

# Screening Matters

July, 2025



## A new era for Screening Matters

Welcome to the first edition of a new format for Screening Matters which will now incorporate updates from each of the Northern Ireland Screening Programmes:

- Cervical Screening
- Bowel Cancer Screening
- Breast Screening
- Very High Risk Breast Surveillance Screening
- Abdominal Aortic Aneurysm (AAA) Screening
- Newborn blood spot Screening
- Infectious diseases in pregnancy Screening Programme (IDPS)
- Newborn hearing screening
- Diabetic Eye Screening Programme (DESP)

This will hopefully be a useful source of information to staff working within the primary care setting on any changes or updates with the screening programmes.

### Cervical Screening - Update on expired vials

Any cervical sample sent to the regional laboratory for testing must be sent in a vial with at least 14 days left before expiry. This is to allow sufficient time for the laboratory to process the sample before the vial expires.

Any vials received that do not meet this criterion will not be tested and will result in individuals having to be recalled for a repeat test.

### Cervical Screening - whats new



The last 18-24 months has seen significant change for the NI Cervical Screening Programme. Some key changes include:

#### December 2023 – Introduction of pHPV pathway

All cervical samples are now firstly tested for the presence of High-Risk HPV. Samples with HrHPV will also be checked for abnormal cells under a microscope.

More detail on this change can be found at [Cervical cancer screening | HSC Public Health Agency](#).

#### October 2024 – Roll out of new Laboratory Information Management System (LIMS)

The new LIMS supports a paperless system and all results are now issued electronically to GP Practices.

#### November 2024 – Transition to a Regional Laboratory located in Belfast Trust (RVH)

All cervical samples are now transported to the cytology laboratory at the Royal Victoria Hospital for testing.

During the transition a backlog of samples built up and results were taking longer than we would have liked. Work has been ongoing to reduce this, and the majority of results are now reported within 4 weeks.

The contact number for the regional laboratory is 028 9615 0214. You can also stay up to date with the latest laboratory information at [Belfast Trust Laboratories User Manual | Belfast Health & Social Care Trust website](#)

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## Infectious diseases in pregnancy screening programme - Screening for rubella in pregnancy

Currently, screening for rubella susceptibility in pregnancy continues to be offered as part of the Infectious Diseases in Pregnancy Screening Programme in Northern Ireland. Women identified as being susceptible to rubella are offered two doses of the MMR vaccine after delivery.

Since two doses of the MMR vaccine gives long term protection against rubella, we are asking women to provide a copy of their MMR vaccination history antenatally. This will prevent them receiving an unnecessary MMR vaccination after delivery.

We would be grateful if GP practices could continue to assist in providing this important information, until we have a routine way of obtaining this information electronically. It is hoped we will be able to do this next year when the child health system goes live on Encompass.



## International Neonatal Screening Day

28th June marked International Neonatal Screening Day.

The NI Newborn bloodspot screening programme has provided life changing benefits for children who are identified and treated before the devastating effects of serious conditions such as phenylketonuria (PKU) and Congenital Hypothyroidism (CHT) can cause irreversible damage or even death.

28th June celebrates Dr Robert Guthrie's birthday. He was microbiologist who introduced the blood spot card and a new assay to screen newborns for Phenylketonuria (PKU) in the USA in the 1960s. His work revolutionised the detection of babies with inborn conditions, enabling the improvement of children's health and development. Dr Guthrie dedicated his life to raise awareness of the fundamental need for neonatal screening for treatable conditions. This is why many professionals refer to the bloodspot card as the 'Guthrie Card'.

Newborn Blood Spot screening has been a truly revolutionary milestone in public health.



## AAA Service User Event

The AAA Screening Programme's twelfth annual service user event took place in Belfast on Friday 21<sup>st</sup> March 2025. This event brought together our teams from PHA, Belfast Trust and our service user men who have, or had a AAA detected through screening.

The event was facilitated by PHA and Belfast Trust staff and included presentations about Programme updates, Ultrasound Imaging from the perspective of the Screening staff, a talk on AAA Surgery from a Consultant Vascular Surgeon and a group discussion exercise. A highlight of the event was one of our men speaking about his own experience in dealing with a diagnosis of a large AAA, this story was featured in a BBC news article ([One in 80 men screened in NI has abdominal aortic aneurysm - BBC News](#)). Chest Heart & Stroke also gave a presentation on what services they provide that would benefit our service users. Feedback from staff & service users who attended was very positive and the screening team are already looking forward to organising the next event in the near future.

## Infectious diseases in pregnancy screening programme - Selective hepatitis B immunisation

For babies born to mothers who have hepatitis B, the upcoming changes to the childhood vaccination programme mean these children will no longer be given their sixth and final hepatitis B vaccine by paediatricians at 12 months. They will instead be given it at 18 months in primary care, as part of the hexavalent vaccine. These babies will, however, continue to attend a hospital appointment with their paediatrician to have their hepatitis B serology test taken at twelve months as per current practice.