

U.S. Preventive Services Task Force Issues Draft Recommendation Statement on Primary Care–Based Prevention of Illicit Drug Use in Children, Adolescents, and Young Adults

*More research is needed on how clinicians can help keep
young people from starting to use drugs*

WASHINGTON, D.C. – October 1, 2019 – The U.S. Preventive Services Task Force (Task Force) today posted a draft recommendation statement and draft evidence review on primary care–based prevention of illicit drug use in young people. The Task Force concluded there is not enough evidence to make a recommendation for or against clinicians providing counseling to prevent drug use in this group. More research is needed on how clinicians can best prevent young people from starting to use illicit drugs. **This is an I statement.**

Grade in this recommendation:

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

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Illicit drug use includes using illegal drugs, as well as using prescription drugs or household products in a way that is not recommended. It is a serious problem in the United States. By the time teenagers graduate from high school, about half of them have used an illicit drug. In 2016, over 70 percent of all deaths in young people ages 10 to 24 years resulted from unintentional injuries, suicide, and homicide. The use of illicit drugs significantly contributes to these causes of death.

“We know that using illicit drugs at a young age can lead to many poor social and health outcomes, including lower academic performance or developing a drug dependency,” says Task Force member Michael Silverstein, M.D., M.P.H. “Therefore, it is critical to find effective ways for clinicians to keep children and teens from starting to use drugs in the first place.”

The Task Force reviewed evidence on how clinicians can prevent drug use in their young patients who have never used drugs or use them rarely by providing counseling. Approaches reviewed included one-on-one counseling, group sessions, print materials, and computer-based tools.

“Unfortunately, while some studies on how primary care clinicians can prevent drug use in young people showed promising results, others did not,” says Martha Kubik, Ph.D., R.N. “More research is needed to identify how clinicians in primary care settings can make a difference in preventing drug use and its negative effects on young patients.”

Clinicians should continue to rely on their judgment on how best to address this issue in young patients who are not using drugs.

The Task Force’s draft recommendation statement and draft evidence review have been posted for public comment on the Task Force website at www.uspreventiveservicestaskforce.org. Comments can be submitted from October 1, 2019, to October 28, 2019, at 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 all Americans by making evidence-based recommendations about clinical preventive services such as screenings, counseling services, and preventive medications.

Dr. Silverstein is a professor of pediatrics, director of the Division of General Academic Pediatrics, and vice chair of research for the Department of Pediatrics at the Boston University School of Medicine. He is also a staff pediatrician and associate chief medical officer for research and population health at Boston Medical Center.

Dr. Kubik is the director of the Department of Nursing at the Temple University College of Public Health and the David R. Devereaux endowed professor in nursing. From 2015 to 2018, Dr. Kubik was a standing member of the National Institutes of Health's Community-Level Promotion Study Section.

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