UK NSC recommendation on adult screening for thyroid dysfunction

Following a review of the evidence against strict criteria, the UK NSC does not currently recommend a national screening programme for thyroid dysfunction in adults.

The thyroid gland, located at the front of the neck, is responsible for the production of 2 hormones which regulate energy levels. Thyroid dysfunction occurs when these hormones are out of balance.

Thyroid dysfunction can lead to many health problems. These include tiredness, heart disease, thinner bones and stroke. But many people with thyroid dysfunction do not suffer any symptoms.

The aim of a screening programme would be to identify people with undiagnosed thyroid dysfunction. They could then be offered treatments to prevent symptoms and reduce the risk of health problems.

Key findings supporting the UK NSC recommendation

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

- different people can safely have different levels of thyroid hormones, depending on their age, sex and ethnicity. For a test to be reliable it must be able to consider these factors by defining test ‘cut-off levels’. We didn’t find any agreement on what these levels should be in the diverse UK population
- some people with abnormal levels of thyroid hormones will return to good health without the need for any treatment. This is because hormone levels naturally fluctuate in life. We are unable to identify which people would actually need treatment
- we did not find reliable evidence showing that treatment would be beneficial to patients identified through a screening programme. Further research is needed in this field

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 thyroid dysfunction, please visit:

legacyscreening.phe.org.uk/thyroid

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).