



17 June 2020

Our ref: GM/Communications

Deputy Hildegard Naughton TD  
[Hildegard.naughton@oireachtas.ie](mailto:Hildegard.naughton@oireachtas.ie)

**PQ9882.20: To ask the Minister for Health if his Department or the HSE has conducted a risk assessment in relation to the indefinite postponement of breast and cervical screening due to Covid-19; if such an assessment has been conducted; if so, if it will be published; and if he will make a statement on the matter.**

Dear Deputy Naughton,

I refer to the above Parliamentary Question.

The National Screening Service (NSS) conducted a risk assessment in March 2020, the purpose of which was to evaluate the impact of a partial or full pause of the NSS's screening services for the duration of the COVID-19 outbreak and management process.

The assessment saw the impact of service withdrawal for patients within the screening service as follows:

- Delayed detection and diagnosis of cancer / eye disease
- Delayed surgery and / or treatment
- Significant patient backlogs in all stages of the screening process
- Client / patient anxiety.

Further to this, BreastCheck and CervicalCheck prepared individual risk assessments specific to their client cohorts. It is not intended to publish the risk assessments.

It was clear from the initial analysis that a pause of screening services would have associated risks. However, on balance of guidance provided by HSE Public Health and the Department of Health, the NSS analysis of the risks and proposed mitigations supported a decision to pause screening for a period. The programmes continue to assess the risks of the pause and balance them against the risks that staff and screening participants would be exposed to in the event of screening restarting.

The NSS is in the process of finalising issues around the dependencies and risks identified before providing dates for restarting screening. We must ensure that the recommencement of screening is undertaken in a safe, planned and aligned manner, in keeping with the established principles of running a screening programme. The NSS continues to strive to "at all costs do no harm to healthy people".

I trust this information is of assistance to you. Should you have further queries please contact me.

Yours sincerely,

Celine Fitzgerald, Interim CEO

Teach Óstaí an Rí, 200 Sráid Parnell, Baile Átha Cliath. King's Inns House, 200 Parnell Street, Dublin 1.  
☎ 353 1 865 9300 ✉ [info@cancerscreening.ie](mailto:info@cancerscreening.ie) [www.cancerscreening.ie](http://www.cancerscreening.ie)

