Cholesterol screenings suggested for kids

  Panel cites early heart disease prevention

**The Associated Press**      More children should be screened for high cholesterol before puberty, beyond those with a family history of problems, according to wide-ranging new guidelines expected from government-appointed experts who are trying to prevent heart disease later in life.

The new advice will be presented Sunday at an American Heart Association conference by members of a panel for the National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute.

   Any call for wider screening is likely to raise concern about overdiagnosing a condition that may not cause problems for decades, if ever. Yet studies suggest that half of children with high cholesterol will also have it as adults, and it’s one of the best-known causes of clogged arteries, which can lead to heart attacks.

   Until now, medical groups such as the American Academy of Pediatrics have advised screening only children with a family history of early heart disease or high cholesterol and those who are obese or have diabetes or high blood pressure.

   However, a West Virginia study tested more than 20,000 fifth-graders and found that many with high cholesterol would have been missed by the targeted screening approach used now, said Dr. Stephen Daniels, who led the panel that wrote the new guidelines.

   Heart disease starts early in life, and “the risk factors that are important for adults are also important for children and adolescents,” Daniels, pediatrics chief at the University of Colorado School of Medicine in Denver, told The Associated Press.

   About a third of U.S. children and teens are obese or overweight. Government studies estimate that up to 13 percent of children and teens have high cholesterol, defined as a score above 200.

   Daniels and other members said they could not disclose details of the advice before Sun-day’s presentation. It’s the first time a government panel has collectively considered all major contributors to heart disease, including obesity, smoking, diabetes, high blood pressure and high blood sugar.

   If screening is done, it should happen before puberty, when cholesterol levels dip before rising again, doctors explain.

   Other parts of the new guidelines: The government will replace the terms “at risk for being overweight” and “overweight” with “overweight” and “obese” for kids in the 85th and 95th percentiles, a member of the panel said.

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