ASSESSING AUTISM IN TODDLERS BORN

Methods A 12-month birth-cohort of toddlers (2-and-4-year-olds) born with a gestational age <29-weeks were administered the Modified Checklist of Autism in Toddlers (M-CHAT)-and follow-up interview (FI™) screen, the ADOS and neurodevelopmental assessments (Bayley Scales of Infant and Toddler Development III-2-year-olds, Wechsler Preschool and Primary Scale of Intelligence-III and Adaptive Behaviour Assessment System-Second Edition-4-year-olds). The ADOS was conducted on toddlers with M-CHAT-FI™ positive screens.

Results Complete data were available on 88% (169/192) of children. Thirteen-percent screened M-CHAT-FI™ positive, of whom 1.8% was classified as autistic. All children with autism classified as autistic on the M-CHAT-FI™ positive screens scored above the 2SD cutoff on the Communication Total category of the ADOS and met the DSM-IV-criteria. An additional 0.6% met the criterion for autism based on the FI™ interview. Associations between positive screens and autistic traits remained significant even after adjusting for psychosocial risk and child gender.

Conclusion The ADOS reports a lower incidence of autistic disorder in children born very preterm compared to studies using diagnostic interview based tools. The distinguishing features of the M-CHAT-FI™ positive cases suggest a sub-threshold communication dysfunction profile.