

U.S. Preventive Services Task Force Recommends Screening All Pregnant Women for Gestational Diabetes in Final Statement

WASHINGTON, D.C. – January 14, 2014 – The U.S. Preventive Services Task Force (Task Force) today released its final recommendation statement advising that all women be screened for diabetes developed during pregnancy, called gestational diabetes, after 24 weeks of pregnancy.

“Diabetes that begins during pregnancy can cause serious health problems for expectant mothers and their babies,” says Task Force chair Virginia A. Moyer, M.D., M.P.H. “The good news is that screening all women after 24 weeks of pregnancy is simple, and can result in better health outcomes for both the mother and the baby.”

Gestational diabetes is diabetes that develops during pregnancy. Diabetes is a disease in which the body does not make enough insulin (a hormone) or use it correctly. As a result, the body cannot process starches or sugars in food into energy. It usually resolves after birth but can put expectant mothers and their babies at risk for a number of health problems. About 240,000, or about 7 percent, of the approximately 4 million women who give birth each year develop gestational diabetes. The condition is on the rise as obesity, older age during pregnancy, and other risk factors become more common among pregnant women.

The Task Force recommends screening for gestational diabetes after 24 weeks of pregnancy in all women who do not have symptoms of the condition. This is a B recommendation. The Task Force found that the current evidence is insufficient to assess the balance of benefits and harms of screening earlier than 24 weeks of pregnancy. Therefore, the Task Force issued an I statement for earlier screening.

The Task Force found evidence showing there is an overall benefit to screening expectant mothers after 24 weeks of pregnancy. Screening and treatment lower the risk of preeclampsia and other complications of pregnancy, labor, and delivery. Preeclampsia is a condition in pregnant women characterized by high blood pressure and high levels of protein in the urine, which can result in life-threatening seizures. Treating diabetes during pregnancy can also prevent babies from growing larger than normal (macrosomia), a condition that can lead to birth injuries.

“All women should talk to their doctors or nurses about actions they can take before becoming pregnant to improve their health,” Dr. Moyer says, “including maintaining a healthy weight, quitting smoking, and managing any chronic conditions.”

The Task Force’s final recommendation statement is published online in the *Annals of Internal Medicine*, as well as on the Task Force Web site at www.uspreventiveservicestaskforce.org. A fact sheet that explains the recommendation statement in plain language is also available. Before finalizing this recommendation, the USPSTF posted a draft version for public comment in the spring of 2013.

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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