

WHAT'S NEW

From the U.S. Preventive Services Task Force

An Overview of Recommendations

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Preventing Dental Caries in Preschool Children

What Does the U.S. Preventive Services Task Force Recommend?

The U.S. Preventive Services Task Force (USPSTF) recommends that primary care clinicians prescribe oral fluoride supplementation at currently recommended doses to preschool children older than 6 months if their primary water source is deficient in fluoride. The USPSTF concludes the evidence is insufficient to recommend for or against the routine risk assessment of preschool children by primary care clinicians for the prevention of dental disease.

What Should Primary Care Clinicians Know?

It is important for primary care clinicians to be aware of the fluoride level in their patients' primary water supply to ensure appropriate supplementation with minimal risk for fluorosis. Current dosage recommendations based on the water

supply in communities across the country are available online at www.ada.org.

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Because few preschool-aged children ever visit a dentist, primary care clinicians often are the only health professionals young children visit. Clinicians, therefore, have a unique opportunity to prevent dental caries in this population.

What Forms of Fluoride May Be Used To Prevent Dental Caries?

Oral fluoride supplementation, available by prescription, is recommended for preschool children with fluoride-deficient water supplies. Professionally applied topical fluoride varnishes are adjuncts to this oral supplementation; these topical varnishes are approved to

prevent dental caries in young children. Their advantages over other topical fluoride agents, such as mouth-rinse and gel, include ease of use, patient acceptance, and reduced potential for toxicity.

What Are the Potential Harms of Fluoride Supplementation?

Dental fluorosis, typically very mild, is the most common potential harm of either oral fluoride supplementation or the use of fluoride toothpaste in children younger than 2 years in the United States.

For more information, contact the following organizations:

American Dental Association®
www.ada.org

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
www.cdc.gov

healthfinder®
www.healthfinder.gov

What's New from the U.S. Preventive Services Task Force is a series of fact sheets based on recommendations of the USPSTF. The USPSTF systematically reviews the evidence of effectiveness of a wide range of clinical preventive services—including screening, counseling, and chemoprevention (the use of medication to prevent disease)—to develop recommendations for preventive care in the primary care setting. **This fact sheet presents highlights of USPSTF recommendations on this topic and should not be used to make treatment or policy decisions.**

More detailed information on this subject is available in "Dental Caries Prevention: The Physician's Role in Child Oral Health; Systematic Evidence Review for the U.S. Preventive Services Task Force" and in the USPSTF Recommendations and Rationale, which can be found on the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ) Web site (www.preventiveservices.ahrq.gov) and through the National Guideline Clearinghouse (www.guideline.gov). The Summary of the Evidence and the USPSTF Recommendations and Rationale are available in print through the AHRQ Clearinghouse (1-800-358-9295, or ahrqpubs@ahrq.gov).

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U.S. Preventive Services Task Force

Members of the USPSTF represent the fields of family medicine, gerontology, obstetrics-gynecology, pediatrics, nursing, prevention research, and psychology. Members of the U.S. Preventive Services Task Force* are:

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*Members of the USPSTF at the time the USPSTF recommendation on this topic was finalized. For a list of current Task Force members, go to www.ahrq.gov/clinic/uspstfab.htm.

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