

# Task force issues stronger skin cancer prevention guidelines

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(HealthDay)—Doctors should start early with skin cancer prevention

advice when their patients are light-skinned, suggests new guidelines that bump that starting point back to the age of 6 months.

This recommendation, from the U.S. Preventive Services Task Force, updates a 2012 recommendation that advised doctors not begin this education until children reached the age of 10.

"Clinicians should counsel children, their parents and young adults to use sun-protective behaviors. Doing things like using sunscreen, wearing sun-protective clothing, and avoiding indoor tanning can help prevent [skin cancer](#) later in life," said task force member Dr. John Epling, Jr. He is a professor of family and community medicine at the Virginia Tech Carilion School of Medicine, in Roanoke, Va.

For adults aged 24 and older, the task force recommends that doctors assess each patient's risk for skin cancer and provide advice on how to prevent this disease on an individual basis.

Task force member Karina Davidson added, "We have more evidence now that tells us that counseling people to practice sun-protective behaviors can benefit some adults with fair skin types." She is director of the Center for Behavioral Cardiovascular Health at Columbia University Medical Center, in New York City.

"When deciding whether to counsel adults over the age of 24, clinicians should talk with their adult patients about their risk for skin cancer," Davidson said in a task force news release.

Children and teens who are exposed to the sun's harmful ultraviolet radiation are at greater risk for developing skin [cancer](#) in adulthood, the task force explained. This exposure is particularly risky for people with fair skin that burns easily, freckles and light-colored hair and eyes. Those who use tanning beds or have a history of [skin cancer](#) or sunburns

are also at higher risk for the disease.

The new recommendations were published online March 20 in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*.

The [task force](#) is an independent, volunteer panel of national experts in prevention and evidence-based medicine that make recommendations about screenings, counseling services and preventive medications.

**More information:** The American Cancer Society has more about [skin cancer](#).

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