



An tSeirbhís Náisiúnta Scagthástála  
National Screening Service

02 July 2020

Deputy John McGuinness  
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Our Ref: GM/Communications

**PQ12865/20: To ask the Minister for Health if cervical testing has been restored to normal levels of activity; if there is a backlog of appointments; if it is normal for patients to be waiting for six months or more; and if he will make a statement on the matter.**

Dear Deputy McGuinness,

I refer to the above Parliamentary Question.

The National Screening Service's (NSS) cervical screening programme, CervicalCheck was paused on March 30, on Public Health and Department of Health advice due to the COVID-19 epidemic. The programme will restart on a phased basis from 06 July 2020. Invitations and reminders for people who are now overdue screening will be sent in line with programme prioritisation. This means that the people who have been waiting the longest, proportionally, for their screening test will be invited first. It is expected that all who were due to be invited for screening during the pause will receive their invites from the programme by year-end.

In order to ensure a safe restart we will be taking measures to protect both participants and staff, and monitoring the restart to ensure their continuing safety. For this reason, we will be unable to screen people at the same level as pre-COVID-19. We will continue to follow Public Health guidelines and adapt our planning accordingly. The health and safety of our participants continues to be our top priority at this time. The recommencement of screening is underpinned by the assumption that there will be no worsening of the COVID-19 situation, and 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 you are clear of the condition or that you won't develop the condition between screening appointments.

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.

I trust this information is of assistance, but should you have any further queries please contact me.

Celine Fitzgerald  
Interim CEO, National Screening Service

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National Screening Service



An tSeirbhís Náisiúnta Scagthástála Cuid  
The National Breast Screening Programme



AN CLÁR NAISIÚNTA SCAGTHÁSTÁLA CEIRIBHEAC  
THE NATIONAL CERVICAL SCREENING PROGRAMME



An Clár Náisiúnta Scagthástála Fíochán  
The National Bowel Screening Programme



An Clár Náisiúnta Scagthástála Fíochán  
The National Diabetic Retinal Screening Programme