Task Force Recommends Routine Adult Screening for Misuse of Alcohol

Doctors and nurses should routinely screen their adult patients and pregnant women for alcohol misuse, and provide those engaged in risky or hazardous drinking with brief behavioral counseling, according to new recommendations from a national task force.

The United States Preventive Services Task Force, an independent group of national experts in prevention and evidence-based medicine, concluded there is not enough evidence to make a recommendation about whether it is effective to screen and provide counseling for alcohol misuse in teenagers ages 12 to 17.

The task force noted that about one-third of Americans misuse alcohol, *The New York Times* reports.

Alcohol misuse leads to about 85,000 deaths a year, according to the task force report. It is the third-leading cause of preventable death in this country, after smoking and obesity.

The report recommends that doctors should determine whether a patient needs alcohol counseling by asking a set of questions about alcohol use during a primary care visit. Questions include, “How often do you have a drink containing alcohol?” and “How often do you have five or more drinks on one occasion?”

The recommendations are based on research showing that counseling helps reduce binge drinking, the article notes.

“Clinicians can help men and women to prevent alcohol-related health risks, so we recommend screening adults, including pregnant women, for patterns of unhealthy drinking, and offering brief behavioral counseling to those who report risky or hazardous drinking,” Task Force Member Dr. Susan Curry, Ph.D., said in a news release.

“While underage drinking is a serious public health problem, we don’t know enough about what

works in the primary care setting to help keep teens safe and sober. We need more research on this important topic."