

# Mental Health Checkups Increase Early Detection and Can Save Lives

Mental health checkups or screenings are especially valuable, because many mental health problems are difficult to detect. The U.S. Surgeon General reports that 11 percent of our nation's youth suffer from a diagnosable mental disorder that causes significant impairment. However, only 20 percent of these youth are identified and receive mental health services.<sup>1</sup>

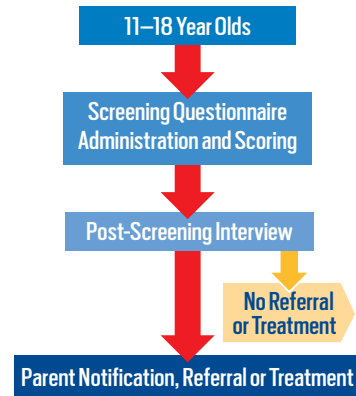
The good news is that most teens who receive a mental health checkup are fine or only experiencing typical teenage problems that do not require further assessment. For some, however, checkups can help detect early signs of mental illness, enabling teens and their families to promptly access professional services that can improve their prognosis for recovery and, in some cases, save their lives.

## Checkups Are...

**Quick and Easy.** Utilizing a brief, evidence-based questionnaire that takes 5–10 minutes to complete, teens are asked about symptoms of depression, anxiety and substance abuse, as well as about suicidal thinking and behavior. The questionnaire can be easily administered in a doctor's office, at school, and in other youth-based settings.

**Effective.** A recent report from the U.S. Preventive Services Task Force concluded that primary care screening tools accurately

## Steps in a Mental Health Checkup



identify depressed adolescents.<sup>2</sup> Additionally, research shows that TeenScreen is effective in identifying young people who are at risk for depression, other mental disorders and suicide.<sup>3</sup>

**Safe.** Research published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* has shown that screening and directly asking youth if they are thinking about suicide or have made a prior suicide attempt does not cause them to start thinking about suicide or increase or create distress.<sup>4</sup>

## Support for Screening and TeenScreen

The importance of early detection of mental illness through screening is well documented in published medical research and is endorsed by government health authorities.



A 2009 U.S. Preventive Services Task Force report recommends annual depression screening by primary care providers for all 12–18 year olds.

The Institute of Medicine and National Research Council also issued a report that calls for evidence-based screening of adolescents for mental, emotional and behavioral disorders. The report highlights primary care, school, and community settings as key locations for screening and states that checkups offer the potential to prevent fully developed disorders.

The U.S. Surgeon General issued a mental health report in 1999 that endorsed early identification of mental illness through screening. In 2003, the President's Commission on

Mental Health also endorsed screening citing TeenScreen as a model program.

Professional groups in the medical community also support regular mental health checkups. The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends annual screening and referral for mental health problems for adolescents. The Society for Adolescent Medicine supports the early identification of mental illness as a critical standard of care. The American Academy of Family Physicians stresses the importance of screening patients for suicide risk.

TeenScreen is included in the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's National Registry of Evidence-based Programs and Practices. TeenScreen also is included in the Suicide Prevention Resource Center's Best Practices Registry.

More than 35 national health, mental health and education organizations are on record in support of voluntary mental health screening for youth.

TeenScreen@childpsych.columbia.edu | 1-877-TeenScreen (1-877-833-6727) | www.teenscreen.org

The TeenScreen National Center for Mental Health Checkups is an affiliate of the Columbia University Division of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry in the Department of Psychiatry at Columbia University Medical Center in New York City.

The National Center for Mental Health Checkups and its two national programs, TeenScreen Primary Care and TeenScreen Schools and Communities, are supported by foundations, individuals, and organizations committed to early identification of mental illness in youth and prevention of teen suicide. The National Center and its programs and initiatives are not affiliated with or funded by any pharmaceutical companies.



1. U.S. Surgeon General: Mental Health Report (1999). Rockville, MD. 2. Williams SB, et al. AHRQ Pub. No. 09-05130-EF-4, March 2009. Rockville, MD. 3. Shaffer D, et al. (2004). *JAACAP*, 43(1), 71-79. 4. Gould M, et al. (2005). *JAMA*, 293, 1635-1643.

# Making Adolescent Mental Health Checkups a National Priority

TeenScreen® National Center for Mental Health Checkups at Columbia University



