

## U.S. Preventive Services Task Force Issues Draft Recommendation Statement on Screening for Autism Spectrum Disorder in Young Children: Seeks Comments From Public

*More research needed on screening asymptomatic children; clinicians should use clinical judgment and parents should raise any concerns with child's doctor.*

WASHINGTON, D.C. – August 4, 2015 – The U.S. Preventive Services Task Force (Task Force) today posted a draft recommendation and draft evidence review on screening for autism spectrum disorder in young children.

The Task Force, an independent, volunteer panel of experts in prevention and evidence-based medicine, reviewed published studies on screening for autism in children under 3 years old who do not have symptoms of autism or developmental delay, and whose parents or health care provider have not raised concerns about autism.

### Grade in this recommendation:

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

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Based on this review, the Task Force found that the current evidence is insufficient to assess the balance of benefits and harms of screening for autism in children who do not have signs or symptoms of autism. This is an **I statement**, meaning the Task Force is unable to make a recommendation for or against screening at this time.

The Task Force found a need for more research to better understand the benefits and harms of screening for autism spectrum disorder in young children without symptoms. Specifically, more research is needed about the best tools to use for these children, the best time to screen, and the best treatment to use for children who are identified through screening. Until then, doctors and other clinicians should use their clinical judgment when deciding whom to screen or when to screen children without symptoms for autism.

The Task Force only makes recommendations for screenings in people without signs or symptoms of the condition.

“It is important to note that the Task Force is not recommending against screening for autism, but is calling for more research on screening children who do not have signs or symptoms of autism. As the science on autism continues to evolve, parents who have any concerns about their child’s development should tell their child’s doctor,” said pediatrician and Task Force member Alex Kemper, M.D., M.P.H., M.S.

The review found that currently there are no studies on whether earlier identification of autism through screening leads to improvements in language or skill development, behavior, or quality of life.

“Researchers have made important progress in understanding more about the causes of autism, effective screening tools, and potential treatments, and are learning more every day,” said pediatrician and Task Force vice chair David Grossman, M.D., M.P.H. “Still, more clear evidence is needed before

the Task Force can recommend for or against screening all children who don't have any signs of the condition. The Task Force calls on researchers, advocates, and the medical community to join us in pushing the research agenda forward to learn more about autism and the role of screening.”

Autism spectrum disorder affects thousands of children and families across the nation. The most recent estimates by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention state that 1 in 68 children is diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder. The Task Force cares deeply about making sure these children and their families can get the care and support they need. This recommendation does not apply to children who have already been diagnosed with autism.

The Task Force's draft recommendation statement is posted for public comment on the Task Force Web site from August 4 to August 31, 2015. To help educate health care professionals, stakeholders, and the general public about this draft recommendation, the Task Force has developed additional materials, including a topic fact sheet, a video, answers to frequently asked questions, and a fact sheet for consumers. All of these materials are available on the Task Force Web site: [www.uspreventiveservicestaskforce.org](http://www.uspreventiveservicestaskforce.org).

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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