UK NSC recommendation on newborn screening for cytomegalovirus

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

Cytomegalovirus (CMV) is a common viral infection found in children and adults. It does not always have symptoms. It does not always need to be treated.

It is called congenital CMV infection if it is passed from mother to baby during pregnancy.

In most cases the virus does not cause harm to the baby. However, for some it can interfere with the baby's development and cause problems later on, such as hearing loss. Most babies identified as having CMV infection will show symptoms in the first 2 weeks and will be treated using an antiviral drug.

The aim of screening would be to identify which babies have the infection and to treat them before they become affected.

Key findings supporting the UK NSC recommendation

An option for newborn screening would be to test a saliva sample, but research is needed to understand if this test is suitable for screening.

It is not currently possible to know which babies are going to develop long-term health problems. More research is needed to distinguish between babies who will suffer from the infection and babies who will not.

Screening is likely to identify a greater number of babies with the infection who have no symptoms and will not have problems from it. Currently, it is not clear what is the best approach for managing these children, and it is unknown whether screening improves their outcomes.

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 cytomegalovirus, please visit:

legacy.screening.phe.org.uk/cytomegalovirus

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/uknsc. 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).