

This fact sheet explains the U.S. Preventive Services Task Force's (Task Force) draft recommendation statement on behavioral counseling interventions to prevent sexually transmitted infections. It also tells you how you can send comments about the draft recommendation to the Task Force. Comments may be submitted from December 17, 2019, to January 21, 2020. The Task Force welcomes your comments.

## Behavioral Counseling Interventions to Prevent Sexually Transmitted Infections

The Task Force issued a **draft recommendation statement** on *Behavioral Counseling Interventions to Prevent Sexually Transmitted Infections*. The Task Force found that clinicians can help prevent sexually transmitted

infections (STIs) by offering behavioral counseling to all sexually active teens and to adults who are at increased risk for STIs.

### What are STIs?

STIs are infections caused by bacteria or viruses that are passed from one person to another through sexual or intimate contact. They are spread by having vaginal, penile, oral, or anal sex with someone who has an STI. There are many types of STIs, including chlamydia, genital herpes, gonorrhea, hepatitis B, HIV, HPV, and syphilis.

### Facts About STIs

STIs are common in the United States and can cause serious health problems. If untreated, STIs can lead to serious complications, including a variety of diseases, infertility, and even death. About half of the new cases of STIs each year occur in people ages 15 to 24 years old.

Factors that increase someone's risk for getting STIs include:

- Having an STI within the past year
- Not using condoms consistently
- Having multiple sex partners
- Having sex with people who might be at greater risk of having an STI

### Behavioral Counseling Interventions to Prevent STIs

To determine which patients may be at increased risk for STIs, clinicians should ask teenage patients whether they are having or have ever had sex and ask adult patients about recent STIs and sexual behaviors that may expose them to STIs. Clinicians use this information to determine which patients should be offered behavioral counseling.

Effective behavioral counseling generally:

- Provides information about STIs
- Communicates about safer sex, such as how to use condoms correctly and consistently
- Aims to increase commitment to safer sex practices

Behavioral counseling can be offered in different settings and in a variety of ways, including in-person counseling, either one-on-one or in a group, telephone support, written materials, videos, websites, and email and text messages, or some combination of these.

Primary care clinicians can offer the counseling during an office visit, refer their patients to other healthcare professionals, or connect them to media-based interventions, such as videos and websites.

The most effective behavioral counseling involves in-person, group counseling that lasts two or more total hours over several sessions.

## Potential Benefits and Harms of Behavioral Counseling Interventions to Prevent STIs

The Task Force looked at the evidence on whether behavioral counseling can help prevent STIs in teens and adults. They found that various types of behavioral counseling can prevent STIs in sexually active teens and adults at increased risk for STIs.

The Task Force found that the harms of the various types of behavioral counseling were minimal.

## The Draft Recommendation on Behavioral Counseling Interventions to Prevent STIs: What Does it Mean?

Here is the Task Force's draft recommendation on behavioral counseling to prevent STIs. It is based on the quality and strength of the evidence about the potential benefits and harms of counseling for this purpose. It is 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 recommends behavioral counseling (**B Grade**), it is because there are more potential benefits than harms.

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 *behavioral counseling* for all *sexually active* adolescents and for adults who are *at increased risk* for *sexually transmitted infections* (STIs).  
**(B Grade)**

## Notes

- 1 *behavioral counseling*  
Behavioral counseling can be offered in different settings and in a variety of ways. It helps patients practice safer sexual behaviors in order to prevent STIs. The counseling can be offered through one-on-one or group discussions, videos, written materials, and/or telephone support.

### *sexually active*

Engaging in any kind of sexual activity, including vaginal, penile, oral, or anal sex.

### *at increased risk*

Having a greater chance of getting an STI because of risky sexual behaviors, such as not using condoms or having multiple sex partners.

### *sexually transmitted infections*

Infections caused by bacteria or viruses that are passed from one person to another through sexual activity or intimate contact.




## 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 Behavioral Counseling Interventions to Prevent STIs](#)

-  **Sexually Transmitted Diseases**  
(Centers for Disease Control and Prevention)
-  **Sexually Transmitted Diseases**  
(MedlinePlus)
-  **Sexually Transmitted Infections**  
(Office on Women's Health, U.S. Department of Health & Human Services)

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



The Task Force welcomes comments on this draft recommendation.



Comments must be received between December 17, 2019 and January 21, 2020.



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