

U.S. Preventive Services Task Force Issues Draft Recommendation Statement on Screening and Behavioral Interventions for Unhealthy Alcohol Use in Adolescents and Adults

Screen all adults and offer counseling to those engaging in risky or hazardous drinking; more research needed to make a recommendation for adolescents

WASHINGTON, D.C. – August 5, 2025 – The U.S. Preventive Services Task Force (Task Force) today posted a draft recommendation statement on screening and behavioral counseling interventions to reduce unhealthy alcohol use in adolescents and adults. The Task Force recommends that healthcare professionals screen all adults, including those who are pregnant, for unhealthy alcohol use and provide brief counseling to those who engage in risky or hazardous drinking. **This is a B grade.** There is not enough evidence to recommend for or against screening and counseling in adolescents. **This is an I statement.**

Grades in this recommendation:

B: Recommended.

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

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Unhealthy alcohol use can range from risky or hazardous drinking, which is drinking too much at one time or overall, to alcohol use disorder, which is a pattern of regular drinking that causes distress or harm. There is no level of alcohol consumption that is known to be safe, and pregnant women and adolescents should not drink any alcohol. Drinking during pregnancy can be harmful to the baby, causing long term physical and developmental problems.

“Unhealthy alcohol use is common and is a leading cause of preventable death in the United States,” says Task Force member Jim Stevermer, M.D., M.S.P.H. “Fortunately, screening and brief counseling can help to detect and address risky or hazardous drinking in adults before a more serious problem develops.”

Screening involves healthcare professionals asking adults a few questions about their drinking habits. Anyone who engages in risky or hazardous drinking should be offered brief counseling. Counseling includes healthcare professionals discussing patients’ alcohol use and their readiness to change their drinking habits as well as developing goals, creating an action plan, and determining follow up care. People with a more serious drinking problem, such as those who have been diagnosed with alcohol use disorder, may need more extensive treatment, which is not the focus of this recommendation.

The Task Force also looked at the evidence on screening and counseling adolescents for unhealthy alcohol use but found limited evidence.

“While adolescent alcohol use is a serious concern, there is not enough evidence to determine whether or not screening and counseling in primary care helps to reduce alcohol use in teens, so we are calling for more research,” says Task Force member John Ruiz, Ph.D. “In the absence of evidence, healthcare professionals should use their judgment when determining whether or not to screen their teen patients.”

The Task Force’s draft recommendation statement and draft evidence review have been posted for public comment on the Task Force website at <https://www.uspreventiveservicestaskforce.org>. Comments can be

submitted from from August 5, 2025, to Tuesday, September 2, 2025 at
<https://www.uspreventiveservicestaskforce.org/tfcomment.htm>.

The Task Force is a scientifically independent, volunteer panel of national experts in prevention and evidence-based medicine that works to improve the health of people nationwide by making evidence-based recommendations about clinical preventive services such as screenings, counseling services, and preventive medications.

Dr. Stevermer is vice chair for academic affairs and the Paul Revare, M.D., professor of family and community medicine at the University of Missouri (MU). He also practices and teaches rural primary care at MU Health Care Family Medicine–Callaway Physicians. His clinical practice is in Fulton, Missouri, where he has practiced medicine for nearly 30 years. He has held multiple leadership roles at the nearby rural hospital. Dr. Stevermer has also been involved in medical education at all levels, with a focus on identifying, training, and preparing physicians for rural practice.

Dr. Ruiz is a professor of clinical psychology in the Department of Psychology at the University of Arizona. He is also the assistant director for workforce development in the University of Arizona Cancer Center.

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