

PE1823/E

The Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists (RCOG) submission of 2 November 2020

About the RCOG

The Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists (RCOG) is a professional membership organisation made up of over 16,000 members worldwide. We work to improve health care for women, by setting standards for clinical practice, providing doctors with training and lifelong learning, and advocating for women's health care.

Should the Scottish Government offer full body scans to all neonates in Scotland?

1. The Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists (RCOG) has gathered feedback from key stakeholders on this issue, including the British Association of Perinatal Medicine (BAPM) and the British Maternal & Fetal Medicine Society (BMFMS) as two of our specialist societies, as well as the RCOG's Scottish Committee.
2. The RCOG follows NICE guidance on 'Antenatal care for uncomplicated pregnancies' which includes a section on screening for fetal anomalies.
3. As this guidance notes, ultrasound screening for fetal anomalies should be routinely offered, normally between 18 weeks 0 days and 20 weeks 6 days. At this screening appointment, women should be given information about the purpose, limitations and implications of the anomaly scan to enable them to make an informed choice as to whether or not to have the scan.¹
4. The limitations of routine ultrasound screening include the fact that detection rates vary by the type of fetal anomaly, the woman's body mass index and the position of the unborn baby at the time of the scan.² Nevertheless, the chances of detection of many of the major structural anomalies are relatively high. For example, detection of spina bifida by the scan is around 90%, anencephaly is around 99%, major kidney problems is around 85%, and cleft lip and palate detection is around 80%.³
5. The NICE guidance also recommends that fetal echocardiography involving the four-chamber view of the fetal heart and outflow tracts is included as part of the routine anomaly scan, and that every pregnant woman should also be offered screening for Down's syndrome if she chooses to have it.⁴
6. The RCOG is supportive of NHS Scotland's recent changes to the National Pregnancy Screening Programme for women. Pregnant women (with a booking appointment from 28 September 2020) can now choose to also have screening for Edwards' syndrome and Patau's syndrome in the first trimester, with a second-line Non-Invasive Prenatal Test

¹ NICE, [Antenatal care for uncomplicated pregnancies](#) (published in 2008, updated in 2019)

² Ibid.

³ St George's University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust, [Checking for structural anomalies](#)

⁴ NICE, [Antenatal care for uncomplicated pregnancies](#) (published in 2008, updated in 2019)

(NIPT) offered to those women who have received a higher-chance result that their baby may have Down's syndrome, Edwards' syndrome or Patau's syndrome.⁵

7. The routine screening tests offered to all pregnant women are extensive but, as noted above, they can have limitations. Complications can be missed, false positives are not impossible and some women choose not to undergo certain tests due to ethical and/or personal reasons.
8. Offering full body scans to neonates carries the same risks as pre-natal screening. There is also a greater risk of identification of complications that modern medicine is unable to manage or the significance of which is not fully understood. The subsequent support offered to women would therefore be limited. This could in some cases, therefore, increase parent anxiety and upset if a complication is detected. Furthermore, there is little evidence to suggest that total body scanning is a useful screening tool in any age group.
9. Finally, maternity and neonatal services are already under significant strain across the UK due to insufficient workforce to meet rising demand. If offered, this service would have to be resourced and funded, which in the current climate of struggling NHS resources, would be challenging and costly.
10. The RCOG supports the recommendation in the public petition for research into rare and hidden conditions, such as brain arteriovenous malformation (AVM), so that such rare conditions are better understood by healthcare professionals, to allow for the early detection and appropriate management.

⁵ Public Health Scotland, [Pregnancy and newborn screening](#)