



An tSeirbhís Náisiúnta Scagthástála
National Screening Service

10 October 2019

Our ref: HM/Communications

James Browne, TD
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PQ 39133/19

To ask the Minister for Health the current wait time for women awaiting smear test results; and if he will make a statement on the matter.

Dear Deputy

I refer to the above parliamentary question.

The CervicalCheck screening programme experienced an unprecedented increase last year in activity, due to women's understandable concerns at the time, and this caused long waiting times for results. In 2018 around 370,000 women presented to the programme, an increase from 280,000 in 2017. This was an increase of approximately 90,000 and caused a backlog in reporting results to women.

We realise the anxiety these delays caused women and we are very sorry for this. Since last year, we have been doing all we can to reduce waiting times by working closely with our laboratory providers and trying to source additional capacity from public and private providers. We successfully secured this capacity and worked with the laboratory with the largest backlog to clear all its outstanding tests. The number of slides in the backlog was at approximately 81,346 at its peak. This backlog has now been eliminated. Currently, we are processing approximately 23,000 slides per month, which is normal throughput in the screening process at all times.

As a result, the turnaround times for reporting of CervicalCheck results has now reduced to an average of 6 weeks – this is a decrease from what once a 6 month waiting time, or longer in some cases. Our priority now is to sustain these turnaround times, to ensure that women receive their results in a reasonable time period, and to continue to improve and strengthen our cervical screening programme.

Yours sincerely

Celine Fitzgerald
Interim CEO
National Screening Service

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