

U.S. Preventive Services Task Force Issues Draft Recommendation Statement on Behavioral Counseling to Prevent Skin Cancer

Task Force finds that clinicians should provide counseling to anyone with fair skin between the ages of 6 months to 24 years of age

WASHINGTON, D.C. – October 10, 2017 – The U.S. Preventive Services Task Force (Task Force) today posted a draft recommendation statement and draft evidence review on providing behavioral counseling to prevent skin cancer. Based on its review of the evidence, the Task Force recommends clinicians provide counseling on sun protection behaviors to anyone with fair skin between the ages of 6 months and 24 years, including the parents of young children with fair skin. This is a **B recommendation**.

For adults over age 24 with fair skin, the Task Force recommends clinicians consider the individual's risks for skin cancer in their decision on whether to provide counseling. This is a **C recommendation**.

The Task Force also found that there is not enough evidence to determine if counseling adults about skin self-examinations is beneficial or harmful. This is an **I statement** (insufficient evidence) and not a recommendation for or against this practice.

Skin cancer is the most common type of cancer in the United States. Exposure to ultraviolet radiation (UV rays) during childhood and adolescence increases the risk of skin cancer later in life. People with fair skin, with freckles, and who sunburn easily are at a higher risk for skin cancer. Other risk factors include a history of sunburns, tanning bed use, and previous skin cancer.

“The Task Force found that providing behavioral counseling to children, their parents, and young adults encourages sun protective behaviors. These actions, such as using sunscreen, wearing sun-protective clothing, and avoiding indoor tanning, can help prevent skin cancer later in life,” says Task Force member Karina W. Davidson, Ph.D., M.A.Sc.

The last time the Task Force looked at this topic, there was not enough evidence to recommend for or against counseling adults over age 24. “Now, there is more evidence that counseling people to practice sun protective behaviors can benefit some adults with fair skin,” says Task Force member John W. Epling, Jr., M.D., M.S.Ed. “When deciding whether to counsel adults over the age of 24, clinicians should talk with their adult patients about their risk for skin cancer.”

The Task Force is calling for more research on counseling people with other skin types and the benefits and harms of counseling about skin self-examination.

Grades in this recommendation:

B: Recommended.

C: The recommendation depends on the patient's situation.

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

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The Task Force's draft recommendation statement and draft evidence review has been posted for public comment on the Task Force Web site at www.uspreventiveservicestaskforce.org. Comments can be submitted from October 10, 2017 to November 6, 2017 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 a vice dean and professor in the Departments of Medicine, Cardiology, and Psychiatry and the director of the Center for Behavioral Cardiovascular Health at Columbia University Medical Center. She is also a psychologist in the Department of Psychiatry at New York Presbyterian Hospital/Columbia University Medical Center.

Dr. Epling is a professor of family and community medicine at the Virginia Tech Carilion School of Medicine in Roanoke, VA. He is the medical director of research for family and community medicine, medical director of employee health and wellness for the Carilion Clinic, and maintains an active clinical primary care practice.

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