

Too little known on how primary care docs can prevent child abuse

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U.S. panel couldn't make recommendations about kids without obvious signs of maltreatment.

(HealthDay)—A lack of research makes it impossible to recommend how primary care doctors can prevent abuse and neglect of children who show no signs or symptoms of maltreatment, according to a new U.S. Preventive Services Task Force statement.

"We know there are children suffering abuse who don't show obvious signs of mistreatment, and the task force wanted to learn more about what [primary care](#) practices can do to help them," task force member Dr. David Grossman said in a task force news release.

Child abuse and neglect affects more than half a million American children each year, according to the release. About 680,000 children in the United States were abused or neglected in 2011 and more than 1,500 of these children died. Children aged 5 and under are at the most risk for abuse and death from abuse.

The task force analyzed studies released since 2004 and concluded that although child abuse and neglect is a serious problem, there is very little evidence to determine how primary care doctors can protect young victims who show no obvious

signs or symptoms of [maltreatment](#).

Due to the lack of information, the task force said it cannot make a specific recommendation for or against primary care doctors taking action to help these children. The statement appears online June 11 in the journal *Annals of Internal Medicine*.

"We critically need more research on how primary care clinicians can prevent maltreatment and protect their young patients when symptoms of abuse or neglect are not apparent," Grossman said.

The task force said areas where more research is needed include: how [health care providers](#) can help support families to prevent abuse and neglect; how to identify children who are being mistreated; ways to prevent abuse of older children; and whether interventions to prevent child abuse could cause unintended harm.

"It will take action from every part of society, including families, schools and [health care professionals](#), to build a future where every child can grow up healthy and safe from abuse and neglect," [task force](#) chair Dr. Virginia Moyer said in the news release. "While we learn more about what primary care professionals can do to help children, all health care professionals must continue to remain vigilant for signs of abuse and neglect, and respond appropriately when they identify problems."

More information: The U.S. Children's Bureau outlines ways to [prevent child abuse and neglect](#).

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