

## U.S. Preventive Services Task Force Issues Draft Recommendation Statement on Primary Care Interventions to Prevent Child Maltreatment

*More research is needed on how to prevent child maltreatment before it occurs*

WASHINGTON, D.C. – August 29, 2023 – The U.S. Preventive Services Task Force (Task Force) today posted a draft recommendation statement on primary care interventions to prevent child maltreatment. The Task Force determined there is not enough evidence to assess the balance of benefits and harms of interventions in the primary care setting to prevent child maltreatment before it occurs. **This is an I statement.** This is not a recommendation for or against these interventions, but rather a call for more research. This recommendation is only for children and teens who do not show signs or symptoms of abuse and neglect. Anyone who is showing signs or symptoms should be immediately evaluated and receive appropriate care.

### Grade in this recommendation:

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

[Learn more here](#)

Child maltreatment, which includes abuse and neglect, is a serious problem that affects too many kids and teens across the United States. In 2021, more than 600,000 children experienced some form of maltreatment, and many more cases do not get reported. Primary care interventions considered for this recommendation focus on preventing maltreatment before it occurs. These interventions aim to identify youth at increased risk of maltreatment, encourage positive parental discipline strategies and coping skills, and strengthen the parent-child relationship. Interventions can include parental education, psychotherapy, and referral to community resources. In reviewing the currently available evidence, the Task Force found that more evidence is needed on the effectiveness of primary care interventions to prevent maltreatment before it occurs in youth with no signs or symptoms.

“No child should ever suffer from abuse or neglect. It’s disappointing that there still is not enough evidence on the effectiveness of interventions in the primary care setting to prevent child maltreatment before it occurs, or how to accurately identify at-risk kids,” says Task Force member James Stevermer, M.D., M.S.P.H. “The Task Force is urgently calling for more research to address this critical issue.”

Maltreatment can lead to devastating effects, such as injury and death, and can also lead to long-term physical and emotional consequences, such as disability, substance abuse, and depression. Healthcare professionals should remain vigilant for signs of abuse and neglect and use their clinical judgment when deciding whether and when to provide interventions to help prevent maltreatment in children before it occurs.

“The Task Force deeply cares about the health of children nationwide and sincerely hopes that future research will help identify evidence-based ways to prevent child maltreatment before it occurs,” says Task Force member Tumaini Coker, M.D., M.B.A. “In the absence of evidence, healthcare professionals should use their clinical judgment when deciding whether to provide preventive interventions for children without signs or symptoms of maltreatment. For any child showing signs of maltreatment, clinicians should ensure that the child receives the care they need to stay safe, and be prepared to report their situation to the appropriate agencies.”

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 August 29, 2023, to September 25, 2023 at <https://www.uspreventiveservicestaskforce.org/tfcomment.htm>.

The Task Force is an 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 the vice chair for clinical affairs and Paul Revare, MD, professor of family and community medicine at the University of Missouri (MU). He is the medical director of MU Health Care Family Medicine–Callaway Physicians, where he practices and teaches rural primary care. His scholarly activities focus on dissemination and evidence-based medicine.

Dr. Coker is division head of General Pediatrics and professor of pediatrics at the University of Washington School of Medicine and Seattle Children's. She serves as the co-director of the University of Washington's Child Health Equity Research Fellowship, which is funded by the National Institutes of Health. She teaches primary care pediatrics at Seattle Children's Odessa Brown Children's Clinic, and her research focuses on improving preventive care services during early childhood.

**Contact: USPSTF Media Coordinator at [Newsroom@USPSTF.net](mailto:Newsroom@USPSTF.net) / (301) 951-9203**