies had argued that the requirements would force them to hike premiums significantly for everyone, and that

the state was in the best position to offer the first line of diagnosis and treatment for people with autism.

But the Pennsylvania Health Care Cost Containment Council noted that the overwhelmed state system often missed opportunities to diagnose the disorder, leading to delayed treatments that were usually more costly and less effective. The Council's study indicated this new coverage would cost every insurance payer about \$12 a year and could save the state \$90 million over four years.

Noted organization Autism Speaks supported the bill as part of a national effort to improve insurance coverage nationwide for people seeking treatment for autism. An [article](#) in the *Lancaster (Pa.) Intelligencer Journal* recounts the bill's twists and turns on its way to becoming law and spells out its provisions.

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responders could be trained in assisting people with autism. Third, the act would set up grants for individual housing and services for people with autism.

Details of the [Helping HANDS for Autism Act](#) are on Menendez's website.

