

Primary care docs shouldn't screen all patients for oral cancer: experts

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Image courtesy of Blausen Medical

Too little evidence that it helps adults without symptoms, U.S. Preventive Services Task Force says.

(HealthDay)—Not enough evidence exists to recommend that primary care physicians perform oral cancer screenings on adult patients who have no signs or symptoms of the condition, an expert panel says.

The U.S. Preventive Services Task Force (USPSTF), an independent medical panel with federal support, said Tuesday that the draft recommendation applies to primary care practitioners but not to dentists or oral health professionals.

The recommendation is not intended to promote or discourage screening, according to a USPSTF news release. Rather, it means the panel concluded that there is insufficient evidence to determine if the benefits of screening outweigh the harm.

"The evidence shows that it is difficult to detect oral cancer and that the evidence is not clear whether oral [cancer screening](#) improves long-term health outcomes among the general [adult population](#) or among high-risk groups," task force member Dr. Jessica Herzstein said in the news release. "We need more high-quality research on whether screening tests can accurately detect oral cancer and if screening adults for oral cancer in primary care settings improves health outcomes."

The task force advised [health care professionals](#) to consider their patients' preferences and [medical histories](#) and the opinions of other experts in addition to their own professional training and experience.

The draft recommendation statement appears on the USPSTF website. Public comments can be made until May 6. The task force will consider these comments while developing its final recommendation.

Although it is not common, oral cancer is a serious disease. Tobacco and alcohol use are major risk factors. Oral human papillomavirus (HPV) also is a growing risk factor for a type of oral cancer known as oropharyngeal cancer, which appears in the upper part of the throat.

More information: The U.S. National Cancer Institute provides more information on [oral cancer](#).

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