Following a review of the evidence, the UK NSC does not recommend introducing newborn screening for kernicterus.

Kernicterus is a rare condition in newborn babies which can damage the brain and spinal cord. It can be life threatening. It is usually found in babies who have high levels of a substance, called bilirubin in their blood.

High levels of bilirubin can cause jaundice. Signs of jaundice include yellowing of the skin and the whites of the eyes. Much higher levels of bilirubin can cause permanent brain damage.

It has been suggested that if screening was introduced it would help to find babies at risk and provide early treatment to reduce bilirubin and prevent brain damage.

Key findings supporting the UK NSC recommendation

- there is no clear evidence that screening would help to find babies at risk of developing kernicterus
- the test (bilirubin in the baby's bloodstream) is not a good predictor of whether the baby will develop kernicterus - so many would be treated unnecessarily
- current treatment options (phototherapy and exchange transfusion) can reduce bilirubin levels - but it is not known whether these are effective in preventing kernicterus

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 recommendation on kernicterus screening in newborns, please visit:

http://legacy.screening.nhs.uk/kernicterus

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).