

Teen Health

Primary Care Doctors Offer Mental Health Checkups At Regular Adolescent Exams

(NAPSA)—Primary care physicians nationwide are offering mental health checkups as part of regular adolescent health exams.

In fact, this spring, the U.S. Preventive Services Task Force, the nation's leading independent panel of private-sector experts in prevention and primary care, recommended annual depression screening by primary care providers for all 12- to 18-year-olds. A separate report by the Institute of Medicine and the National Research Council also called for mental health screening of adolescents and highlighted primary care settings as a key location for such checkups.

Mental health checkups are especially valuable, because many mental health problems are difficult to detect. The U.S. Surgeon General reports that 11 percent of the nation's youth suffer from a diagnosable mental disorder that causes impairment in their day-to-day lives at home, in school or with peers. Yet only 20 percent are identified and receive mental health services.

Each year, more than 500,000 teens make a suicide attempt serious enough to require medical attention. According to the National Institute of Mental Health, more than 90 percent of suicide victims have a significant psychiatric illness at the time of their death. Mood disorders and substance abuse are the two most common disorders and, when both are present, the risk for suicide is much greater, particularly for adolescents and young adults.

Mental health checkups can be completed in five minutes as part of a regular health care provider visit. The checkup uses a brief,



Eleven percent of all American teens suffer from a diagnosable disorder that could be found in a mental health checkup.

evidence-based questionnaire to help identify teens who may be at risk for undetected mental illness and/or exhibit potential risk factors for suicide. Screenings are safe and effective. Like hearing and vision screenings, mental health checkups can identify potential problems early on so that effective intervention can take place.

Adolescents who score positive on the screening questionnaire are further evaluated and then, if necessary, are referred to a mental health professional or treated by their primary care provider. Parents are notified of a positive screen and any referral or treatment decisions are made with parents, health professionals and teens together.

The TeenScreen National Center for Mental Health Checkups at Columbia University offers free screening materials for doctors' offices through its TeenScreen Primary Care Program.

For more information, visit www.teenscreen.org/checkups-in-primary-care.