

U.S. Preventive Services Task Force Issues Final Recommendation Statement: Screening and Behavioral Counseling to Reduce Alcohol Misuse

WASHINGTON, D.C. – May 14, 2013 – The U.S. Preventive Services Task Force (Task Force) today released its final recommendation statement on screening and behavioral counseling interventions in primary care to reduce alcohol misuse among adolescents and adults. The recommendation statement has two parts:

- The Task Force recommends that primary care professionals ask all adults 18 years and older about their drinking habits and offer counseling to those who drink more than they should. This is a grade B recommendation.
- The Task Force also found that, although risky and hazardous alcohol use among teens is a serious problem, there was not enough evidence on how to identify teens who may be engaging in harmful drinking or if offering teens brief counseling is effective. Therefore, the Task Force issued an I statement.

“When people misuse alcohol, there can be serious consequences for themselves, their families, and their communities. Alcohol misuse is the cause of tens of thousands of deaths per year in the United States—deaths that could have been prevented,” says Task Force member Sue Curry, Ph.D. “The good news is that primary care professionals can identify adults who engage in risky or hazardous drinking and through brief counseling, help them drink more responsibly.”

Alcohol misuse is common, with approximately 30 percent of the U.S. population engaged in risky use or drinking above recommended limits. It is associated with 85,000 deaths per year, making it the third-leading cause of preventable death in the country.

“Unfortunately, risky and hazardous drinking is also a serious problem among adolescents, but we don’t know how to identify teens who may be engaging in risky or hazardous drinking, and we don’t know if brief counseling is effective in helping them to stop,” says Dr. Curry. “We recognize the critical need for more research on what primary care teams can do to help keep teens safe and sober.”

While highlighting the valuable role primary care professionals can play in helping Americans avoid risky drinking, the Task Force also calls out in its new recommendation statement the important role of community and school-based organizations, as well as State and federal agencies, in addressing this critical public health issue.

The Task Force’s final recommendation statement is published online in the *Annals of Internal Medicine*, as well as on the Task Force Web site at: www.uspreventiveservicestaskforce.org. A fact sheet that explains the recommendation statement in plain language is also available. Before finalizing this recommendation, the USPSTF posted a draft version for public comment in the fall of 2012.

The Task Force is an independent, volunteer panel of national experts in prevention and evidence-based medicine that works to improve the health of all Americans by making evidence-based

recommendations about clinical preventive services such as screenings, counseling services, and preventive medications.

Contact: [Ana Fullmer at Newsroom@USPSTF.net](mailto:Ana.Fullmer@USPSTF.net) / (202) 350-6668