



02 July 2020

Deputy Martin Heydon  
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Our Ref: GM/Communications

**PQ13480/20: To ask the Minister for Health the status of the restart of smear tests and other cancer screening programmes; and if he will make a statement on the matter.**

Dear Deputy Heydon,

I refer to the above Parliamentary Question.

On 24 July 2020 the National Screening Service (NSS) announced a planned phased restart of its cancer screening programmes. The programmes will restart as follows:

- CervicalCheck will begin sending invites and reminders to participants in its cervical screening programme on July 06.
- BreastCheck will resume screening in September/October.
- BowelScreen will resume in September/October.

Invitations and reminders for people who are now overdue screening will be sent on a phased basis, in line with programme prioritisation. In the case of cervical screening, this means that invitations and reminders will be first sent to people who are overdue a non-routine repeat screening.

The BreastCheck static units continue to assist the symptomatic service delivery for their host hospitals, and prioritise patients who have a known high grade/aggressive cancer. BreastCheck mobile units are being reconditioned to meet infection control and physical distancing standards. BowelScreen is continuing to investigate options to ensure capacity is available for treatment when the issuing of screening kits recommences.

Screening will look different when we restart. In order to ensure a safe restart we will take measures to protect both participants and staff, and monitor to ensure their continuing safety. For this reason, we will be unable to screen people in the same numbers that we did pre-COVID-19. We will continue to follow Public Health guidelines and will adapt our planning accordingly. The health and safety of our participants continues to be our top priority.

We will also ensure all parts of the system have sufficient capacity to process the volume of tests during the restart period, because blockages could result in delayed test results for participants.

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. Provided all key conditions remain safe for participants and staff, invitations will be sent to individuals overdue a routine screening.

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☎ 353 1 865 9300 ✉ [info@screeningservice.ie](mailto:info@screeningservice.ie) [www.screeningservice.ie](http://www.screeningservice.ie)





## An tSeirbhís Náisiúnta Scaghástála National Screening Service

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 GPs, 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](mailto:info@screeningservice.ie) or contact their clinic directly.

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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An tSeirbhís Náisiúnta Scaghástála  
National Screening Service



BreastCheck  
An tAic Náisiúnta Scaghástála Cais  
The National Breast Screening Programme



CervicalCheck  
AN CLAR NAISIÚNTA SCAGHÁSTÁLA CEIRBEACS  
THE NATIONAL CERVICAL SCREENING PROGRAMME



BowelScreen  
An tAic Náisiúnta Scaghástála Folaíoch  
The National Bowel Screening Programme



Diabetic RetinaScreen  
An tAic Náisiúnta Scaghástála Scannán na Síne  
The National Diabetic Retinal Screening Programme