UK NSC recommendation on newborn screening for biliary atresia

Following a review of the evidence against strict criteria, the UK NSC does not currently recommend introducing newborn screening for biliary atresia.

Biliary atresia is a rare condition that causes the bile ducts to become blocked or inflamed. Bile is a digestive fluid necessary to digest fatty acids and vitamins. If it cannot drain away from the liver, bile can build up and cause serious liver damage in the early years.

An operation to allow drainage of the bile ducts can prevent or delay the need for liver transplant which would otherwise be needed. This is called the Kasai procedure. It is important that this is performed before the liver becomes badly damaged.

The aim of a screening programme for biliary atresia would be to allow for earlier detection of biliary atresia and reduce the age at which the Kasai procedure is performed.

Key findings supporting the UK NSC recommendation

A national screening programme is not recommended in the UK because:

- there is no reliable test which could be used to find babies with biliary atresia in the first week of life
- a small number of countries have introduced screening using stool colour cards, but the age at which babies with biliary atresia have the Kasai procedure is similar in those countries to what it is in the UK

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 newborn screening for biliary atresia, please visit:

[legacyscreening.phe.org.uk/biliaryatresia](http://legacyscreening.phe.org.uk/biliaryatresia)