

## U.S. Preventive Services Task Force Recommends Screening High-Risk People for Hepatitis B

*Evidence shows that high-risk individuals benefit from screening*

WASHINGTON, D.C. – May 26, 2014 – The U.S. Preventive Services Task Force (Task Force) today published its final recommendation statement on screening for hepatitis B virus (HBV) infection in individuals at high risk. This recommendation includes adults and adolescents who are not pregnant and who have not been vaccinated, as well as other individuals at high risk for infection.

After reviewing the evidence, the Task Force recommends screening people who have the following risk factors for HBV infection:

- People born in countries and regions with a high prevalence of HBV infection, such as Africa, Southeast Asia, Pacific Islands, China, Middle East, Eastern Europe, and the northern countries in South America
- U. S.-born persons not vaccinated as infants whose parents were born in countries or regions with a high prevalence of HBV infection
- HIV-positive people, injection drug users, men who have sex with men, and those living with or having sex with someone with HBV infection
- Patients with weakened immune systems or undergoing treatment for kidney failure (hemodialysis)

The United States' strategy to eliminate HBV transmission includes universal vaccination of all infants at birth, catchup vaccination of adolescents, and vaccination of high-risk groups. "Today, most people born in the U.S. have been vaccinated for hepatitis B, which is the best way to prevent the infection," says Task Force member Mark Ebell, M.D., M.S. "Because of this, most people in the U.S. are not at risk of getting hepatitis B."

There are still as many as 2.2 million people in the United States chronically infected with hepatitis B and 15 to 25 percent of those individuals die from liver disease (cirrhosis) or liver cancer. "Some people still remain at risk for getting hepatitis B and suffering from health complications of the disease, such as liver damage. It is important that these high-risk individuals be screened," says Dr. Ebell.

"Screening can identify people who have chronic HBV infection, and the good news is that treatment can help prevent liver cancer in these people," says Douglas K. Owens, M.D., M.S.

The Task Force previously issued a recommendation that all pregnant women in the United States should be screened for hepatitis B, which complements this new recommendation.

The Task Force's final recommendation statement has been published online in *Annals of Internal Medicine*, as well as on the Task Force Web site at [www.uspreventiveservicestaskforce.org](http://www.uspreventiveservicestaskforce.org). A fact sheet that explains the recommendation statement in plain language is also available. A draft recommendation was available for public comment February 12 to March 11, 2014.

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.

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