UK NSC recommendation on screening for familial hypercholesterolaemia (FH) in children

Following a review of the evidence against strict criteria, the UK NSC does not currently recommend introducing a national screening programme for FH in children.

People with FH have a high amount of a fatty substance called cholesterol. In people with FH the high cholesterol is inherited from a parent, rather than gained from an unhealthy lifestyle and can lead to the early development of heart problems, such as coronary heart disease.

In the UK, FH is thought to affect about 1 in 500 people. This means that approximately 130,000 people may be affected by FH.

There is a 1 in 2 (50%) chance that a child, brother or sister of someone with FH will also have the condition.

Screening in children has been suggested as it may find FH earlier so that lifestyle changes and other treatments can begin sooner. Earlier treatment may prevent death and serious illness.

Key findings supporting the UK NSC recommendation

- there are no studies that help understand how well a childhood screening strategy works in practice
- no studies have been identified that assessed whether child screening reduces illness or death from FH
- there remain unanswered questions about the acceptability of universal screening at 1-2 years

The UK NSC regularly reviews its recommendations on screening for different conditions in the light of new research evidence becoming available.

To find out more about the UK NSC’s screening for FH in children recommendation, please visit:

http://legacy.screening.nhs.uk/familialhypercholesterolaemia-child

The UK National Screening Committee (UK NSC) advises ministers and the NHS in the 4 UK countries about all aspects of screening and supports implementation of screening programmes.

Find out more about the UK National Screening Committee at www.gov.uk/government/groups/uk-national-screening-committee-uk-nsc. The UK NSC evidence review process is described at www.gov.uk/government/publications/uk-nsc-evidence-review-process and a list of all UK NSC recommendations can be found at legacy.screening.nhs.uk/recommendations

The UK NSC secretariat is hosted by Public Health England (www.gov.uk/phe).