

This fact sheet explains the U.S. Preventive Services Task Force's (Task Force) draft recommendation statement on behavioral counseling to prevent skin cancer. It also tells you how you can send comments about the draft recommendation to the Task Force. Comments may be submitted from October 10, 2017 to November 6, 2017. The Task Force welcomes your comments.

Behavioral Counseling to Prevent Skin Cancer

The Task Force has issued a **draft recommendation statement** on *Behavioral Counseling to Prevent Skin Cancer*. The Task Force recommends that clinicians provide counseling to anyone with fair skin between the ages of 6 months to 24 years of age. This also includes the parents of young children. Clinicians may provide

counseling to some adults over 24 with fair skin, depending on the individual's risks for skin cancer. More research is needed to know if counseling adults about skin self-exams helps prevent skin cancer.

This recommendation applies to individuals with no history of skin cancer.

What is skin cancer?

It is an abnormal growth of cells that begins in the outermost layer of skin (epidermis).

Facts About Skin Cancer and Skin Cancer Counseling

Skin cancer is the most commonly diagnosed type of cancer in the U.S., affecting millions of people every year. There are two types of skin cancer – melanoma and non-melanoma skin cancer. Melanoma is far less common than non-melanoma cancer, but people are more likely to die from melanoma than non-melanoma cancers. The majority of skin cancer cases are non-melanoma skin cancers, which rarely spread to other parts of the body and almost always respond to treatment.

People at greatest risk for skin cancer are those exposed to UV rays during childhood and adolescence and:

- Have fair skin, freckles, or who sunburn easily,
- Have a history of sunburns,
- Use tanning beds, or
- Have previously had skin cancer.

There are many types of behavioral counseling that can encourage people to adopt sun protection behaviors. These include talking with a clinician or health educator during an office visit and getting information from a clinician about protecting the skin from UV rays.

Sun protective behaviors include:

- Wearing hats, glasses, or sun-protective clothing,
- Avoiding sun exposure,
- Using sunscreen with a sun protection factor (SPF) of 15 or greater,
- Staying in the shade, especially during midday hours (10AM to 4 PM), and
- Avoiding indoor tanning.

Potential Benefits and Harms of Behavioral Counseling to Prevent Skin Cancer

The Task Force reviewed studies about the benefits and harms of providing behavioral counseling to prevent skin cancer. They found that counseling about skin cancer can increase sun protective behaviors, which in turn helps reduce the likelihood of skin cancer and death. The harms of skin cancer counseling for protection from UV rays are small and may include skin reactions to sunscreen lotions.

Because people with fair skin are at higher risk for skin cancer, the majority of research that the Task Force found and reviewed focused on individuals with fair-skin type. More research is needed on the effectiveness of counseling individuals with other skin tones.

There was not enough evidence to determine whether counseling adults about skin self-examination helps prevent skin cancer. More research is needed to understand the benefits and harms.

The Draft Recommendations on Behavioral Counseling to Prevent Skin Cancer: What Do They Mean?

Here are the Task Force's draft recommendations on behavioral counseling to prevent skin cancer. They are based on the quality and strength of the evidence about the potential benefits and harms of counseling 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 **Grade B**, it recommends counseling because it has more potential benefits than harms. When the Task Force issues a **Grade C**, it recommends counseling only in some cases because the benefit is small and applies to only certain individuals. When there is not enough evidence to judge benefits and harms, the Task Force does not make a recommendation for or against and instead issues an **I Statement**.

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

- 1 The USPSTF recommends counseling children and their parents, adolescents, and young adults aged 6 months to 24 years who have fair skin about minimizing their exposure to [ultraviolet radiation](#) to reduce risk for skin cancer. **(Grade B)**
- 2 The USPSTF recommends that clinicians [selectively offer counseling](#) to adults over age 24 years with fair skin about minimizing their exposure to ultraviolet radiation to reduce risk for skin cancer. Existing evidence indicates that the [net benefit](#) of counseling all adults over age 24 is small. In determining whether this service is appropriate in individual cases, patients and clinicians should consider the presence of risk factors for skin cancer. **(Grade C)**
- 3 The USPSTF concludes that the current evidence is insufficient to assess the balance of benefits and harms of counseling adults about [skin self-examination](#) to prevent skin cancer. **(I Statement)**

Notes

- 1 [ultraviolet radiation](#)
Invisible rays that come from the sun and tanning beds. Ultraviolet radiation can burn the skin and cause skin cancer.
- 2 [selectively offer counseling](#)
Counseling benefits some, not all, adults over age 24, depending on an individual's risk factors for skin cancer.
- [net benefit](#)
The overall amount someone benefits from counseling.
- 3 [skin self-examination](#)
The practice of checking your skin for new or changing skin growths, such as moles or lesions.

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

The Task Force is an independent, 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 Web site**.

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 Skin Cancer

- Skin Cancer**
(National Cancer Institute)
- Take Steps to Prevent Skin Cancer**
(healthfinder.gov)
- Anyone Can Get Skin Cancer**
(National Cancer Institute)
- Skin Cancer**
(Centers for Disease Control and Prevention)

Click Here to Comment on the Draft Recommendation



The Task Force welcomes comments on this draft recommendation.



Comments must be received between October 10 and November 6, 2017.



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