

# P-06-1197 Petition *P-06-1197 Heart screenings free for all 11-35 year olds who represent their school or county in sport*

Y Pwyllgor Deisebau | 1 Tachwedd 2021  
Petitions Committee | 1 November 2021

Reference: SR21/837-9

**Petition Number:** P-06-1197

**Petition title:** Heart screenings free for all 11-35 year olds who represent their school or county in sport

**Text of petition:** 12 people under the age of 35 die suddenly every week in the UK, from a heart condition that could have been detected with a heart screening. 80% of these deaths show no prior symptoms. Cardiac arrest has a 7% survival rate. Since making heart screenings compulsory in Italy for all sports players, sudden cardiac death has decreased by 89%.

Owen Morris, 13, died suddenly during rugby training in Cardiff from an undiagnosed heart condition that may have been picked up in a screening. 1/300 heart screenings pick up a potentially life threatening issue which can then be managed or treated. Owen Morris' story:

<https://www.walesonline.co.uk/news/local-news/friends-family-welsh-schoolboy-who-7361218>

Chris Morse, 33, was immediately sent to hospital after a heart screening "It will take a matter of minutes and could undoubtedly save your life, as I am sure it did for me." Chris' story can be found here: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-wales-50635370>



Ben McDonald, 25, suffered a fatal cardiac arrest at the Cardiff Half Marathon. Ben's mum, Ruth McDonald, wants people in Wales to have access to free heart screenings to help prevent sudden cardiac death.

Here at Calon Heart Screening Wales we have to charge for heart screenings. However, we want funding from the government to be able to provide free heart screenings for those aged 11-35 who take part in sport for their school, county or country. See more about our charity here: [www.heartscreening.wales](http://www.heartscreening.wales)

## 1. Background

### 1.1. Cardiac screening policy in the UK

The UK National Screening Committee (UK NSC) **does not currently recommend screening** for cardiac conditions associated with sudden cardiac death in the young. Sudden cardiac death happens when a healthy young person's heart suddenly stops beating, with little or no warning. The causes in people under the age of 39 are often a thickening of the heart muscle or an electrical problem with the heart. In older people, it is more likely to be caused by a narrowing of the blood vessels that supply the heart.

The UK NSC **considered the evidence** behind several proposed ways of screening people aged 12 to 39, including electrocardiography (ECG), personal or family history, physical examination and a combination of these approaches in June 2015. It did not recommend screening for this condition.

An updated review of the evidence in 2019 suggested that **the available tests were not accurate enough** to correctly identify conditions which could lead to sudden cardiac death without wrongly identifying many people with healthy hearts.

In addition to concerns about the test, there were **uncertainties** about the overall benefit of identifying people at risk, as currently the harms seem to outweigh the benefits. There is **no agreed treatment** for someone who has been identified as being at risk.

The **next review** is estimated to be completed in 2022/23.

## Cardiac (heart) screening

Screening examinations are **tests performed to find disease before symptoms begin**. The goal of screening is to detect disease at its earliest and more treatable stage. Cardiac screening is a diagnostic test used to detect and evaluate heart disease. All screening tests have the potential to cause harm as they carry **a risk of false results**.

Routine cardiac screening to detect an underlying cardiac condition is not provided by NHS Wales. Some charities and memorial funds such as [Calon Heart](#), and the [Ben McDonald Heart Screening Fund](#) offer cardiac screenings for people aged between 14 and 35.

The screening to diagnose cardiac abnormalities is done by having **an ECG (electrocardiogram) test**, which records the electrical activity of the heart. If a more detailed image is required, an ultrasound scan of the heart - an **echocardiogram**, is needed. From this, measurements are taken which give a guide to heart muscle thickness and the size of the chambers of the heart.

### 1.2. Welsh Government Action

The UK NSC advises Ministers in the four UK countries about all aspects of population screening. It does not recommend screening to prevent sudden cardiac death and screening is therefore not provided in Wales.

The Welsh Government has said that population screening programmes **should only be offered where there is clear evidence that screening will do more good than harm**. In her letter to the Chair of the Senedd's Petitions Committee, Eluned Morgan MS states:

Population screening programmes generally can save lives through early risk identification but can also do harm by identifying risk factors that would never otherwise develop into a serious condition or complication. Screening programmes may have false negative results, so do not guarantee protection. Additionally, receiving a low risk result does not prevent the person from developing the condition at a later date.

The Health Minister added that **“should more accurate tests become available, whole population asymptomatic cardiac screening will be fully considered”**. In the meantime, she advises families of individuals who have suffered sudden cardiac death to seek an individual clinical assessments to assess risk. She also suggests

that Calon Heart Screening Wales consider asking the UK NSC to review the evidence for introducing a targeted screening programme for sudden cardiac death for those participating in sports.

Every effort is made to ensure that the information contained in this briefing is correct at the time of publication. Readers should be aware that these briefings are not necessarily updated or otherwise amended to reflect subsequent changes.