

Understanding Task Force Draft Recommendations

This fact sheet explains the U.S. Preventive Services Task Force's (Task Force) draft recommendation statement on serologic screening for genital herpes. It also tells you how you can send comments about the draft recommendation to the Task Force. Comments may be submitted from August 16, 2022, to September 12, 2022. The Task Force welcomes your comments.

Serologic Screening for Genital Herpes

The Task Force issued a **draft recommendation statement** on *Serologic Screening for Genital Herpes*.

The Task Force does not recommend screening all adolescents and adults for genital herpes because it does not improve the overall health of people without signs and symptoms.

This recommendation does not apply to people who have signs or symptoms of genital herpes or who have a past genital herpes infection, including those who are in between an outbreak. It also does not apply to people with HIV or other conditions that affect the immune system..

Facts About Genital Herpes

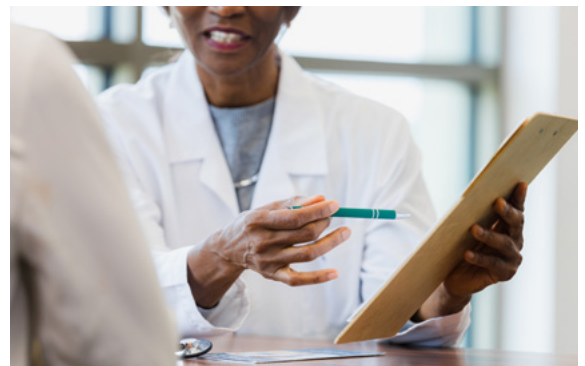
Genital herpes is a common sexually transmitted infection (STI) in the United States that is caused by one of two types of the herpes simplex virus—herpes simplex virus type 1 (HSV-1) and herpes simplex virus type 2 (HSV-2). Genital herpes can cause sores, bumps, pain, tenderness, or itching in the genital area, and fever. Experiencing these and other symptoms is known as having an “outbreak.” Unfortunately, genital herpes cannot be cured, but medications can provide relief from the symptoms of outbreaks.

Genital herpes is most often spread through sexual contact. Many cases of genital herpes are caused by HSV-2, which is spread through anal, vaginal, or oral sex. HSV-1 is spread by mouth, often leading to cold sores on the mouth. However, HSV-1 can also lead to genital herpes through oral sex. Herpes is most often spread when an infected person is having an outbreak, but it can also be spread without any symptoms present. Pregnant people can also transmit genital herpes to their baby, most often during vaginal delivery, which is known as neonatal herpes. Fortunately, neonatal herpes is uncommon, but when it does happen, it can have serious consequences for the baby.

There are certain risk factors that increase a person's risk for developing herpes including having 10 or more sex partners, multiple or frequent changes in sex partners, having HIV or a prior STI, having sexual contact with a person who has a herpes infection, and having unprotected anal or vaginal sex. Additionally, herpes is more common among Hispanic and Black populations compared to the general U.S. population. However, this difference is driven by social aspects of health such as low socioeconomic status and education level rather than biological differences.

Facts About Screening for Genital Herpes

The Task Force does not recommend screening adolescents and adults without signs or symptoms, but there are available screening tests. Screening is done through a blood test that looks for antibodies, which are proteins made by the body to fight infection.



What is genital herpes?

Genital herpes is a common sexually transmitted infection that can cause sores, bumps, pain, or tenderness in the genital area.

Serologic Screening for Genital Herpes

Potential Benefits and Harms of Screening for Genital Herpes

The Task Force found that there is little benefit in finding herpes through screening people without signs and symptoms since the tests used to screen for this infection have limitations, genital herpes cannot be cured, and treatment focuses on managing symptoms.

An important harm of screening is that there is a high chance that test results will say a person has herpes when they, in fact, do not, which is known as a false positive result. A false positive result can lead to unnecessary treatment with medications or, for pregnant people, unnecessary C-sections. Some people falsely diagnosed with herpes may also experience stigma or shame, which could potentially lead to anxiety and disrupt personal relationships. Based on this evidence, the Task Force concluded that the harms of screening outweigh the benefits.

It is important that people who have signs or symptoms of genital herpes, or who have a partner who has been diagnosed with herpes, talk to their healthcare professional about testing and treatment options, especially if they are pregnant or planning to become pregnant.

The Draft Recommendation on Screening for Genital Herpes: What Does It Mean?

Here is the Task Force's draft recommendation on serologic screening for genital herpes. It is based on the quality and strength of the evidence about the potential benefits and harms of screening for this purpose. It also is based on the size of the potential benefits and harms. Task Force recommendation grades are explained in the box at the end of this fact sheet.

When the Task Force recommends against screening **Grade D**, it is because screening has more potential harms than potential benefits.

Before you send comments to the Task Force, you may want to read the full **draft recommendation statement**. The recommendation statement explains the evidence the Task Force reviewed and how it decided on the grade. An **evidence document** provides more detail about the scientific studies the Task Force reviewed.

1 The USPSTF recommends against **routine serologic screening** for genital herpes simplex virus (HSV) infection in **asymptomatic** adolescents and adults, including pregnant persons. **D Grade**

Notes

1 **routine**
Screening all adolescents and adults, including pregnant people.

serologic screening
A blood test that looks for antibodies, which are proteins made by the body to fight infection.

asymptomatic
Having no signs or symptoms of the condition. Symptoms can include sores, bumps, pain, tenderness, or itching in the genital area, and fever.

Serologic Screening for Genital Herpes

What is the U.S. Preventive Services Task Force?


The Task Force is an independent, volunteer group of national experts in prevention and evidence-based medicine. The Task Force works to improve the health of people nationwide by making evidence-based recommendations about clinical preventive services, such as screenings, counseling services, and preventive medicines. The recommendations apply to people with no signs or symptoms of the disease being discussed.

To develop a recommendation statement, Task Force members consider the best available science and research on a topic. For each topic, the Task Force posts draft documents for public comment, including a **draft recommendation statement**. All comments are reviewed and considered in developing the final recommendation statement. To learn more, visit the **Task Force website**.

USPSTF Recommendation Grades

Grade	Definition
A	Recommended.
B	Recommended.
C	Recommendation depends on the patient's situation.
D	Not recommended.
I statement	There is not enough evidence to make a recommendation.






[Click Here to Learn More about Genital Herpes](#)

 **Genital Herpes – CDC Basic Fact Sheet**
(Centers for Disease Control and Prevention)

 **Genital Herpes**
(MedlinePlus)

 **Genital Herpes**
(Office on Women's Health)

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-  [Screening for Syphilis in Nonpregnant Adults and Adolescents](#)
-  [Behavioral Counseling for Sexually Transmitted Infections](#)

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The Task Force welcomes comments on this draft recommendation.



Comments must be received between August 16, 2022, and September 12, 2022.



All comments will be considered for use in writing final recommendations.