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Requirements Specification for NHS Vaccinations and Screening Directions – Cancer Screening Services

Document management

Revision History

Version	Date	Summary of Changes
1.0	20/3/2026	Taken from v0.5 to v1.0 final following approvals

Reviewers

This document must be reviewed by the following people:

Reviewer name	Title / Responsibility	Date	Version
REDACTED	IG Lead, NHS England	29/01/2026	0.4
Solicitor	Government Legal Services, Department of Health and Social Care	30/10/2025	0.1
Arjun Dhillon	Deputy Caldicott Guardian, NHS England	3/11/2025	0.1
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Jackie Gray	Director of Privacy and Information Governance, NHS England	15/01/2026	0.3
Ming Tang	Chief Digital Information Officer (Interim) and Chief Data and Analytics Officer, NHS England	9/11/2025	0.1

Approved by

This document must be approved by the following people:

Name	Title	Date	Version
REDACTED	Director of Vaccination and Screening Delivery and Transformation, NHS England	10/3/2025	0.5
Mary De Silva	Deputy Director Data Policy Department for Health and Social Care	19/3/2026	0.5
Jackie Gray	Director of Privacy and Information Governance, NHS England	04/03/2026	0.4
Meghana Pandit	Caldicott Guardian and co-Medical Director, NHS England	11/3/2025	0.5

Document Control:

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Purpose of document

This document sets out the requirements for the analysis of data relating to breast, bowel and cervical cancer screening services for England and should be read alongside the:

- [NHS Vaccinations and Screening Directions 2026](#) given by the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care

Introduction

The NHS public health functions agreement sets out the arrangements under which the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care delegates responsibility to NHS England for certain public health services under section 7A of the National Health Services Act 2006 (known as section 7A Services)¹, including national screening programmes in England. NHS England's role is to ensure the national screening programme is provided in accordance with the standards and guidance set by the UK National Screening Committee². This includes, but is not limited to:

- Identifying individuals eligible for screening
- Sending individuals invite, reminder and results communications
- Inviting individuals for screening at relevant intervals directed by their age and result status
- Receiving and processing results and communicating results including those for further management and referral.

From time to time the National Screening Committee may recommend changes on how screening programmes should operate or require evaluation of potential changes to programmes. This may require changes to the data processing within the programme for example, by extending the interval between screens.

The purpose of the NHS Vaccinations and Screening Directions 2026 (the **Directions**) is to direct NHS England to establish and operate an information system for the collection and analysis of data relating to national screening programme participants in England for purposes beyond direct care and the section 7A Services. This secondary use of data will enable the delivery of those national screening programmes. It will also enable NHS England to meet its obligations in exercising the Secretary of State's public health functions, as set out in the [NHS public health functions agreement](#)³ established between the Department of Health and Social Care (**DHSC**) and NHS England by virtue of section 7A of the National Health Service Act 2006.

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/nhs-public-health-functions-agreements>

² <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/uk-national-screening-committee>

³ The responsibility for these public health services has been delegated to NHSE under s.7A of the 2006 Act and the arrangement for this delegation is set out in the NHS public health functions agreement

This will also support DHSC’s mission to build an NHS fit for the future through the National Cancer Plan⁴, to reduce the incidence of and mortality from cancer by delivering systematic, quality assured, population-based screening programmes for all eligible participants.

NHS England is also responsible for the operational delivery of changes in services or introduction of new services that are agreed with DHSC in section 7A Services public health agreements.⁵ This includes supporting the generation of evidence for UK National Screening Committee review by enabling and supporting the delivery of studies of proposed screening programmes.

NHS England plays a crucial role in supporting screening by providing national IT infrastructure and services through:

- National screening systems
- Digital screening tools
- Data management and security
- Performance monitoring
- Support for local IT teams

Data

Scope

Direct Care Processing:

Historically, patient-level confidential patient information relating to breast, bowel and, cervical screening was processed with approval of the Secretary of State under Regulation 5 of the Health Services (Control of Patient Information) Regulations 2002. Following consultation and agreement with the National Data Guardian in 2025, much of this processing of patient data will now occur under the lawful basis of providing direct care, meaning Regulation 5 approval for the primary purposes of processing patient data to deliver national screening services is no longer required.

Secondary Uses Under the Directions:

Data obtained for these direct care purposes is also however processed for secondary purposes which is not direct care. This is processing NHS England is now required to undertake by the Secretary of State under the NHS Vaccinations and Screening Directions 2026. This processing involves analysis of data NHS England for the following secondary uses:

- producing National healthcare statistics: Publishing KPI reports and annual bulletins for screening programmes.
- Health inequalities analysis: Linking data with demographic indicators (e.g. age, deprivation, ethnicity) to identify disparities in the provision of screening services.
- Capacity planning: analysis of uptake and referral data to inform workforce and resource planning relating to screening programmes.
- Screening programme evaluation & policy development.

⁴ [Shaping the national cancer plan - GOV.UK](#)

⁵ [NHS public health functions agreement 2025 to 2026.](#)

- Health research.

Categories of Data

NHS England is required to pseudonymise and analyse the following record level personal data and special category data as set out below:

- Participant identifiers – NHS Number
- Participant demographic details – date of birth, address etc.
- Records relating to screening include medical condition, screening results and medical imaging

Analysis

Internal processing

NHS England will conduct various processing on the patient level data to complete a pseudonymisation process so the data remains patient level (so it can be linked to other datasets if there is a legal basis to do so) but in de-identified form. Primary analysis will be undertaken to support the Purposes of the Directions to enable key aspects of service provision across England to be analysed by and reported at a national level and local level.

Any analysis undertaken by NHS England will support:

- Increasing coverage and uptake: Ensuring more eligible people receive invitations and are screened.
- Flexibility and responsiveness: Making screening services more adaptable to change.
- Research, pilots, and trials: Facilitating screening research, in-service evaluations and pilot programmes.
- Efficiency, equity and targeted screening: Improving programme efficiency and implementing targeted and stratified screening to determine who is and is not being offered, or taking up, screening so we can reduce inequalities.

This will also include analysis for data quality purposes, including undertaking comparison and consistency analysis of the same or similar information which NHS England holds, and taking such steps as NHS England considers appropriate to maintain data quality, accuracy and consistency of information.

Data linkage

Data will be analysed to support wider projects and programmes relying on analysis and insights provided direct from screening data, or in using screening data linked to other data assets where there is a legal basis to do so. Such access and analysis are only permitted where it is carried out under a Data Protection Impact Assessment (DPIA) which has been approved under the NHS England Data Protection Impact Assessment Procedure (an Approved DPIA), including by the Information Asset Owner.

To support screening, NHS England will analyse de-identified screening data in combination with other key datasets to understand changes and outcomes over time. Data sets include:

- National Disease Registration Service Data

- Hospital Episode Statistics (HES)
- Radiotherapy Dataset (RTDS)
- Systemic Anti-Cancer Therapy (SACT)

The processing of screening data will be carried out in the national identifiable instance of FDP and must be carried out in accordance with an approved DPIA. Data will be pseudonymised using Privacy Enhancing Technologies (PET) producing the pseudonymised screening dataset and routed to the National Federated Data Platform with access and analysis permitted as set out in an approved DPIA for the purposes set out in the Directions and this Specification.

Data may also be analysed under the NHS England De-Identified Data Analytics and Publication Directions 2023 (Data Analytics Direction). Any analysis under the Data Analytics Direction will only occur where approved in accordance with Information Governance procedures and controls, including where required in accordance with the statutory guidance issued under s274A of the 2012 Act, and advice from the NHS England Advisory Group for Data. NHS England may also analyse the information in accordance with the Life Sciences Directions 2019. In either case analysis must only be carried out where permitted under an approved DPIA.

Consultation

NHS England has consulted with the following stakeholders:

- a. The Department for Health and Social Care (DHSC)
- b. Screening providers
- c. Screening Quality Assurance Service delivered by the Screening Directorate of NHS England.
- d. Screening Delivery Group within the Screening Directorate of NHS England.
- e. National Data Guardian
- f. Confidentiality Advisory Group
- g. NHS England's Advisory Group for Data

Dissemination/Sharing

Regular Dissemination/Sharing

NHS England may disseminate anonymous data analysed under the Directions and this Specification to support commissioners and policy teams as well as providing anonymous statistical information to the DHSC and its associated bodies, agencies and committees, including but not limited to the UK Health Security Agency and UK National Screening Committee.

Data Access Request Service (DARS)

Applications for endorsement of research, evaluation or innovation activity involving screening service users or requiring access to data controlled by NHS England are all managed via NHS population screening programmes' Research, Innovation and Development Advisory Committee.

In future, NHS England will disseminate data via the NHS England [Data Access Request Service](#) (DARS) which will include oversight by the Advisory Group for Data where appropriate. Organisations will be able to apply to the DARS and on approval, with the appropriate legal basis, have access to data obtained under the Direction.

Any dissemination will be subject to the organisations applying to access the data having a lawful basis to process it, NHS England having a lawful basis to disclose it, successful applications being made to the DARS and the organisations entering into a data sharing agreement. National data opt-outs will be applied in accordance with the national data opt-out policy to the dissemination of data.

NHS England publishes the details of any data sharing agreements on its [Data Uses Registers](#).

Publication

Data to be published

NHS England will publish information it has obtained under these Directions in line with its duty under section 260(1) of the 2012 Act unless data falls within section 260(2) of the 2012 Act.

Aggregate data that forms part of national performance reports will be generated in accordance with the standard service specifications for publication. Those in scope are detailed below:-

- Service Specification 24 covers breast screening
- Service Specification 25 covers cervical screening
- Service Specification 26 covers bowel screening

NHS England in conjunction with the Department of Health and Social Care publishes the [annual statistical bulletin](#) in accordance with the Code of Practice for Statistics, which are official statistics for the screening programmes.

Change control process

Changes to this Specification will be managed by NHS England in conjunction with the Department of Health and Social Care to ensure such changes are aligned with the NHS Vaccinations and Screening Directions 2026.