

Many lacked preventive care before health reform law: U.S. report

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Only about half of American adults got screenings, medications to ward off disease.

(HealthDay) -- Prior to the passage of the Affordable Care Act in 2010, only about half of U.S. adults received preventive health services such as screenings, consultations and prescriptions, government researchers report.

Increased use of preventive health services could save tens of thousands of lives, according to the researchers from the U.S. [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#).

The investigators also noted that the [Affordable Care](#) Act -- which provides coverage for many preventive tests -- could lead to greater use of such services.

The CDC team analyzed national data from 2007 to 2010 to assess the use of certain adult preventive services such as aspirin or other blood-thinning drugs, [blood pressure control](#), screening for and controlling [high cholesterol](#), and quitting cigarettes and other [tobacco products](#).

Among the findings:

- Only 47 percent of patients with heart disease primarily affecting the blood vessels were prescribed the recommended daily use of aspirin.
- Only 44 percent of patients with [high blood pressure](#) had it under control, despite recommendations that adults with high blood pressure receive a clinical treatment plan that might include medications and regular follow-up visits until healthy blood pressure is achieved.
- Despite strong evidence that screening for and treating high cholesterol reduces sickness and death due to heart disease, about 33 percent of men and 25 percent of women were not screened during the previous five years. Of the adults diagnosed with high levels of LDL (bad) cholesterol, only 32 percent of men and women had it under control.
- Fewer than one in 13 [tobacco users](#) were prescribed medications to help them quit their habit.

"Clinical preventive services prevent heart attack, stroke, cancer and other diseases and save lives," CDC director Dr. Thomas Frieden said in an agency news release. "This report provides a snapshot of preventive services for U.S. adults before 2010. As we look to the future, we can track how our nation's health is progressing through better prevention in health care."

Provisions in the Affordable Care Act that could increase the use of

preventive services include a requirement that new private health insurance plans cover recommended preventive services with no cost-sharing.

In addition, the health care law requires coverage for a new annual wellness visit under Medicare and eliminates cost sharing for recommended preventive services provided to Medicare beneficiaries.

The law also offers state Medicaid programs financial incentives to cover preventive services for adults and supports efforts to improve public education about the benefits of preventive services.

More information: The American Academy of Family Physicians has more about [preventive services for healthy living](#).

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