

Safer Down's test for pregnant women to be introduced in Wales

Public Health Minister Rebecca Evans has confirmed the Welsh Government has agreed to the introduction of non-invasive prenatal testing (NIPT) within the antenatal screening programme in Wales.

NIPT, a blood sample analysed in a laboratory, will be added to the screening pathway as an additional option for women who accept current primary screening and are assessed as being at higher chance of Down's, Edwards' and Patau's syndrome.

The current antenatal screening programme offers pregnant women a number of different primary screening tests to detect some of the conditions that may affect either the woman or their baby. One of these screening tests shows the chance of having a baby with Down's syndrome. If this is equal to or higher than 1 in 150, women are considered higher chance but are currently only offered the option of an invasive test to confirm the diagnosis. These invasive diagnostic tests carry a small risk of miscarriage.

NIPT will be offered as an additional option to these invasive tests and for women who receive a negative result, no further tests will be required. It is expected that 1 to 2 babies per year in Wales will be saved from miscarriage as a result of the introduction of NIPT.

NIPT will be rolled out as soon as practicable during 2018. Work is already underway with the other UK nations and charities on the development of health professional training and patient information, designed to ensure women are supported to make a fully informed decision.

Public Health Minister, Rebecca Evans said:

"We want to ensure every expectant mother in Wales receives the information, advice and support they need throughout their pregnancy. Our antenatal screening programme plays an important role in this.

"The Welsh Government has accepted the recommendations made by the UK National Screening Committee and the Wales Screening Committee to introduce Non-Invasive Prenatal Testing (NIPT) as an additional option for women identified as higher chance for Down's, and to add screening for Edwards' and Patau's syndrome and screening in twin pregnancies within the screening pathway in Wales.

"NIPT is more accurate than the current primary tests. A negative NIPT result will offer pregnant women the reassurance they need, without the need for a further invasive diagnostic test – reducing the unnecessary harm from miscarriage that can be caused through the use of these tests."

The introduction of NIPT will be evaluated over the next 3 years, in line with recommendations made by the UK National Screening Committee and the Wales Screening Committee.

National priorities announced in Natural Resources Policy

The policy sets out three national priorities for the management of our natural resources which will drive delivery across all our wellbeing goals to benefit communities and our economy, as well as improving the environment

The priorities are:

- the delivery of nature-based solutions
- increasing renewable energy and resource efficiency; and
- taking a place-based approach.

The Cabinet Secretary said that focusing efforts on key areas will allow us to directly address the challenges affecting our natural resources and realise the many benefits they provide for our well-being and prosperity as a nation, which is now all the more important as we define a new place for Wales in the world post-Brexit.

Lesley Griffiths said:

“Everyone has a stake in our natural resources and a role to play in ensuring these resources are sustainably managed. In Wales, with our abundant natural resources and beautiful landscapes, we are fortunate. At the heart of our wellbeing, they support our health, our livelihoods and our vibrant culture. But we cannot take this for granted. Climate change, the decline of biodiversity and our ecosystems and other factors are already driving change, with very real consequences for our communities.

“Working with nature and being more efficient with our natural resources has crucial benefits – less pollution, less waste and less impact. Managing them to best effect can play an important role in supporting our communities and future competitiveness, creating jobs and new business opportunities in Wales.

“Ultimately, it is only by working together that we can implement the national priorities in the context of local needs and

opportunities.”

The Natural Resources Policy will drive action across the whole of government. The Cabinet Secretary will be undertaking a range of visits this week that demonstrate the breadth of application of the NRP and its priorities across farming, energy production and marine and fisheries.

Statement from the First Minister of Wales on the terrorist attacks in Barcelona and Cambrils

First Minister of Wales Carwyn Jones said:

“Our thoughts today are with all of those who were affected by yesterday’s terrorist attacks on Barcelona and Cambrils. It is truly horrifying to think that people who were simply going about their daily lives, relaxing and enjoying themselves could be targeted in such an evil way.

“Barcelona is a proud and beautiful city which welcomes international visitors with open arms, including many from Wales, and of course we also enjoy an air link with the city through Cardiff Airport. I would urge anyone visiting the area at the moment to keep following the advice of the local authorities and to check the Foreign Office twitter feed and website for further updates.

“Wales and Catalunya of course also share many historical and cultural ties and I want to end by expressing my deepest sympathies on behalf of the people of Wales. We stand by your side at this difficult time.”

Halen Môn takes to the taste of ultrafast Fibre Broadband

Established in 1996 by Alison and David Lea-Wilson, Halen Môn has gone from strength to strength and today exports its product globally to over 15 countries with famous fans including former US President Barack Obama.

To improve the service and offer, the company decided to apply for support through the Welsh Government's Ultrafast Connectivity Voucher and became one of the first businesses in Wales to invest in Fibre on Demand technology, which has enabled them to access broadband speeds of 330Mbps.

The Ultrafast Connectivity Voucher helps businesses meet the initial capital costs involved in installing ultrafast broadband services. Fibre on Demand is available in Wales as part of the Superfast Cymru programme.

Changing to a better and faster connection has made a huge impact at Halen Môn and has enabled the firm to employ a remotely based sales manager, who can link in with the business from any location without needing to be based in Anglesey.

Alison Lea-Wilson, co-founder of Halen Môn, said:

"Making the switch to Fibre on Demand has greatly improved our daily working life. It has seen costs go down and we can run all of our gadgets through one strong broadband connection.

"Fibre on demand has significantly improved our connection speeds meaning we can now work through cloud services and make full use of the technologies available which also allows us to engage with customers throughout the world.

"Accessing faster broadband speeds has become essential, a fourth utility, and deciding to make the switch is really paying off."

Minister for Skills and Science, Julie James said:

"I'm delighted to hear how Fibre on Demand technology thanks to Superfast Cymru is making a real difference to Halen Môn.

"Having access to superfast and ultrafast broadband speeds is becoming increasingly important for businesses throughout Wales and that is why the Welsh Government is investing in providing the infrastructure capable of delivering them.

"Halen Môn is a prime example of how taking advantage of faster broadband can be a real boost to business.

“The Ultrafast Connectivity Voucher is just one of the measures we have taken to support businesses and make Wales one of the best connected countries.

“Across Wales over 647,000 premises can now access superfast broadband as a result of Superfast Cymru, and that figure will increase before the end of the year.

“Thanks to Superfast Cymru, Wales has the best availability of superfast broadband among the devolved nations, with more than eight out of ten premises with access.

“Without the intervention of the programme no premises in Anglesey would be able to access superfast broadband. Today, more than 30,000 can access it.”

Ed Hunt, regional director for Openreach, said:

“The roll out of superfast broadband is making a huge difference to how companies up and down the country do business.

“With faster, more reliable broadband speeds, businesses can expand into new markets or save time and money by doing things, such as downloading large documents, faster.

“Fibre on Demand can enable companies to access ultrafast speeds by extending the fibre-optic broadband connection from their nearest street cabinet to their front door. For some companies, such as Halen Môn that need these faster speeds, this is a great solution.”

Superfast Cymru is the partnership between the Welsh Government, BT, UK Government and the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), bringing faster broadband to areas which would otherwise not receive it.

The Welsh Government also runs the Access Broadband Cymru scheme, which can offer assistance to those not able to access superfast broadband by providing grant aid to help them receive it through other technologies.

Further details are available at www.gov.wales/broadband

Tenants reminded to have their say on lettings agents' fees

The [consultation](#) is the first step towards fulfilling the Welsh Government's

Commitment to bringing forward the Fees Charged to Tenants Bill to address fees charged in the private rented sector.

The call came as research into the potential implications of banning these fees published today showed that 84% of the agents who responded charge a set up fee and the average cost to tenants of setting up a tenancy is £178. These fees make up 19% of agents' income – around £10m in total.

Mr Sargeant said:

“I launched the consultation into fees charged to tenants in the private rented sector last month but so far, the biggest response has been from landlords and lettings agents. While I encourage everyone with an interest to participate in this consultation I particularly want to hear from tenants to ensure we have as wide a range of views as possible.

“I want to know the extent of the fees charged, what those fees cover and understand the implications of the removal of these fees for letting agents, landlords, tenants and any third parties involved in the private rented sector.”