

NHS Abdominal Aortic Aneurysm (AAA) Screening Programme



Information for Health Professionals

The NHS Abdominal Aortic Aneurysm (AAA) Screening Programme is being introduced gradually across England. Phased implementation began in March 2009 and it is anticipated that coverage across England will be achieved by 2013.

Research has demonstrated that offering men ultrasound screening in their 65th year could reduce the rate of premature death from ruptured AAA by up to 50 per cent.

The screening process

Men are automatically invited for screening in the year they turn 65

Men who are older than 65, and who have not previously been screened or treated for an abdominal aortic aneurysm, can opt in through self-referral direct to the screening programme



Men receive an invitation leaflet with an appointment time three weeks in advance



If the man accepts the invitation, an ultrasound scan of the abdomen is carried out and the aortic diameter measured



Results are provided verbally immediately after the scan and in the post shortly afterwards

Structure and delivery

The NHS AAA Screening Programme is coordinated and led nationally. Screening is delivered locally in line with national quality standards and protocols.

By 2013, it is anticipated that there will be around 40 local screening programmes covering the whole of England.

Each local programme coordinates screening for the population in its area and organises invitation letters, screening and surveillance clinics, results letters and referrals to the appropriate vascular network.

The local screening programmes ensure GPs are informed when men from their practice have been screened and of the outcomes of their screen.

The NHS AAA Screening Programme operates separately from the Vascular Risk Management Programme.

Prevalence

- Around 6,000 deaths each year in England and Wales from ruptured AAA
- Deaths from ruptured AAA account for around 2 per cent of all deaths in men aged 65 and over
- Around 4 per cent of men aged between 65 and 74 in England have an AAA (approximately 80,000 men)
- Vascular disease (including death from ruptured AAA) accounts for 40 per cent of UK deaths
- Vascular disease is as common as cancer and heart disease

Risk factors

- The main risk factors are age and being male; 95 per cent of ruptured AAA occur in men over 65
- The condition is six times more common in men than women
- Risk is increased by smoking, high blood pressure or through close family history

Result

Follow-up

Primary Care

Normal (960 in 1,000 men)

Aortic diameter
Less than 3cm
No aneurysm
detected

No treatment or further
scans required
Man discharged from
screening programme

GP informed of outcome by letter

Small or medium aneurysm (35 in 1,000 men)

Aortic diameter
measures:

3 to 4.4cm
(small
aneurysm)

Man
offered
yearly
surveillance

Appointment
with nurse
practitioner/
vascular nurse
offered at or
before first
surveillance
scan

4.5 to 5.4cm
(medium
aneurysm)

Man
offered
three
monthly
surveillance

GP is informed, by letter, of the outcomes of screening and appointment with nurse

Review and prescribing of medication may be appropriate

Patient may require regular blood pressure monitoring

Steps patient can take which may slow growth of the aneurysm:

- Eat a healthy balanced diet and reduce intake of fatty foods
- Stop smoking
- Maintain a healthy weight
- Take regular exercise

Large aneurysm (5 in 1,000 men)

Aortic diameter
5.5cm or above

Man referred to consultant
vascular surgeon within
defined and agreed Screening
Programme Vascular Network
by screening programme
coordinator

GP informed by phone call/fax and then by letter

Steps patient can take in advance of potential treatment:

- Eat a healthy balanced diet and reduce intake of fatty foods
- Stop smoking
- Maintain a healthy weight

Non-visualised

Repeat scan
required

Man offered appointment
at hospital medical imaging
department

GP informed by letter

Further information for men

- **National leaflets** – all men invited receive a copy of a national invitation leaflet. Men who have a small or large aneurysm detected receive additional national information leaflets
- **Local AAA screening programme** – the phone number for the local screening programme is on the invitation and follow-up letters
- **NHS AAA Screening Programme**
aaa.screening.nhs.uk or email aaa.screening@nhs.net
- **The Circulation Foundation** – a charity supporting people with vascular diseases.
www.circulationfoundation.org.uk

Further information for health professionals

- **NHS AAA Screening Programme** – Visit <http://aaa.screening.nhs.uk> or scan this QR code with your smartphone for further information on the national programme
- Speak to your **local AAA screening programme coordinator**
- **Map of Medicine** – the care pathway for the NHS AAA Screening Programme is published on Map of Medicine. See healthguides.mapofmedicine.com
- **GP Notebook** – online medical information available at www.gpnotebook.co.uk

