

U.S. Preventive Services Task Force Focuses on Evidence Gaps Related to Care for Children and Adolescents in 2014 Report to Congress

WASHINGTON, D.C. – November 13, 2014 – Today, the U.S. Preventive Services Task Force (Task Force) released its annual Report to Congress, highlighting seven high-priority evidence gaps in the research on preventive care for children and adolescents. The report also highlights the Task Force’s continued commitment to public engagement and providing information to help young people and their families decide with their doctor which preventive services are right for them.

Recognizing that children and adolescents have unique health care needs that change with age, the Task Force calls for more research in targeted areas of prevention for young people. These areas include mental health conditions and substance abuse, obesity and cardiovascular health, behavior and development, infectious diseases, cancer prevention, injury and child maltreatment, and vision disorders. As the report notes, additional research in these areas would result in important new knowledge that may improve the health and health care of young Americans, with lasting benefits through adulthood.

The Task Force acknowledges that the evidence base for children and adolescents is different from other populations, and has worked to improve its processes to better inform effective and safe preventive care for children. Developing age-appropriate recommendations for children and adolescents can help families make better informed decisions about preventive services with their child’s primary care professional.

“Preventive services can improve health outcomes in childhood, which can have a lasting impact throughout adulthood. The Task Force currently has 29 recommendations that consider issues relevant to children and adolescents. Within all of our recommendations, we identify critical gaps in evidence, highlighting the areas of research that could help us develop more definitive recommendations in the future,” says Task Force Co-Vice Chair Dr. Kirsten Bibbins-Domingo, Ph.D., M.D. “We hope that future work to resolve these evidence gaps will improve the quality and effectiveness of preventive services, not only for children and adolescents, but for all Americans.”

The report also provides an update on the Task Force’s activities over the past year, during which it continued to focus on making its work clear and relevant to health care professionals and patients. Since October 2013, the public had the opportunity to comment on 15 draft research plans and 11 draft recommendation statements on topics ranging from screening for autism spectrum disorder in young children to behavioral counseling interventions to prevent STIs. In addition, this year the Task Force published 17 final recommendation statements in peer-reviewed journals and on its Web site.

“The Task Force is proud of the work it accomplished in 2014. In addition to issuing a number of new recommendations that span the preventive care landscape for children, adolescents, and adults, we continued to focus on providing the opportunity for public input throughout our process,” says Task Force Chair Dr. Michael LeFevre, M.D., M.S.P.H. “In 2015, we will continue our work more than 30 active topics, including a number of recommendations relevant to children and adolescents.”

The “Fourth Annual Report to Congress on High-Priority Evidence Gaps for Clinical Preventive

Services” can be found on the Task Force Web site at <http://www.uspreventiveservicestaskforce.org/Page/Name/reports-to-congress>.

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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