

**PE1505/B**

**Children and Families Directorate**  
Child and Maternal Health Division

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In 2014 Scotland Welcomes the World



28 April 2014

Dear Mr Howlett

### **CONSIDERATION OF PETITION PE1505**

Further to your letter of 28 March 2014 in regards to the above petition, I offer below the Scottish Government's response.

#### **Will the Scottish Government ensure that information is routinely given to all expectant mothers in Scotland on Group B Streptococcus and on how to undertake tests and screening privately?**

Information given to prospective parents is at the discretion of each NHS Board in Scotland which have information, developed locally and nationally, on a range of pregnancy issues. The Scottish Government will remind NHS Boards of the importance of raising awareness of Group B Streptococcus as well as working with Health Scotland to revise Ready Steady Baby! to include relevant information on Group B Strep for parents.

The UK National Screening Committee (NSC) policy regarding screening for group B streptococcus is followed by clinicians in Scotland. Women will have testing for the presence of Group B streptococcus if they fall into the high risk categories as advised in the recent RCOG guidance - <http://www.rcog.org.uk/womens-health/clinical-guidance/prevention-early-onset-neonatal-group-b-streptococcal-disease-green>. The NSC have determined that taking swabs to screen for Group B Streptococcus does not confer benefit and therefore screening for Group B Streptococcus in both the NHS and in private practice is unnecessary and potentially harmful in terms of intervention.

#### **Will the Scottish Government review its policy on the screening of all expectant mothers for Group B Streptococcus?**

The Scottish Government is given independent advice by the UK National Screening Committee (NSC), the independent expert advisory group who advise Ministers and the NHS in the four UK countries about all aspects of screening.

The NSC reviewed the policy for Group B Streptococcus in November 2012. This review used all of the available medical evidence of the risks and benefits of screening all pregnant women - <http://www.screening.nhs.uk/groupbstreptococcus> - the conclusion being that a systematic population screening programme was not recommended.

**What is the current policy on instances where an expectant mother requests testing or screening for Group B Streptococcus from the NHS?**

The Scottish Government recognises the recently revised guidance called 'The Prevention of Early-onset Neonatal Group B Streptococcal Disease' issued by the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists (RCOG) in June 2012. This recommends an approach to testing and the use of antibiotics administration for pregnant women. The Scottish Government would expect healthcare staff to follow professional guidance from their respective Royal Colleges.

**Will the Scottish Government consider making Group B Streptococcus a reportable disease in order to gather accurate data for its incidence in Scotland?**

Although Group B strep can be passed from pregnant mother to baby during labour it does not fall into the same category as the notifiable diseases in the Public Health (Scotland) Act 2008. The Expert Working Group which developed the list of notifiable diseases for the 2008 Act considered that notification should be confined to those diseases which required urgent public health action, ie where there is a high risk of transmissibility through casual contact and that person-to-person spread could occur. Group B Strep, although a serious condition, does not meet this definition.

If you require any further information, please do not hesitate to contact me again.

Yours sincerely

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