

# NHS Abdominal Aortic Aneurysm (AAA) Screening Programme



## Information for Primary Care

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

### The screening process

All men will automatically be 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, will be able to opt-in through self referral direct to the screening programme



Men will 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 will be coordinated and led nationally. Local screening services will be delivered by PCTs which will provide screening for their population in line with national quality standards and protocols.

Each area will have a local screening centre that will coordinate screening for the population and organise invitation letters, screening and surveillance clinics, results letters and referrals to their appropriate Vascular Network.

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

The 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% of all deaths in men aged 65 and over
- Around 4 percent of men aged between 65 and 74 in England have an AAA (approx. 80,000 men)
- Vascular disease (including death from ruptured AAA) accounts for 40 percent 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 percent of ruptured AAA occurs 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 1000 men)

Aortic diameter  
**Less than 3cm**

No treatment or further scans required

GP informed of outcome by letter

No aneurysm detected

Man discharged from screening programme

### Small aneurysm (35 in 1000 men)

Aortic diameter measures:  
**3 to 4.4cm**

Man offered **yearly** surveillance

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

GP will be 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

**4.5 to 5.4cm**

Man offered **three** monthly surveillance

**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 1000 men)

Aortic diameter  
**5.5cm or above**

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

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 will receive a copy of a national invitation leaflet. Men who have a small or large aneurysm detected will also be provided with national information leaflets.
- **Local AAA screening centre** – men will find the phone number for their local screening centre on their invitation and follow-up letters.
- **NHS AAA Screening Programme** [aaa.screening.nhs.uk](http://aaa.screening.nhs.uk)
- **The Circulation Foundation** – a charity that supports people with vascular diseases [www.circulationfoundation.org.uk](http://www.circulationfoundation.org.uk) or 020 7304 4779

### Further information for health professionals

- **NHS AAA Screening Programme** – the programme's website provides further information for health professionals including details of pilot studies and the evidence base for AAA screening. Copies of patient leaflets can also be downloaded from the professionals' area. See [aaa.screening.nhs.uk/professionals](http://aaa.screening.nhs.uk/professionals)
- Speak to your **local AAA screening programme coordinator**.