
Executive summary

Health Council of the Netherlands. Population Screening Act: Renewal of nationwide cervical cancer screening programme. The Hague: Health Council of the Netherlands, 2016; publication no. 2016/08.

In this advisory report, the Health Council of the Netherlands' Committee on Population Screening assesses a permit request from the collective screening organisations for the renewal of the nationwide cervical cancer screening programme. The aim is to increase the health gain still further by the early detection and treatment of cervical cancer precursor lesions. To this end, a test for the presence of human papillomavirus (hrHPV, the high-risk types of the virus that causes cervical cancer) is being introduced as the initial test, instead of a cytological examination. Previous trial population screening programmes showed that hrHPV testing is more sensitive in terms of detecting precursors of cervical cancer. In addition, a self-sampling kit is being introduced for those women who have not previously responded to invitations to take a smear test at their GP practise to encourage them to participate in the programme.

The Committee has reviewed the application with regard to the requirements of the Population Screening Act. The Committee notes that the proposed new screening programme complies with the legal requirements concerning scientific rigour and with the rules governing medical practice. The Committee also feels that the benefits of the programme outweigh its potential risks. Accordingly, it is advising the Minister to grant the requested permit.

The Committee recommends that the new method be carefully monitored. This includes the combination of an hrHPV test, followed by cytological examination if hrHPV is detected. Furthermore, it is important to carefully monitor the percentage of hrHPV-positive women in the various age groups,

particularly those in the 30 to 35 year age group. Finally, it is important to evaluate the participation rate and the health gain, even in those hard-to-reach, high-risk groups that are eligible for the self-sampling kit.