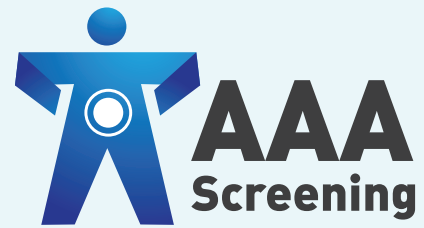


The Northern Ireland Abdominal Aortic Aneurysm Screening Programme: FAQs



1. What is an abdominal aortic aneurysm

The aorta is the main artery that supplies blood to your body. It runs from your heart down through your chest and abdomen (stomach). As some people get older, the wall of the aorta in the abdomen can become weak and balloon out to form an aneurysm, rather like a bulge in a worn car tyre. This is called an abdominal aortic aneurysm (AAA).

As the wall of the aorta stretches, it becomes weaker and can burst. A burst aneurysm is a life-threatening emergency.

2. Why do we have an AAA screening programme?

Screening programmes aim to prevent problems by detecting medical conditions early, so that they can be monitored or treated. AAA screening saves lives by detecting large aneurysms before they burst.

The programme was introduced following research evidence, pilot programmes and economic evaluation. The UK National Screening Committee assessed the evidence around the introduction of an AAA screening programme against a set of internationally recognised criteria to ensure that it will deliver benefits at a reasonable cost.

3. How do we raise awareness of the AAA screening programme?

Staff within the programme raise awareness of AAA screening in a variety of ways, including attending public events and small group events.

4. Why are men under 65 and women not screened?

AAA screening is not routinely offered to men under 65 or to women because most burst AAAs happen in men over 65. Men are six times more likely to have an AAA than women. There's not enough evidence to suggest that routinely screening women and younger men would deliver major benefits.

5. What if I have a close family member with an AAA?

If you have a close family member who has had an AAA, you should contact your GP to consider whether a scan should be requested to check for an AAA. If your GP feels you might benefit from having a scan, it will usually be done when you are five years younger than the age that your relative was found to have an AAA.

6. Where can I be screened?

There are 24 screening centres across Northern Ireland. You will automatically be invited to your nearest screening centre, but this can be changed if required.

The current list of screening centres and directions can be found on the following link: www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/abdominal-aortic-aneurysm-screening-locations#toc-2

7. Can I change my appointment?

Yes. Your appointment time, date or location can be changed by calling the screening office on 028 9615 1212.

8. I have a small/medium AAA which is under surveillance. Why can't I have surgery now?

It is highly unlikely that a small or medium AAA will pose a serious risk. As with any operation, there are risks associated with having surgery for an AAA. As these risks are greater than that posed by monitoring an AAA, surgeons do not recommend treatment for men with a small or medium AAA. If the AAA grows and the risk of rupture increases, surgery may become an option and will be discussed with you.

9. What should I do in preparation for my surveillance appointments?

We suggest you avoid eating a large meal or drinking fizzy drinks before the appointment, as this may limit how well the scan is able to be performed. You do not need to fast before your appointment. Contact the screening office before your appointment on 028 9615 1212 between 9am and 5pm, Monday to Friday, if you have any special requirements, for example if you need someone to assist you at your appointment, if you require an interpreter or if you require a hoist.

10. Is there a text reminder service?

Yes, a text reminder service is available for your surveillance appointments. To set this up, please call the screening office and advise them of your contact mobile number.

11. What if I have questions between my appointments?

You can contact the screening office on 028 9615 1212 between 9am and 5pm, Monday to Friday.

12. What is the difference between an ultrasound scan and a CT scan?

An ultrasound scan uses high-frequency sound waves to create an image of part of inside the body. Aortic ultrasound imaging is the recommended first-line test used in all clinical practice, for the screening programme and wider secondary care services. This is because it is the standard technique with a high level of accuracy, and there are minimal side effects from the procedure.

A computerised tomography (CT) scan uses x-rays and a computer to create detailed images of inside the body. This test is more expensive and has risks associated, for example with the radiation involved in the test and risk of affecting other parts of the body such as kidney function. A CT scan may be undertaken in preparation for AAA surgery or for another health reason.

Due to the differences between these two tests, it is not uncommon for the measurement of the aorta to vary slightly between these two tests. This is not something to be concerned about, and is a common and well-known finding by the hospital specialists.

13. Why is surgery only carried out at the Royal Victoria Hospital?

AAA surgery is carried out at the Royal Victoria Hospital because it is the Regional Vascular and Endovascular Surgery Unit and is the only Vascular Specialist centre in Northern Ireland.

The multi-disciplinary team consists of specialist vascular surgeons, interventional radiologists, vascular nurse specialists, vascular technologists and other allied health professionals. It has state-of-the-art imaging and theatre facilities and can provide the option of either open or keyhole surgery and a combination of both. This is where surgery for men with large AAAs will take place.

14. What are the symptoms of a ruptured AAA?

It is extremely unlikely that a small or medium AAA will rupture (burst), but it is important that you are aware of any symptoms of a ruptured aneurysm. If you have been diagnosed with an AAA and have new symptoms of severe, persistent abdominal and/or lower back pain, you should seek immediate medical help through an emergency department. Make sure you tell any medical staff that you have an AAA detected through screening.

Find more information about the AAA screening programme here:



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12-22 Linenhall Street, Belfast BT2 8BS.
Tel: 0300 555 0114 (local rate).
www.publichealth.hscni.net

Find us on:



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