

Scottish Government submission of 3 October 2023

PE2045/A: Lower the cervical cancer smear test age in Scotland to 16

The Scottish Government, along with the rest of the United Kingdom, relies on advice about screening programmes from the UK National Screening Committee (UK NSC), an independent expert advisory group. They advise the Scottish Government that, within the criteria for a population screening programme, the benefit gained by individuals from the screening programme should outweigh any harms, for example from overdiagnosis, overtreatment, false positives, false reassurance, uncertain findings and complications.

Following this guidance, women under the age of 25 are not invited for routine cervical screening as the evidence shows that screening would do more harm than good. For example, cervical cancer is extremely rare in women under 25, despite cervical abnormalities being quite common. Repeated treatments for cervical abnormalities can increase the chance of premature births if a woman goes on to become pregnant.

The UK NSC is due to complete their next review of cervical screening, although we do not anticipate any changes to the current age thresholds. More information can be found at [Cervical cancer - UK National Screening Committee \(UK NSC\) - GOV.UK \(view-health-screening-recommendations.service.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/topics/cervical-cancer/cervical-cancer-screening-recommendations)

Thank you again for raising these concerns with the Scottish Government. I hope that you find this response helpful.