

U.S. Preventive Services Task Force Issues Draft Recommendation Statement on Screening for Skin Cancer

Task Force finds insufficient evidence to recommend for or against visual skin cancer screening by doctors in adults

WASHINGTON, D.C. – December 1, 2015 – Today, the U.S. Preventive Services Task Force (Task Force) posted a draft recommendation statement and draft evidence review on visual skin cancer screening exams by doctors in adults. Based on its review, the Task Force found that the current evidence is insufficient to assess the balance of benefits and harms of a full-body visual skin exam performed by a doctor to find melanoma skin cancer in adults. This is an I statement and not a recommendation for or against screening.

Skin cancer is the most common cancer in the United States, affecting 74,000 men and women in 2015. The vast majority of skin cancers are of a type which rarely result in death. Melanoma, however, is a type of skin cancer that is much less common—representing less than 2% of all skin cancers—but has a higher death rate.

The Task Force looked at the current research on the effectiveness of a full-body visual skin cancer screening by a doctor. It determined that there is not enough evidence to know for certain whether such screening prevents death from melanoma. Additionally, the Task Force found that there are potential harms that go along with skin cancer screening, including unnecessary biopsies that can have poor cosmetic results and, more rarely, scarring or other damage that can affect feeling or range of motion.

“The Task Force is dedicated to helping Americans avoid skin cancer and lead healthy lives. Until we have more research to better understand the balance of benefits and harms of a clinical visual skin exam, we encourage patients to talk to their doctor about any concerns they have about their skin,” said Task Force member Michael P. Pignone, M.D., M.P.H.

For now, the best protection against skin cancer is to minimize exposure to ultraviolet rays. One way to do this is to reduce the amount of time spent directly in the sun, especially during the peak daylight hours of noon to 3 p.m.

The Task Force’s draft recommendation statement and draft evidence review have been posted for public comment on the Task Force Web site at www.uspreventiveservicestaskforce.org. Comments can be submitted from December 1 to December 28 at

<http://www.uspreventiveservicestaskforce.org/Page/Name/us-preventive-services-task-force-opportunities-for-public-comment>.

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.

Grade in this recommendation:

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

[Learn more here](#)

Dr. Pignone is a professor of medicine at the University of North Carolina Department of Medicine and chief of the Division of General Internal Medicine. He also serves as director of the university's Institute for Healthcare Quality Improvement.

Contact: Nicole Raisch at Newsroom@USPSTF.net / (202) 572-2044