

Briefing for the Public Petitions Committee**Petition Number:** [PE01788](#)**Main Petitioner:** Alexander Tiffin**Subject:** CMV Screening for Pregnant Women

Calls on the Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to introduce screening for Cytomegalovirus (CMV) for all pregnant women.

Background

Cytomegalovirus (CMV) is a virus similar to the herpes virus that causes cold sores and chickenpox. It can infect people of all ages and most adults and children with the virus will have no signs or symptoms ([NHS](#)). CMV infection spreads by contact of body fluids such as saliva, blood and urine.

CMV can cause problems in unborn babies if the mother catches it when pregnant. This is known as congenital CMV. Most children born with congenital CMV will not show symptoms at birth ([CMV Action](#)). Around 10% to 15% of babies born with congenital CMV will show moderate or severe symptoms in the first two weeks of life, and around half of these babies (between 120 and 180 in the UK each year) will develop adverse long-term outcomes, such as hearing loss and other neurological problems. Around 10% of the babies without symptoms at birth will also develop problems in later life.

It is estimated that around 2,000 children are born with CMV in the UK each year. Of these, approximately 200 will develop problems from the virus ([Bazian Ltd, 2017](#)).

Screening for CMV

The [UK National Screening Committee](#) (UK NSC) is an expert advisory group which advises Ministers and the NHS in the four UK countries about all aspects of population screening and supports implementation of screening programmes.

The UK NSG has considered both antenatal and new born screening for CMV. Antenatal screening would aim to detect women acquiring CMV in pregnancy and new born screening would aim to identify infants with congenital CMV ([Townsend, 2011](#)).

In 2012, the UK NSC recommended against screening for CMV. This was [reviewed in 2017](#) and the recommendation was still considered to be valid.

In pregnancy, screening is not recommended because:

1. There is still no reliable screening test to detect cytomegalovirus infection during pregnancy.
2. No treatment was identified that could prevent the developing baby in the womb getting cytomegalovirus infection from their mother.

The [2012 review](#) noted that, due to the complexities around diagnosis of maternal and fetal CMV infection and the lack of available interventions to prevent transmission or development of congenital CMV disease, the focus of attention had shifted in recent years towards neonatal screening instead of antenatal screening. The [2017 review](#) found no significant new evidence to suggest that the UK NSC should reconsider screening in the antenatal period.

The next review is [scheduled for 2020/21](#).

The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) states that the available evidence [does not support routine cytomegalovirus screening](#) in pregnant women and that it should not be offered.

Scottish Government Action

All pregnant women in Scotland are offered screening. [Pregnancy screening](#) aims to enable women and their partners to make an informed choice about continuing the pregnancy, or to accept treatment at an early stage when it is likely to be more effective. As advised by the UK NSG, pregnancy screening in Scotland does not include screening for CMV.

Scottish Parliament Action

Parliamentary questions on CMV have focused mainly on infection through contaminated blood products.

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22/01/2020

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