

U.S. Preventive Services Task Force Issues Draft Recommendation on Screening for Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV)

WASHINGTON, D.C. – November 20, 2012 – The U.S. Preventive Services Task Force (Task Force) today posted a draft recommendation statement on screening for human immunodeficiency virus (HIV). The Task Force is providing an opportunity for public comment on this draft recommendation until December 17. All public comments will be considered as the Task Force develops its final recommendation.

The draft recommendation applies to all people aged 15 to 65 and all pregnant women. It has two parts:

- The Task Force strongly recommends that clinicians screen all people aged 15 to 65 for HIV infection. Younger adolescents and older adults who are at an increased risk for HIV infection should also be screened.
- The Task Force also strongly recommends that clinicians screen all pregnant women for HIV, including women in labor whose HIV status is unknown.

HIV is a critical public health problem. Nearly 1.2 million people in the United States are living with HIV infection, yet 20 to 25 percent of them do not know that they are HIV-positive.

“The draft recommendation reflects new evidence that demonstrates the benefits of both screening for and earlier treatment of HIV,” said Task Force member Dr. Douglas K. Owens, M.D., M.S.

Beginning combined antiretroviral therapy (ART) earlier reduces the risk of developing AIDS-related complications. Treatment also has been shown to decrease the chance of transmission of HIV.

“Because HIV infection usually does not cause symptoms in the early stages, people need to be screened to learn if they are infected,” Dr. Owens said. “People who are feeling well and learn they are infected with HIV can begin treatment earlier, reduce their chances of developing AIDS and live longer and healthier lives.”

The best way to reduce HIV-related disease and death is to avoid getting infected. This recommendation is aimed at helping people who are already infected stay healthy, delay the onset of AIDS, and reduce the risk of spreading the infection.

The Task Force’s draft recommendation has been posted for public comment on the Task Force Web site at <http://www.uspreventiveservicestaskforce.org>. Comments can be submitted from November 20 to December 17 at www.uspreventiveservicestaskforce.org/tfcomment.htm.

A fact sheet that explains the draft recommendation statement in plain language is also available online.

The Task Force is an independent group 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.

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