

U.S. Preventive Services Task Force Issues Final Recommendations on Prevention of Iron Deficiency Anemia in Pregnant Women and Young Children

More research needed to assess harms and benefits of screening and supplementation

WASHINGTON, D.C. – September 8, 2015 – The U.S. Preventive Services Task Force (Task Force) today published final recommendation statements on the prevention of iron deficiency anemia (IDA) in pregnant women and children ages 6 to 24 months.

The Task Force concluded that there is not enough evidence to determine the balance of benefits and harms of routine screening for IDA in pregnant woman or for the use of iron supplements during pregnancy. Therefore, it cannot recommend for or against either service. Both screening for IDA and the use of iron supplements in pregnant women received **I statements**.

Additionally, the Task Force reviewed evidence on the benefits and harms of screening for IDA in young children ages 6 to 24 months. The Task Force found that there is not enough evidence at this time and issued an **I statement**.

Grades in this recommendation:

I: The balance of benefits and harms cannot be determined.

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Iron deficiency is a common cause of anemia in the United States. Because of the body's increased need for iron during pregnancy and early childhood, pregnant women and young children may be at increased risk for IDA. However, eating a diet rich in iron may be enough to prevent development of IDA.

"We wanted to see whether general screening for IDA and the use of iron supplements improves the health of mothers and their babies. However, today, there is simply not enough high-quality evidence to make a recommendation, and we are calling for more research on IDA screening and iron supplementation among pregnant women," says Task Force member Francisco Garcia, M.D., M.P.H.

The Task Force also reviewed the evidence on screening for IDA in average-risk young children ages 6 to 24 months and is also calling for more research about whether screening young children improves their growth and development. "A healthy diet with iron-rich foods can help maintain iron levels in children. Parents who are concerned about iron deficiency should talk to their child's health care provider," says Task Force vice chair David Grossman, M.D., M.P.H.

The Task Force's final recommendation statement on screening for IDA in pregnant women has been published online in *Annals of Internal Medicine*, as well as posted on the Task Force Web site at www.uspreventiveservicestaskforce.org. Its final recommendation statement on screening for IDA in young children has been published online in *Pediatrics* and posted on the Task Force Web site. A fact sheet that explains the recommendation statements in plain language is also available. The draft recommendation statements were available for public comment from March 31 to April 27, 2015.

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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