

NEWS

By the Numbers: Polypharmacy, outpatient autism care, pandemic behaviors

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Welcome to the second edition of the By the Numbers Newsletter. At *Spectrum*, we do our best to summarize the latest autism research findings — and sometimes the best summary comes in the form of a chart or map. In this newsletter, we boil down interesting new research that is conveyed most succinctly by way of simple data visualizations.

Let us know what you think of the newsletter, or tell us about your own data-rich work, at news@spectrumnews.org.

Spectrum story spotlight: Polypharmacy and shifting prescriptions are common for autism comorbidities

People with autism frequently **switch medications** to control common co-occurring conditions, such as anxiety and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), according to a new study.

And about 30 percent of autistic people take three or more psychotropic drugs to manage those comorbidities, the study found.

“We were very surprised by the wide spectrum, and number of drugs, that are being used to treat the same comorbidity conditions, and how often those were changed in patients,” says **Paul Avillach**, assistant professor of biomedical informatics at Harvard Medical School, who led the

study.

The new work analyzed insurance claims and filled-prescription records from roughly 27,000 autistic people enrolled in a large U.S. health insurance plan, and considered 24 commonly prescribed medications across three broad categories: medications that treat agitation and irritation; those that treat hyperactivity and ADHD; and those that treat mood and anxiety disorders.

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