

U.S. Preventive Services Task Force Issues Draft Recommendation Statement on Screening for Syphilis Infection in Pregnant Women

Task Force finds strong evidence of benefit in screening all pregnant women for syphilis

WASHINGTON, D.C. – February 6, 2018 – The U.S. Preventive Services Task Force (Task Force) today posted a draft recommendation and draft evidence review on screening for syphilis infection in pregnant women. The Task Force looked at whether screening pregnant women for syphilis infection prevents babies from getting congenital syphilis, which is syphilis passed from mother to baby during pregnancy. The Task Force found convincing evidence that screening all pregnant women helps reduce the occurrence of congenital syphilis and related negative birth outcomes. **This is an A recommendation** and consistent with the Task Force’s 2009 recommendation on this screening.

The number of babies born with congenital syphilis in the United States is increasing, nearly doubling from 2012 to 2016. Syphilis during pregnancy can lead to negative birth outcomes, such as death of the baby during pregnancy or within the first month after birth, premature birth, or low birth weight. Babies born with congenital syphilis also can have birth defects, such as bone deformities, blindness, or deafness.

A blood test is used to screen pregnant women for syphilis. If syphilis is found, penicillin is the standard treatment for the disease. Treatment is most effective when started early in pregnancy.

“The Task Force found clear evidence that screening and treating pregnant women for syphilis helps prevent the infection from being passed to the baby,” says Task Force member Melissa A. Simon, M.D., M.P.H. “It’s important to screen early in pregnancy, when treatment is most effective in preventing the baby from getting syphilis.”

“Because the early stages of syphilis often don’t cause any symptoms, screening helps identify the infection in pregnant women who may not realize they have the disease,” adds Task Force member Chien-Wen Tseng, M.D., M.P.H., M.S.E.E. “This is why the Task Force recommends that all pregnant women be screened for syphilis.”

This recommendation statement is consistent with recommendations from other organizations. Many states also require screening all pregnant women for syphilis.

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 February 6, 2018 to March 5, 2018 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.

Grade in this recommendation:

A: Recommended.

[Learn more here](#)

Dr. Simon is the George H. Gardner professor of clinical gynecology, the vice chair of clinical research in the Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology, and professor of preventive medicine and medical social sciences at Northwestern University Feinberg School of Medicine. She is the founder of the Chicago Cancer Health Equity Collaborative and a member of the Robert H. Lurie Comprehensive Cancer Center.

Dr. Tseng is the Hawaii Medical Service Association endowed chair in health services and quality research, an associate professor, and the associate research director in the Department of Family Medicine and Community Health at the University of Hawaii John A. Burns School of Medicine. She is also a physician investigator with the nonprofit Pacific Health Research and Education Institute.

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