Are we close to a simple blood test for autism?

A new study suggests that its results could lead to a simple test for some children with autism, but statisticians say the test — even if validated — could not be used to screen for autism in the general population.

The study, published Thursday [Sept. 6] in Biological Psychiatry, says about 17 percent of children with autism have unusual proportions of amino acids — the building blocks of proteins — in their blood. A test that looks for these molecules correctly identifies nearly 94 percent of this subgroup of children.

However, those results only hold because of the study's statistical design, experts say. In the general population, the test's accuracy would be less than 8 percent.

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"We understand that there's more steps to go before there's a definitive blood test," even for the subset of children with the distinctive patterns of molecules, [researcher David] Amaral says. "But what I think is interesting is a blood test for this subtype of autism isn't decades away; it could literally be months away."

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"This has the potential to open up whole new areas of diagnostics and treatments for autism," says Joseph Gleeson, professor of neurosciences at the University of California, San Diego, who was not involved in the work. "But it's very early and needs to be interpreted very cautiously."

Read full, original post: A blood test for autism? Not so fast, experts say