

U.S. Preventive Services Task Force Issues Draft Recommendation on Screening & Behavioral Counseling to Reduce Alcohol Misuse

WASHINGTON, D.C. – September 24, 2012 – The U.S. Preventive Services Task Force (Task Force) today posted a draft recommendation statement on screening and behavioral counseling to reduce alcohol misuse. The Task Force is providing an opportunity for public comment on this draft recommendation until October 22. All public comments will be considered as the Task Force develops its final recommendation.

The draft recommendation applies specifically to screening and behavioral counseling interventions to reduce alcohol misuse in the primary care setting. It does not apply to people with signs or symptoms of alcohol misuse or who already are seeking evaluation or treatment for alcohol use.

The draft recommendation has two parts:

- The Task Force recommended that clinicians screen all adults 18 and older and pregnant women for alcohol misuse and provide individuals engaged in risky or hazardous drinking with brief behavioral counseling interventions to reduce alcohol misuse.
- The Task Force also determined that there currently is not enough evidence to make a recommendation about whether it is effective to screen and provide behavioral counseling interventions to reduce alcohol misuse for adolescents aged 12 to 17.

This recommendation reaffirms the Task Force’s recommendation made on this topic in 2004.

“Clinicians can help men and women to prevent alcohol-related health risks, so we recommend screening adults, including pregnant women, for patterns of unhealthy drinking, and offering brief behavioral counseling to those who report risky or hazardous drinking,” said Task Force Member Dr. Susan Curry, Ph.D. “While underage drinking is a serious public health problem, we don’t know enough about what works in the primary care setting to help keep teens safe and sober. We need more research on this important topic.”

Approximately one-third of the U.S. population is affected by alcohol misuse, with most people engaged in risky use, or drinking above recommended amounts. Alcohol misuse causes more than 85,000 deaths each year, making it the third-leading cause of preventable death in the United States.

“We recognize that while primary care systems can play an important role in addressing this issue, that there are many community organizations, school-based programs, and federal agencies that are also working to address alcohol misuse. Everyone, including primary care, has a role to play,” added Dr. Curry.

The Task Force's draft recommendation has been posted for public comment on the Task Force Web site at <http://www.uspreventiveservicestaskforce.org>. Comments can be submitted from September 24 to October 22 at www.uspreventiveservicestaskforce.org/Page/Name/us-preventive-services-task-force-opportunities-for-public-comment. A fact sheet that explains the draft recommendation statement in plain language is also available online.

The Task Force is an independent group 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