

U.S. Preventive Services Task Force Publishes Final Recommendation Statement on Screening for Syphilis

Task Force recommends screening persons at increased risk for infection

WASHINGTON, D.C. – June 7, 2016 – Today, the U.S. Preventive Services Task Force (Task Force) published a final recommendation statement and evidence summary on screening for syphilis infection in non-pregnant adults and adolescents. The Task Force strongly recommends screening individuals at increased risk for syphilis infection. **This is an A recommendation.**

Syphilis is an infectious disease that can be transmitted sexually between partners. Syphilis may initially present as a sore on the skin, and without treatment, can become more severe. The later, more severe stage of the disease may cause inflammation throughout the body, which can lead to cardiovascular or organ dysfunction. Syphilis can also affect the nervous system at any stage of infection and can cause a loss of coordination or dementia.

Syphilis rates in the United States have been increasing. In 2014, there were almost 20,000 cases of syphilis, the highest number in over 10 years. “Clinicians play an important role in helping to control the rising rates of syphilis infection and should focus on screening those at increased risk,” says Task Force member Ann E. Kurth, Ph.D., R.N., M.S.N., M.P.H.

“People at the highest risk for syphilis infection are men who have sex with men and people living with HIV. In addition, clinicians should also consider their patients’ sexual behaviors and networks as well as local rates of infection when deciding whom to screen,” says Task Force member Francisco García, M.D., M.P.H.

Everyone can reduce their risk for syphilis infection by consistent and correct use of condoms, limiting sexual activity to a mutually monogamous relationship with a partner who does not have syphilis, or by abstaining from sex.

The Task Force’s recommendation has been published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*, as well as on the Task Force Web site at www.uspreventiveservicestaskforce.org. A fact sheet that explains this recommendation statement in plain language is also available. A draft version of this recommendation was available for public comment in December 2015.

This recommendation complements a 2009 recommendation statement in which the Task Force recommended screening for syphilis infection in all pregnant women.

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.

Grade in this recommendation:

A: Recommended.

[Learn more here](#)

Dr. Kurth is dean of the Yale School of Nursing. She is also an adjunct professor in the New York University College of Nursing and the College of Global Public Health.

Dr. García is the director and chief medical officer of the Pima County Department of Health in Tucson, AZ.

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