

PE1592/B

Scottish Government submission of 5 June 2017

Thank you for your letter of 28 April 2017 seeking the Scottish Government's views on the UK National Screening Committee's (UK NSC) recommendation on Group B Streptococcus screening in pregnancy.

The Scottish Government is given independent advice by the UK NSC, the body that advises Ministers and the NHS in the four UK countries about all aspects of screening, Streptococcus (GBS) in pregnancy. As you are aware, on the 22 March 2017 the UKNSC published its recommendation, based on the latest evidence, not to offer a national screening programme for Group B Streptococcus (GBS) in pregnancy.

The UK NSC recommendation not to screen women at 35-37 weeks of pregnancy for GBS was due to insufficient evidence to demonstrate that the benefits of screening would outweigh the harms. The UK NSC highlighted that a screening programme would lead to large numbers (nearly 100,000 per annum) of predominantly low risk women being offered antibiotics that they did not need. This is because the test cannot distinguish between the small number of carriers whose baby would be affected by early onset GBS and the large numbers which would not. This advice is consistent with guidance from the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists (RCOG) and the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE).

The Scottish Government is fully committed to ensuring that women and their babies have access to high quality, safe and effective care which is why, based on the independent UK National Screening Committee's recommendation, we have not approved screening for GBS. However, the Committee and other bodies recognise that better evidence is needed to assess the clinical effectiveness, benefits and harms of a screening programme.

As a result the National Institute of Health Research have been asked to commission a UK wide clinical trial to compare universal screening for GBS against usual-risk based care. We hope this will commence as soon as practicable.

Additionally, the UK Government Chief Scientific Adviser held two research workshops last year to bring together a broad range of experts on GBS from across the UK. The workshop group intend to publish an outcome paper outlining the tractable, high priority questions agreed which could move us closer to reducing the harm caused by GBS.

I hope this provides you with reassurance that the Scottish Government continue to take this matter very seriously.