

# Doctors: Test all kids for cholesterol by age 11

CHICAGO (AP) — Every child should be tested for high cholesterol as early as age 9 — surprising new advice from a government panel that suggests screening kids in grade school for a problem more common in middle age.

The idea will come as a shock to most parents. And it's certain to stir debate.

The doctors on the expert panel that announced the new guidelines Friday concede there is little proof that testing now will prevent heart attacks decades later. But many doctors say waiting might be too late for children who have hidden risks.

Fat deposits form in the heart arteries in childhood but don't usually harden them and cause symptoms until later in life. The panel urges cholesterol screening between ages 9 and 11 — before puberty, when cholesterol temporarily dips — and again between ages 17 and 21.

The panel also suggests diabetes screening every two years starting as early as 9 for children who are overweight and have other risks for Type 2 diabetes, including family history.

The new guidelines are from an expert panel appointed by the National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute and endorsed by the American Academy of Pediatrics.

Some facts all agree on:

- By the fourth grade, 10 to 13 percent of U.S. children have high cholesterol, defined as a score of 200 or more.

- Half of children with high cholesterol will also have it as adults, raising their risk of heart disease.

- One third of U.S. children and teens are obese or overweight, which makes high cholesterol and diabetes more likely.

Until now, cholesterol testing has been done only for kids with a known family history of early heart disease or inherited high cholesterol, or with risk factors such as obesity, diabetes or high blood pressure. That approach misses about 30 percent of kids with high cholesterol.