

U.S. Preventive Services Task Force Issues Final Recommendation Statement on Screening for Autism Spectrum Disorder in Young Children

*More research needed on the benefits and harms of screening young children:
Task Force's I statement is not a recommendation against screening*

WASHINGTON, D.C. – February 16, 2016 – The U.S. Preventive Services Task Force (Task Force) today posted a final recommendation on screening for autism spectrum disorder in young children, after careful consideration of an in-depth evidence review and comments submitted by the public and health care professionals.

The Task Force found insufficient evidence to determine the long-term benefits or harms of screening children who don't have obvious symptoms or whose parents or health care provider have not raised concerns about their development (**I statement**). The Task Force is not recommending for or against autism screening, but it is calling for more research.

Grade in this final recommendation:

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

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The Task Force cares deeply about the challenges children with autism and their families have in getting the care and support they need and is calling for more research to help it make a recommendation in the future.

“To date, autism research has appropriately focused on treatment for children who have significant symptoms. Now we need more research to help us understand the benefits and harms of screening young children whose parents, caregivers, or doctor have not noticed any symptoms,” said pediatrician and Task Force vice chair David C. Grossman, M.D., M.P.H.

The Task Force's I statement is not a recommendation against screening and will not affect insurance coverage for autism screening.

Until more research is available, the Task Force suggests that clinicians should use their clinical judgment to decide if screening children without overt signs and symptoms is appropriate for the population in their care.

“Parents or caregivers who have any concerns about their child's learning or behavior should tell their child's primary care clinician. Doctors and other health care professionals who care for children should listen to parents' and other caregivers' concerns and use proven tools to assess the need for further testing and services,” said pediatrician and Task Force member Alex Kemper, M.D., M.P.H., M.S.

A draft recommendation statement was made available for public comment from August 4 to August 31, 2015. The Task Force carefully reviewed all of the public and stakeholder comments it received.

To help educate health care professionals, stakeholders, and the general public about its final recommendation statement on autism, the Task Force published additional materials, including a video, answers to frequently asked questions, and links to autism resources, which are available through its [Web site](#).

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. Grossman is a pediatrician recognized for his research on clinical preventive services, injury prevention, and Native American health. He is a senior investigator at the Group Health Research Institute in Seattle, WA, where he is also medical director for population health. He is also professor of health services and adjunct professor of pediatrics at the University of Washington.

Dr. Kemper is a board-certified pediatrician and professor of pediatrics at Duke University Medical School. He serves as the associate division chief for research in the Division of Children's Primary Care at Duke University. Dr. Kemper is also the deputy editor of *Pediatrics*.

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