

U.S. Preventive Services Task Force Issues Draft Recommendation Statement on Screening for Hepatitis C Virus Infection in Adolescents and Adults

Clinicians should screen all adults for hepatitis C infection

WASHINGTON, D.C. – August 27, 2019 – The U.S. Preventive Services Task Force (Task Force) today posted a draft recommendation statement and draft evidence review on screening for hepatitis C virus infection in adolescents and adults. The Task Force recommends screening all adults ages 18 to 79 for hepatitis C. **This is a B recommendation.**

Hepatitis C is a viral infection of the liver. It is primarily spread when blood from an infected person enters the body of someone who isn't infected. More than 4 million people in the United States have a past or current hepatitis C infection, and it is the most common cause of death from an infectious disease.

Grade in this recommendation:

B: Recommended.

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"Today, more people are infected with hepatitis C than there were a decade ago, but there are now better treatments available," says Task Force chair Douglas K. Owens, M.D., M.S. "The evidence now shows more people can benefit from screening; therefore, we are recommending to screen all adults ages 18 to 79 for hepatitis C."

The Task Force's new recommendation expands the ages for screening to all adults. This change is based on new evidence that shows hepatitis C is affecting more people than it did previously—many of whom are younger. And, there are now newer antiviral medications that are more effective and safer in treating people with hepatitis C.

"It is concerning that we are seeing a significant increase in hepatitis C, and many people don't know they have it," says Task Force vice chair Alex H. Krist, M.D., M.P.H. "The good news is that we have newer treatments that are more effective and safer, and screening adults for hepatitis C can detect the infection earlier, before they have complications from the virus."

The Task Force also suggests that clinicians consider screening patients who are younger than age 18 and older than age 79 if they are at high risk for infection.

The Task Force's draft recommendation statement and draft evidence review have been posted for public comment on the Task Force website at www.uspreventiveservicestaskforce.org. Comments can be submitted from August 27, 2019, to September 23, 2019, at www.uspreventiveservicestaskforce.org/tcomment.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. Owens is a general internist and investigator at the Center for Innovation to Implementation at the Veterans Affairs Palo Alto Health Care System. He is the Henry J. Kaiser, Jr., professor at Stanford University, where he is also a professor of medicine.

Dr. Krist is a professor of family medicine and population health at Virginia Commonwealth University and an active clinician and teacher at the Fairfax Family Practice Residency. He is co-director of the Virginia Ambulatory Care Outcomes Research Network and director of community-engaged research at the Center for Clinical and Translational Research.

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