



U.S. Preventive Services Task Force Issues Final Recommendation Statement on Behavioral Counseling to Prevent Skin Cancer

Task Force finds that clinicians should provide counseling to anyone with a fair skin type between the ages of 6 months and 24 years

WASHINGTON, D.C. – March 20, 2018 – The U.S. Preventive Services Task Force (Task Force) today posted a final recommendation statement and evidence summary on providing behavioral counseling to prevent skin cancer. Based on its review of the evidence, the Task Force recommends clinicians provide counseling on sun protection behaviors to anyone with a fair skin type who is between the ages of 6 months and 24 years, including the parents of young children with fair skin types. This is a **B recommendation**.

For adults over age 24 with fair skin types, the Task Force recommends clinicians consider the individual's risks for skin cancer in their decision on whether to provide counseling. This is a **C recommendation**.

The Task Force also found that there is not enough evidence to determine if providing counseling to adults about skin self-examination is beneficial or harmful. This is an **I statement** (insufficient evidence) and not a recommendation for or against this practice.

Skin cancer is the most common type of cancer in the United States. Exposure to ultraviolet radiation (UV rays) during childhood and adolescence increases the risk of skin cancer later in life. People with fair skin types—those with ivory or pale skin, light hair and eye color, freckles, or who sunburn easily—are at a higher risk for skin cancer. Using tanning beds and having a history of previous skin cancer or sunburns also increases a person's risk for skin cancer.

"Clinicians should counsel children, their parents, and young adults to use sun protective behaviors. Doing things like using sunscreen, wearing sun-protective clothing, and avoiding indoor tanning can help prevent skin cancer later in life," says Task Force member John W. Epling, Jr., M.D., M.S.Ed.

The last time the Task Force looked at this topic, there was not enough evidence to recommend for or against counseling adults over age 24. "We have more evidence now, that tells us that counseling people to practice sun protective behaviors can benefit some adults with fair skin types," says Task Force member Karina W. Davidson, Ph.D., M.A.Sc. "When deciding whether to counsel adults over the age of 24, clinicians should talk with their adult patients about their risk for skin cancer."

The Task Force is calling for more research on counseling people with other skin types and the benefits and harms of providing counseling about skin self-examination.

Grades in this recommendation:

B: Recommended.

C: The recommendation depends on the patient's situation.

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

[Learn more here](#)

The Task Force's draft recommendation statement and draft evidence review were posted for public comment on the Task Force Web site at www.uspreventiveservicestaskforce.org from October 10, 2017 to November 6, 2017.

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.

Dr. Epling is a professor of family and community medicine at the Virginia Tech Carilion School of Medicine in Roanoke, VA. He is the medical director of research for family and community medicine, medical director of employee health and wellness for the Carilion Clinic, and maintains an active clinical primary care practice.

Dr. Davidson is a vice dean and professor in the Departments of Medicine, Cardiology, and Psychiatry and the director of the Center for Behavioral Cardiovascular Health at Columbia University Medical Center. She is also a psychologist in the Department of Psychiatry at New York Presbyterian Hospital/Columbia University Medical Center.

Contact: USPSTF Media Coordinator at Newsroom@USPSTF.net / (202) 572-2044