

U.S. Preventive Services Task Force Issues Draft Recommendation Statement on Screening for High Blood Pressure in Children and Adolescents

More research is needed to make a recommendation for or against screening

WASHINGTON, D.C. – April 21, 2020 – The U.S. Preventive Services Task Force (Task Force) today posted a draft recommendation statement on screening for high blood pressure in children and adolescents. The Task Force determined that there is not enough evidence to make a recommendation for or against screening for high blood pressure in children and adolescents. **This is an I statement.**

Grade in this recommendation:

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

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The Task Force reviewed the evidence on screening for high blood pressure in children and teens. High blood pressure is becoming more common among children and teens in the United States. It can have serious negative health effects in childhood and adulthood, such as kidney disease and heart problems. Children and teens who have high blood pressure are more likely to have it as adults, and in younger children, high blood pressure can also be a sign of another underlying condition.

“High blood pressure is a growing problem for children and teens in the United States,” says Task Force member Michael Silverstein, M.D., M.P.H. “Unfortunately, there is not enough evidence to determine if screening for high blood pressure in youth helps detect and prevent other health problems, such as heart disease.”

For this recommendation, the Task Force expanded its review of the evidence to look at the benefits and harms of screening for hypertension caused by other medical conditions, or secondary hypertension, as well as the usual type of high blood pressure which has no clear cause, known as primary hypertension. However, there is limited evidence on screening for both primary and secondary hypertension, so the Task Force continues to call for more research on this important topic.

“We know that children and teens who have high blood pressure are more likely to have it as adults. However, more research is needed on whether early identification and lowering of blood pressure in youth leads to improved cardiovascular health in youth or adults,” says Task Force member Martha Kubik, Ph.D., R.N.

In the absence of evidence, the Task Force encourages clinicians to use their judgement about whether to screen youth without signs or symptoms for high blood pressure.

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 April 21, 2020, to May 18, 2020, 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, chief 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 associate chief medical officer for research and population health at Boston Medical Center/Boston University School of Medicine.

Dr. Kubik is a professor and director of the Department of Nursing at the Temple University College of Public Health and holds the David R. Devereaux endowed chair in nursing. Dr. Kubik is a nurse scientist, active researcher, and past standing member on the National Institutes of Health's Community-Level Health Promotion Study Section. Dr. Kubik is a fellow of the American Academy of Nursing.

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