

U.S. Preventive Services Task Force Issues Draft Recommendation Statement on Screening for Illicit Drug Use, Including Nonmedical Use of Prescription Drugs

Clinicians should screen all adults for illicit drug use; more research needed to make a recommendation for teens

WASHINGTON, D.C. – August 13, 2019 – The U.S. Preventive Services Task Force (Task Force) today posted a draft recommendation statement on screening for illicit drug use, including nonmedical use of prescription drugs. For the first time, there is enough evidence for the Task Force to recommend that primary care clinicians screen all adults for illicit drug use. **This is a B recommendation.** The Task Force concluded that there was not enough evidence to make a recommendation for or against screening teens ages 12 to 17 and is calling for more research in this important population. **This is an I statement.**

Approximately 1 in 10 Americans older than age 18 currently use illicit drugs, and illicit drug use is among the most common causes of preventable death, injury, and disability in the United States. Illicit drug use can include using illegal drugs or using a prescription drug in a way that is not recommended by a clinician. Screening typically involves asking one or more questions about drug use, frequency of use, or risks related to use. This can include questions on routine intake forms or asking patients questions when they come into a clinician's office.

Grades in this recommendation:

B: Recommended.

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

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“Illicit drug use can have a devastating impact on individuals and families,” says Task Force co-vice chair Karina Davidson, Ph.D., M.A.Sc. “Clinicians can help by screening their adult patients and connecting people who use illicit drugs to the care they need to get better.”

This update to the Task Force's 2008 recommendation included more evidence on the accuracy of screening tools and new studies on the benefits and harms of treatment in adults. The draft recommendation also highlights the importance of having systems in place that help people who use illicit drugs find the care they need to get better.

“We want to help prevent illicit drug use in teens, so we're calling for more research on the benefits of screening,” says Task Force member Carol Mangione, M.D., M.S.P.H. “Clinicians should continue to use their professional judgement to determine what's best for their teen patients.”

Parents or caregivers who are concerned about teen drug use or who see physical or behavioral evidence of drug use can talk to the teen's clinician about further assessment.

The Task Force's draft recommendation statement and draft evidence reviews have been posted for public comment on the Task Force website at www.uspreventiveservicestaskforce.org. Comments can be submitted from August 13, 2019, to September 9, 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. Davidson is senior vice president of research, dean of academic affairs, and head of a new center focused on behavioral and cardiovascular health research at the Feinstein Institute for Medical Research at Northwell Health. She is also a professor of behavioral medicine at the Zucker School of Medicine at Hofstra University/Northwell Health.

Dr. Mangione is the chief of the Division of General Internal Medicine and Health Services Research and the Barbara A. Levey, M.D., and Gerald S. Levey, M.D., endowed chair in medicine at the David Geffen School of Medicine at the University of California, Los Angeles.

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