

This fact sheet explains the U.S. Preventive Services Task Force's (Task Force) draft recommendation statement on screening for illicit drug use. It also tells you how you can send comments about the draft recommendation to the Task Force. Comments may be submitted from August 13, 2019 to September 9, 2019. The Task Force welcomes your comments.

Screening for Illicit Drug Use

The Task Force issued a **draft recommendation statement** on *Screening for Illicit Drug Use, Including Nonmedical Use of Prescription Drugs*. This recommendation statement applies to adults ages 18 or older and teens ages 12 to 17 years old. This statement does not apply to people who have been diagnosed with a drug use disorder or to people who are currently undergoing

treatment for drug misuse or drug use disorders.

Based on its review of the evidence, the Task Force recommends that primary care clinicians screen all adults for illicit drug use. The Task Force did not find enough evidence to know whether or not screening can benefit teens ages 12 to 17.

What is illicit drug use?

Illicit drug use means using illegal drugs, like heroin or cocaine, or using a prescription drug in a way that's not recommended by a doctor (known as nonmedical use of prescription drugs).

Facts About Illicit Drug Use

Approximately 1 in 10 Americans aged 18 or older currently use illicit drugs. It is among the most common causes of preventable death, injury, and disability in the United States. Illicit drug use can cause serious health issues such as problems with memory and learning, coma, seizures, and even death. Some people are at greater risk for illicit drug use, including young adults, males, certain racial and ethnic minorities, and individuals living with mental health conditions.

Screening for Illicit Drug Use

Screening for drug use in primary care involves asking one or more questions about drug use, frequency of drug use, or risks related to drug use. Clinicians can ask their patient questions, or they can ask their patient to write his or her answers on a form, computer, or tablet.

After screening, some patients who report using illicit drugs may need a follow-up assessment to determine whether they have a drug use disorder and might need treatment. Treatment options vary based on the type of drug used, the severity of drug use, and the type of drug use disorder. They can include counseling or other behavioral interventions, medications, or a combination of the two.

Potential Benefits and Harms of Screening for Illicit Drug Use in Adults

The main benefit of screening for illicit drug use in adults is that it identifies people who use illicit drugs and may have a drug use disorder, so they can be connected to treatment. The evidence the Task Force reviewed did not show any significant harms from screening or counseling or medication-based treatments.

Potential Benefits and Harms of Screening for Illicit Drug Use in Adolescents

The Task Force also looked at the evidence on screening teens for illicit drug use. There was not enough evidence to determine whether or not screening can benefit teens. The Task Force is calling for more research in this area.

The Draft Recommendations on Screening for Illicit Drug Use: What Do They Mean?

Here are the Task Force's draft recommendations on screening for illicit drug use. They are based on the quality and strength of the evidence about the potential benefits and harms of screening for this purpose. They are also based on the size of the potential benefits and harms. Task Force recommendation grades are explained in the box at the end of this fact sheet.

When the Task Force issues a **B Grade**, it recommends screening because it has more potential benefits than harms. An **I Statement** means that there is not enough evidence to recommend for or against screening.

Before you send comments to the Task Force, you may want to read the [draft recommendation statement](#). The recommendation statement explains the evidence the Task Force reviewed and how it decided on the grade. [Evidence documents](#) provide more detail about the scientific studies the Task Force reviewed.

1 The USPSTF recommends screening for [illicit drug](#) use in adults age 18 years or older. Screening should be implemented when services for [accurate diagnosis](#), [effective treatment](#), and [appropriate care](#) can be offered or [referred](#).
(B Grade)

2 The USPSTF concludes that the [current evidence is insufficient](#) to assess the balance of benefits and harms of screening for illicit drug use in adolescents. **(I Statement)**

Notes

1 [illicit drug](#)
Illicit drugs include illegal drugs such as cocaine and heroin. It also includes using a prescription drug in a way that's not recommended by a doctor (nonmedical use of prescription drugs).

[accurate diagnosis](#)
A diagnosis free of errors, such as misdiagnosis or missed diagnosis.

[effective treatment](#)
Treatment that results in successful outcomes such as reducing or stopping drug use.

[appropriate care](#)
Care that helps the patient with their drug use disorder.

[referred](#)
Services that primary care clinicians can send a patient to that are outside the primary care setting, such as to mental health and substance use treatment professionals.

2 [current evidence is insufficient](#)
The Task Force did not find enough information to make a recommendation for or against screening for drug use in teens.






What is the U.S. Preventive Services Task Force?

The Task Force is an independent, non-federal, volunteer group of national experts in prevention and evidence-based medicine. The Task Force works to improve the health of all Americans by making evidence-based recommendations about clinical preventive services, such as screenings, counseling services, and preventive medicines. The recommendations apply to people with no signs or symptoms of the disease being discussed.

To develop a recommendation statement, Task Force members consider the best available science and research on a topic. For each topic, the Task Force posts draft documents for public comment, including a [draft recommendation statement](#). All comments are reviewed and considered in developing the final recommendation statement. To learn more, visit the [Task Force Website](#).

USPSTF Recommendation Grades	
Grade	Definition
A	Recommended.
B	Recommended.
C	Recommendation depends on the patient's situation.
D	Not recommended.
I statement	There is not enough evidence to make a recommendation.

Click Here to Learn More About Screening for Illicit Drug Use

-  **Drugs of Abuse**
(National Institute on Drug Abuse)
-  **Understanding Drug Use and Addiction**
(National Institute on Drug Abuse)
-  **SBIRT: Screening, Brief Intervention, and Referral to Treatment**
(Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, Health Resources and Services Administration)
-  **Substance Use Disorder and Pregnancy**
(Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, Health Resources and Services Administration)
-  **Talk to Your Kids About Tobacco, Alcohol, and Drugs**
(Healthfinder.gov)

[Click Here](#) to Comment on the Draft Recommendation



The Task Force welcomes comments on this draft recommendation.



Comments must be received between August 13, 2019 and September 9, 2019.



All comments will be considered for use in writing final recommendations.