



An tSeirbhís Náisiúnta Scagthástála
National Screening Service

04 August 2020

Deputy David Cullinane
alan.kelly@oireachtas.ie

Our Ref: GM/Communications

PQ17893/20: To ask the Minister for Health the backlog in screening by the four national screening programmes in tabular form; his plans to clear the backlog; and if he will make a statement on the matter.

PQ17897/20: To ask the Minister for Health the details of his plans to return all four national screening programmes to pre-Covid-19 levels; the time frame to achieving same; the additional resources that will be made available to achieving pre Covid-19 levels of screening; and if he will make a statement on the matter.

Dear Deputy Cullinane,

I refer to the above Parliamentary Questions. Because the two questions are similar in their scope, I have combined the answers into one. I trust you will be satisfied with this approach.

The National Screening Service's (NSS) four programmes: BreastCheck, CervicalCheck, BowelScreen and Diabetic RetinaScreen were paused in March 2020. This move was taken on public health advice due to the situation with COVID-19. The pause in screening was put in place to protect participants and staff by complying with social distancing guidelines. In addition, the HSE temporarily redeployed staff and resources to the response to COVID-19. However, clinical staff continued to work within the programmes.

In June, the NSS announced a planned phased restart of its screening programmes. CervicalCheck and Diabetic RetinaScreen recommenced screening at the beginning of July. BowelScreen is resuming in August. BreastCheck will resume in September/October.

All parts of the screening chain, from sample-taking and laboratories through to treatment (for example, colposcopy and surgery) have to be robust and staffed and accessible for screening to recommence safely. This includes the need to have appropriate infection controls in place and that PPE requirements are identified and made available.

As screening restarts, we are ensuring all parts of the system have sufficient capacity to process the volume of tests during the restart period. For example, CervicalCheck has forecasted the likely capacity and demand for screening. We will continue to monitor this in the coming weeks and adapt our plan accordingly. Detailed planning continues for BreastCheck for the safe recommencement of screening, and progress is continuing in clearing symptomatic lists.

In order to ensure a safe restart we are taking measures to protect both participants and staff, and monitoring the restart to ensure their continuing safety. For this reason, we are unable to screen people at the same numbers we did pre-COVID-19. We continue to follow Public Health guidelines and are adapting our planning accordingly. The health and safety of our participants continues to be our top priority.

Teach Óstaí an Rí, 200 Sráid Parnell, Baile Átha Cliath D01 A3Y8. King's Inn House, 200 Parnell Street, Dublin 1, D01 A3Y8.
☎ 353 1 865 9300 ✉ info@screeningservice.ie www.screeningservice.ie



An tSeirbhís Náisiúnta Scagthástála
National Screening Service





An tSeirbhís Náisiúnta Scagthástála
National Screening Service

We are assessing capacity at our screening and laboratory facilities on an ongoing basis to understand the impact of new processes and procedures, and how they will impact on the throughput of our programme participants.

The following table shows the number of screening invitations that were outstanding on 01 July 2020 across our four programmes. Please note that this is the number of outstanding invites due to the pause in screening, not the final number of people who will come forward for screening.

Programme	Invitations Outstanding
BowelScreen	65,000
BreastCheck	79,000
CervicalCheck	100,000
Diabetic RetinaScreen	30,000

We have made the following estimates of the time that will be needed to address the outstanding invitations:

- For **BowelScreen**, around five months will be required to clear people who are already in the colonoscopy system. Based on national averages, this means it will be mid-December 2020 when new referrals can be seen in endoscopy.
- With **BreastCheck** operating at reduced capacity due to Covid-19 restrictions, it will potentially take 36 months to offer screening appointments to women who would usually be seen after 24 months.
- In the **CervicalCheck** programme all 'paused' screening invitation letters (January to May 2020) will have been issued by October 2020. It is expected that all people due a screening test in 2020 will have been invited by February 2021.
- The **Diabetic RetinaScreen** programme expects that all clients who were due to be invited between 18 March and 30 June, and patients due to be invited between July to December 2020, will have been offered a screening appointment by the end of this year.

The recommencement of screening is underpinned by the assumption that there will be no worsening of the COVID-19 situation, and that restrictions will continue to ease.

Screening is a population health measure for people who are presumed healthy and do not have symptoms. The aim of a population screening programme is to reduce the incidence of disease in a population. Screening is not a diagnostic tool and no screening test is completely accurate.

All screening programmes are limited by the sensitivity of the test which is the ability to detect those with the disease in a population (true positives). Screening programmes are likewise limited by the specificity of the test which is the ability to detect those who are free of the disease (true negatives). Therefore, a negative test result is not a guarantee that a person is clear of the condition, or that they won't develop the condition between screening appointments.

Teach Óstaí an Rí, 200 Sráid Parnell, Baile Átha Cliath D01 A3Y8. King's Inn House, 200 Parnell Street, Dublin 1, D01 A3Y8.
☎ 353 1 865 9300 ✉ info@screeningservice.ie www.screeningservice.ie



An tSeirbhís Náisiúnta Scagthástála
National Screening Service



An Clár Náisiúnta Scagthástála Coik
The National Breast Screening Programme



AN CLÁR NAISIÚNTA SCAGTHÁSTÁLA CERIBHEACS
THE NATIONAL CERVICAL SCREENING PROGRAMME



An Clár Náisiúnta Scagthástála Púidige
The National Bowel Screening Programme



AN CLÁR NAISIÚNTA SCAGTHÁSTÁLA SEIRNÍO
The National Diabetic Retinal Screening Programme



An tSeirbhís Náisiúnta Scagthástála
National Screening Service

The NSS continues to encourage all people who are between screening appointments, or waiting for rescheduled appointments, to be aware of, and act upon, any symptoms associated with the conditions for which they are being screened. We ask that those people contact their GP, who will arrange appropriate follow-up care.

For other queries patients can call the Freephone information line on 1800 45 45 55, email info@screeningservice.ie or contact their clinic directly. I trust this information is of assistance to you, but should you have any further queries please contact me.

Fiona Murphy
Chief Executive
National Screening Service

Teach Óstaí an Rí, 200 Sráid Parnell, Baile Átha Cliath D01 A3Y8. King's Inn House, 200 Parnell Street, Dublin 1, D01 A3Y8.
☎ 353 1 865 9300 ✉ info@screeningservice.ie www.screeningservice.ie



An tSeirbhís Náisiúnta Scagthástála
National Screening Service

