

U.S. Preventive Services Task Force Finds Insufficient Evidence on Whether Primary Care Behavioral Interventions Reduce Illicit Drug and Nonmedical Pharmaceutical Use in Children and Adolescents

WASHINGTON, D.C. – March 11, 2014 – The U.S. Preventive Services Task Force (Task Force) today posted its final recommendation statement on primary care behavioral interventions to reduce illicit drug and nonmedical pharmaceutical use in children and adolescents. Illicit drug use and the nonmedical use of prescription and over-the-counter medicines by children and adolescents are serious problems in the United States. However, the Task Force concluded there is not enough available evidence to determine what primary care professionals can do to prevent or reduce drug use in children and adolescents under 18 years of age and issued an I statement.

The recommendation does not apply to children and adolescents who have already been diagnosed with a substance use disorder. Young people who have a substance use disorder need help and should receive treatment.

“The Task Force understands the importance of preventing illicit drug use or nonmedical use of medicines in children and adolescents,” says Task Force member Susan J. Curry, Ph.D. “However, we found that there was not enough evidence to determine what effective measures primary care professionals can take to prevent adolescents from trying drugs, or to reduce drug use among those who are already experimenting. This does not mean that the Task Force is recommending against primary care professionals speaking with their young patients about drug use. When there is a lack of evidence, doctors must use their clinical experience and judgment, and many clinicians may choose to talk with an adolescent to prevent or discourage risky behaviors, such as drug use.”

About one in 10 adolescents (ages 12 to 17 years) use illegal drugs or prescription or over-the-counter drugs for nonmedical purposes, which can have serious health, educational, and social consequences. Adolescent drug use is a significant contributor to car accidents, homicide, and suicide—the leading causes of death in adolescents. Every year, more than 150,000 children and adolescents are seen in emergency rooms as a result of illicit drug and nonmedical pharmaceutical use.

“Keeping kids healthy and safe is so important to our families and communities,” says Task Force co-vice chair Al Siu, M.D., M.S.P.H. “Therefore, the Task Force calls on the research community to continue to search for ways to prevent and reduce illicit drug and nonmedical pharmaceutical use.”

Before finalizing this recommendation, the Task Force posted a draft version for public comment in October 2013. The Task Force’s final recommendation statement is published online in *Annals of Internal Medicine*, as well as on the Task Force Web site at www.uspreventiveservicestaskforce.org. A fact sheet that explains the recommendation statement in plain language is also available.

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.