

P-06-1197 Heart screenings free for all 11-35 year olds who represent their school or county in sport, Correspondence – British Heart Foundation to Committee, 21.01.22

Good morning,

I just wanted to check in about a petition that the Petitions Committee will be considering on Monday 24th January, namely 'Heart Screenings free for all 11-35 year olds who represent their school or their county in sport'. The Committee initially recommended that instead of following the guidance of the UK Screening Committee that Welsh Government should carry out a study about a Wales specific approach in support of screening for sportspeople aged 11-35. We understand that the Minister for Health and Social Services has since given a response to this petition and it is now back in consideration with the Petitions Committee.

The BHF supports targeted expert assessment of families where there is a high risk of an inherited cardiac disease, or where there has been a sudden unexplained death. However, at present we are not calling for a publicly-funded screening programme for athletes. While a proportion of people may be identified that have an underlying heart condition, screening is not yet at a scientific level of precision whereby all people at risk of sudden cardiac death can be accurately predicted. Misleading screening results can have potentially damaging consequences for healthy athletes and their families such as overtreatment and misdiagnosis which can follow athletes throughout their lives.

Standard cardiovascular risk assessment screening – the type that ideally all adults over the age of 40 should have periodically – would not pick up most of the conditions that cause sudden death in young athletes. Until more evidence and improved screening is available, we can only support targeted expert assessment and not a universal screening programme. Multiple gaps in evidence strongly indicate that implementing pre-participation cardiovascular screening of athletes on a large scale would be premature.