

## **KENT & MEDWAY CANCER SCREENING PROGRAMMES**

### **1.INTRODUCTION**

Cancer screening tests are aimed at diagnosing cancers earlier or preventing cancer in people without symptoms. Early diagnosis means treatment is more likely to be successful. Cancer screening is for people with no symptoms at all.

There are three national cancer screening programmes.

- Cervical screening
- Breast screening
- Bowel screening

### **2.CERVICAL SCREENING**

The NHS cervical screening programme in England is offered to people with a cervix aged from 25 to 64. Routine screening is offered every three years up to 49 years of age and every five years from 50 to 64 years of age.

As part of the NHS Cervical Screening Programme, all samples taken at cervical screening appointments are tested for high-risk Human Papillomavirus (HPV) in the first instance. This is the virus which causes nearly all cervical cancers. Samples that test positive for HPV then go on to be further analysed to detect cell abnormalities. This process identifies more people at risk of cervical cancer earlier and can prevent around 600 additional cancers a year nationally.

HPV is a very common virus which effects around 8 in 10 people, in many cases, the immune system naturally gets rid of HPV.

#### **2.1 Cervical Screening model in Kent and Medway**

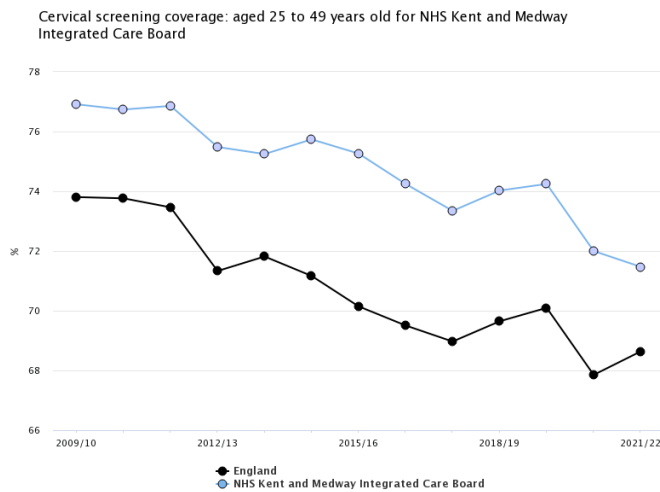
Like most of the country, cervical screening in Kent and Medway is delivered in general practice by specially trained sample takers (nurses, doctors and some nurse associates). There has been a national move to deliver some screening through sexual health services and in Kent and Medway, both KCHFT and MTW have begun delivering cervical screening opportunistically for eligible people accessing their service.

There is a growing appetite to deliver centralised 'hub' cervical screening at PCN level. Interested PCNs are working with the ICB and NHSE to enable this. Colposcopy units do not routinely deliver cervical screening but provide support in cases where samples are difficult to take in primary care.

#### **2.2 Performance of the programme in Kent and Medway**

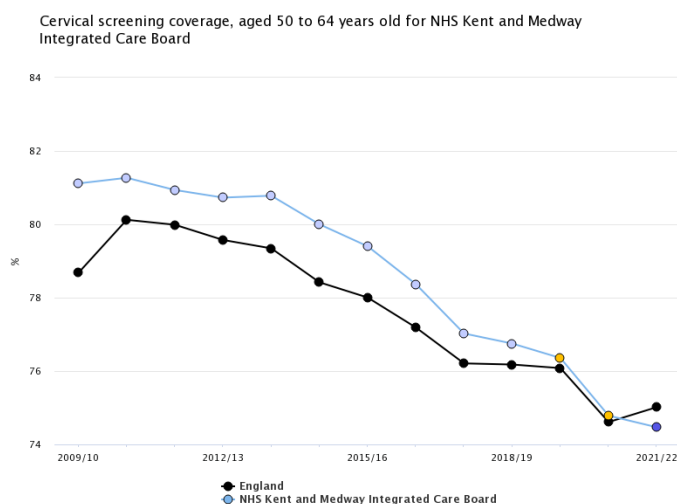
Cervical screening coverage in Kent and Medway remains largely in line with the general trend in the rest of the country.

## Graph 1 Cervical screening coverage: aged 25 to 49 years old for NHS Kent and Medway ICB



Source: *Fingertips*

## Graph 2 Cervical screening coverage: aged 50 to 64 years old for NHS Kent and Medway ICB



Source: *Fingertips*

### 2.3 Issues to highlight

There are some issues in primary care (and to a smaller extent in secondary care) around mislabelling of samples. This results in women having to have their tests repeated within a minimum of three months after the initial sample. A small proportion of women do not return for their repeat tests. It is important to minimise the occurrence of mislabelling.

Colposcopy units in all four acute trusts are reporting an increase in the volume of referrals, both from the lab for abnormal cervical results and directly from primary care also. The Screening and Immunisation Team and ICB Quality team are planning

a Lunch-and-Learn session to improve the knowledge and awareness of cervical conditions amongst primary care clinicians to ensure appropriate referrals.

### **3. BREAST SCREENING**

About 1 in 8 women in the UK are diagnosed with breast cancer during their lifetime. If it's detected early, treatment is more successful and there's a good chance of recovery.

Breast screening uses an X-ray test called a mammogram that can spot cancers when they're too small to see or feel.

Breast screening is offered to women aged 50 to their 71st birthday in England. Women are invited for screening within three years of their 50th birthday.

Some women may be eligible for breast screening before the age of 50 if they have a very high risk of developing breast cancer.

Women above the age of 71 stop receiving screening invitations but can still have screening if they want to and can do so by arranging an appointment by contacting their local screening unit.

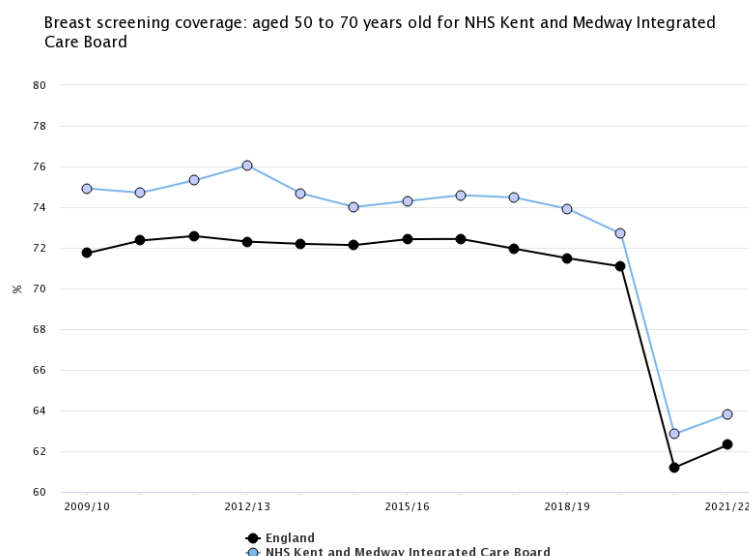
#### **3.1 Breast screening model in Kent and Medway**

There are three breast screening units in Kent and Medway: Canterbury, Maidstone and Medway that deliver the majority of screening on mobile vans (8 in total) with a limited amount of screening at the base hospitals. East Kent Hospital University Foundation Trust (EKHUFT) is responsible for the delivery of the service across Kent and Medway and holds the contract with NHS England. It manages the subcontracts with Maidstone and Tunbridge Wells Hospital (MTW) and Medway Foundation Trust (MFT) for the other two units.

#### **3.2 Performance of the programme in Kent and Medway**

The following graph (3) shows the impact of the covid-19 pandemic on the breast screening programme in Kent & Medway and nationally.

### Graph 3 Breast screening coverage: aged 50 to 70 years old for NHS Kent and Medway ICB



Source: *Fingertips*

### 3.3 Issues to highlight

Two out of three breast screening units have recovered in Kent and Medway but full recovery for this programme is yet to be achieved at the Medway unit. It is expected to be achieved by September 2023. There are nationally recognised challenges within breast screening (and radiology as a whole) with regards to staff recruitment and retention.

## 4.BOWEL SCREENING

Bowel cancer survival is improving and has more than doubled in the last 40 years in the UK. If diagnosed early, more than 90% of bowel cancer cases can be treated successfully.

Bowel cancer screening programmes test to see if people show any early signs of cancer. By detecting bowel cancer at an early stage, treatment has a better chance of working.

As part of the NHS Bowel Cancer Screening Programme, men and women aged 54-74 are sent a home testing kit every two years to collect a small sample of poo to be checked for tiny amounts of blood which could be caused by cancer. In 2019, the home testing kit was changed from the guaiac Faecal Occult Blood Test (gFOBT) to the Faecal Immunochemical Test (FIT) because it is:

- more accurate – it can detect smaller signs of blood hidden in poo samples, which can be an early sign of bowel cancer.
- easier to use – only one sample is required. The gFOBT required three samples to be taken on three different days.

As part of the NHS Long Term Plan, there is roll out of bowel screening to people who are 50 years old. Currently it is being rolled out to those aged 54 years and there is a plan to roll it out to individuals aged 50 and 52 in 2024/25.

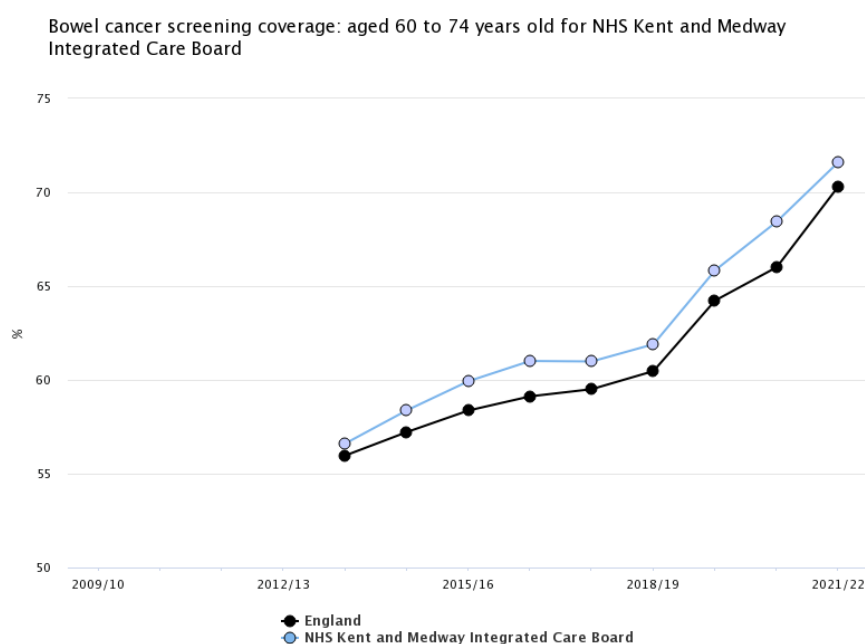
#### 4.1 Bowel screening model in Kent and Medway

Kent and Medway have two bowel screening centres that are responsible for the assessment and diagnostic testing parts of the bowel cancer screening pathway following referral from the regional bowel screening hub. The two centres are East Kent (covering the East Kent HaCP area) and West Kent and Medway (covering DGS, West Kent and Medway and Swale HaCP areas).

#### 4.2 Performance of the programme in Kent and Medway

The uptake and coverage of bowel screening remains above the England average in K&M as shown in the following graph. Please note this applies to the 60-74 year old cohort only.

**Graph 4 Bowel screening coverage: aged 60 to 74 years old for NHS Kent and Medway ICB**



Source: *Fingertips*

#### 4.3 Issues to highlight.

Both bowel screening centres in Kent & Medway continue to face challenges with regards to capacity to deliver the programme. This is especially the case for East Kent which is yet to roll out age extension for year 3 – incorporating the population aged 54 years. The need to build and sustain endoscopy and pathology capacity is particularly pertinent.

For the West Kent & Medway centre, there is a need to increase colonoscopy capacity at the MFT site to cater for the Medway and Swale populations. At present, due to the limited capacity there, some patients are offered appointments at Maidstone hospital. For those unable or unwilling to travel, they are offered appointments at MFT outside the two-week expected timeframe.

## **CONCLUSION**

Overall, the three cancer screening programmes are performing well in Kent and Medway though there are some issues which require attention in each of the programmes. Shortage of workforce is a theme that runs through all screening programmes. It takes considerable time to train staff to work in the screening programmes.

All screening programmes were paused for some time during the Covid 19 pandemic resulting in backlog of invitations for screening, although throughout lockdown some screening did continue for people in the high-risk category.

In addition, infection control requirements meant that screening services were only able to operate at a reduced capacity. There was also a reluctance to attend for screening for fear of exposure to infection.

The screening providers in Kent and Medway have worked hard to achieve recovery in the screening programmes. All screening programmes have recovered in Kent and Medway with the exception of the Medway Breast Screening unit which is on trajectory to achieve recovery by end of August 2023.

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