UK NSC recommendation on screening for iron deficiency anaemia (IDA) in children under 5 years

Following a review of the evidence against strict criteria, the UK NSC does not currently recommend introducing screening for IDA in children under 5 years.

IDA is the most common form of anaemia and occurs when iron levels are too low to support the production of red blood cells, usually because of a lack of iron in the diet. Children aged under 5 years are especially at risk. It is possible that IDA may affect a child’s development, but this is not known for certain.

Screening could potentially lead to earlier diagnosis and treatment which may improve health outcomes for young children.

Key findings supporting the UK NSC recommendation

A national screening programme for IDA is not recommended by the UK NSC because:

• it is not known how many children in the UK are affected
• it is uncertain whether IDA in children under the age of 5 causes adverse developmental outcomes and whether it gets better without treatment
• a suitable test is not yet available
• it is not clear whether treatment improves long-term developmental outcomes in children

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 screening for IDA in children under 5 years, please visit:

legacy.screening.phe.org.uk/irondeficiencyanaemia

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).