

U.S. Preventive Services Task Force Issues Final Recommendation Statement on Screening for Hepatitis C Virus Infection in Adults

WASHINGTON, D.C. – June 25, 2013 – The U.S. Preventive Services Task Force (Task Force) today released its final recommendation statement on screening for hepatitis C virus infection in adults. Based on the latest evidence, the Task Force recommends hepatitis C screening for adults at risk of infection, including people who currently use injection drugs or have in the past, as well as people who received a blood transfusion before 1992. The Task Force also recommends one-time hepatitis C screening for all adults born between 1945 and 1965.

“Millions of people in the United States are infected with hepatitis C, and many are unaware of their condition, in large part because they may not have any symptoms,” says Task Force member Kirsten Bibbins-Domingo, Ph.D., M.D. “Hepatitis C infection is a leading cause of liver damage, liver cancer, and liver transplants in the United States. Screening for hepatitis C can help people who are infected live longer, healthier lives.”

In recent years, there have been substantial advances in the effectiveness of treatments for hepatitis C. Evidence shows that these advances have also reduced the potential side effects and harms of diagnosis and treatment.

The Task Force recommends that people who continue to use injection drugs should be screened regularly for hepatitis C. People born between 1945 and 1965 and those without ongoing risk factors only need to be screened once. Safe and effective treatments for hepatitis C are now available, though not everyone with the infection will need to be treated.

“Baby boomers account for three out of four people with hepatitis C,” says Task Force co-chair Albert Siu, M.D., M.S.P.H. “Many people in this age group contracted hepatitis C from a blood transfusion or unknown or unreported high-risk behaviors. Even though they may have no symptoms yet, the evidence is convincing that one-time screening will help find millions of Americans with the infection before they develop a serious liver disease.”

This recommendation applies to all asymptomatic adults without known liver disease or functional abnormalities. The Task Force recommendation notes that screening should be voluntary, and before screening patients should receive an explanation of hepatitis C infection and the meaning of positive and negative test results, an opportunity to ask questions, and the chance to decline testing.

The Task Force’s recommendations have been published online in the *Annals of Internal Medicine*, as well as on the Task Force Web site at:

<http://www.uspreventiveservicestaskforce.org>. A fact sheet that explains the recommendation statement in plain language is also available.

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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