

## U.S. Preventive Services Task Force Issues Draft Recommendation Statement on Screening for Speech and Language Delay and Disorders in Children

*Task Force determines that more research is needed to recommend for or against screening all children age 5 years and younger*

WASHINGTON, D.C. – July 25, 2023 – The U.S. Preventive Services Task Force (Task Force) today posted a draft recommendation statement on screening for speech and language delay and disorders in children. The Task Force determined there is not enough evidence to make a recommendation for or against primary care professionals screening for speech and language delay and disorders in children 5 years and younger who do not show any signs. **This is an I statement.**

The Task Force looked at evidence on whether or not it is helpful to screen all children 5 years old and younger for speech and language delays and disorders. It found that more evidence is needed on primary care screening and whether it leads to improvements in speech, language, or other outcomes, such as school performance.

### Grade in this recommendation:

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

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Speech or language delay is when a child develops speech and language at a slower rate than expected. Speech or language disorders refer to speech or language ability that is different from typical development. This may mean a child has difficulty with forming specific sounds or has trouble speaking compared to other children their age.

"Speech and language are critical parts of development, and delays and disorders can be challenging for children and their families," says Tumaini Rucker Coker, M.D., M.B.A. "Caring for children with speech and language delays and disorders is incredibly important, but unfortunately, there is not enough evidence to tell us whether or not it is helpful to screen all children 5 years and younger in the primary care setting."

Importantly, this recommendation is for children who do not show signs of speech and language delays or disorders. If a child does show signs, or their caregiver raises concerns about their speech and language development, these children should be evaluated and, if needed, receive treatment.

"Our recommendation is not a recommendation for or against screening, but rather a call for more research," says Li Li, M.D., Ph.D., M.P.H. "It is essential that the gaps in the evidence be addressed, particularly for those who are more likely to experience speech and language delays and disorders, such as Black, Hispanic/Latino, and Native American children, as well as children in households with low incomes."

The Task Force is also calling for more research on the potential harms of screening and treatment, such as labeling, stigma, caregiver anxiety, other social and emotional harms, and overdiagnosis. Additionally, more studies are needed about outcomes such as academic performance, social and emotional health, and child and family well-being that result from the treatment of children with delays or disorders who were found through screening.

The Task Force's draft recommendation statement and draft evidence review have been posted for public comment on the Task Force website at <https://www.uspreventiveservicestaskforce.org>. Comments can be submitted from July 25, 2023, to August 21, 2023, at <https://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 people nationwide by making evidence-based recommendations about clinical preventive services such as screenings, counseling services, and preventive medications.

Dr. Coker is chief of the Division of General Pediatrics and professor of pediatrics at the University of Washington School of Medicine and Seattle Children's. She serves as the co-director of the University of Washington's Child Health Equity Research Fellowship, which is funded by the National Institutes of Health.

Dr. Li is a family physician and the Walter M. Seward professor and the chair of family medicine at the University of Virginia (UVA) School of Medicine. He is also the director of population health at UVA Health and leader of the Cancer Prevention and Population Health program at the UVA Comprehensive Cancer Center.

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