S AN F RANCISCO — Eighteen-month-old children who scored above the threshold for autism spectrum disorders on the Autism Diagnostic Observation Schedule were more than six times as likely to have a clinical diagnosis of autism spectrum disorder at the age of 3 years than those who scored lower, Dr. Lonnie Zwaigenbaum reported in a poster presentation at the annual meeting of the Pediatric Academic Societies.

Nevertheless, scores on the Autism Diagnostic Observation Schedule (ADOS) must be interpreted with caution in children who are 18 months old, wrote Dr. Zwaigenbaum of McMaster University, Hamilton, Ontario, and his colleagues. ADOS scores should be interpreted in the context of an overall clinical assessment, because the test has a high sensitivity but a relatively low specificity, missing more than 50% of the children with diagnoses at 3 years.

The study involved 101 children who were at increased risk of autism by virtue of a family history or other risk factors at 18 months, and they received a blinded diagnosis by an expert clinician at an average age of 39 months.

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