

U.S. Preventive Services Task Force Issues Draft Recommendation Statement: Prevention of Dental Caries in Children From Birth Through Age 5 Years

WASHINGTON, D.C. – May 21, 2013 – The U.S. Preventive Services Task Force (Task Force) today posted a draft evidence report and draft recommendation statement on the prevention of dental caries, otherwise known as tooth decay, in children from birth through age 5 years. The Task Force is providing an opportunity for public comment on this draft evidence report and draft recommendation statement until June 17. All public comments will be considered as the Task Force develops its final evidence report and final recommendation.

“Tooth decay is the most common chronic disease in American children, but only about one out of four children under 6 years old visit a dentist,” says Task Force chair Virginia Moyer, M.D., M.P.H. “Fortunately, evidence shows that primary care clinicians can play an important role in helping to reduce tooth decay, substantially improving children’s health.”

Dental caries can cause serious health complications for children including pain, loss of teeth, and cavities later in life. It can also cause children to miss school and affect their growth, speech, and appearance. All children are at risk for dental caries, especially those whose primary water supply does not have enough fluoride.

The Task Force’s draft recommendation includes two ways that primary care clinicians can help prevent dental caries in young children: 1) providing fluoride supplements, usually in the form of drops, tablets, or lozenges, to children whose water supply is deficient in fluoride starting at 6 months, and 2) applying fluoride varnish to the primary teeth of infants and children once the teeth start coming in. Fluoride varnish is easy for a primary care clinician to apply and can benefit all children regardless of the level of fluoride in their water.

“Evidence shows that both fluoride varnish and oral fluoride supplements can help prevent tooth decay in young children,” says Task Force member Glenn Flores, M.D. “These interventions are more vital than ever because, after decades of decline, the rate of tooth decay in children is rising, particularly in those 2 to 5 years old. Preventing this disease is critical to children’s well-being.”

New evidence showing that children benefit from the application of fluoride varnish has emerged since the Task Force last examined this topic in 2004, and the evidence in support of oral fluoride supplements remains strong. However, there is still not enough evidence on whether screening for dental caries by primary care clinicians improves outcomes, so the Task Force is not able to recommend for or against such screening.

The Task Force’s draft evidence report and draft recommendation statement have been posted for public comment on the Task Force Web site at www.uspreventiveservicestaskforce.org. Comments can be submitted from May 21 to June 17 at www.uspreventiveservicestaskforce.org/tfcomment.htm.

The Task Force is an independent, volunteer panel of national experts in prevention and evidence-based medicine who work to improve the health of all Americans by making evidence-based

recommendations about clinical preventive services such as screenings, counseling services, and preventive medications.

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