



27 May 2020

Deputy Martin Kenny  
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Our Ref: GM/Communications

**PQ5805/20: To ask the Minister for Health when CervicalCheck and other screening services will be operational; and if he will make a statement on the matter.**

Dear Deputy Kenny,

I refer to the above parliamentary question.

The National Screening Service (NSS) develops and manages delivery of population-based, call-recall, national screening programmes: BreastCheck, CervicalCheck, BowelScreen and Diabetic RetinaScreen. The aim is prevention and early detection of disease to reduce deaths and incidence of disease in the populations screened.

Each programme provides free screening at defined intervals to a specific target population. Almost 2 million individuals in Ireland are eligible for at least one of the programmes.

The NSS programmes were paused in March 2020 as part of the government response to the Covid-19 pandemic. The pause was put in place to protect patients and staff by complying with social distancing guidelines. In addition, the HSE temporarily redeployed staff and resources, where available, to the response to Covid-19. However, clinical staff have continued to work within the programmes.

Please be reassured that the safe restart of screening is a priority for the NSS. The screening programmes are continuing to advance their recommencement plans, notwithstanding certain issues that remain outside of their control.

In addition, the NSS has established a cross-functional working group to support the managed restart of its programmes. It is chaired by Dr Caroline Mason Mohan, NSS Director of Public Health, and Interim Clinical Director of CervicalCheck. The group will work with the HSE steering group chaired by Dr Colm Henry and Anne O'Connor, on the continuity of system-wide non-Covid healthcare.

The Group is reviewing the individual programme plans for recommencement, and providing a framework to support the safe restart of screening. This framework will ensure that all those who have missed out on screening can avail of a test in a phased basis over a period of months.

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An tSeirbhís Náisiúnta Scagthástála  
National Screening Service

Principles of the NSS working group include:

- The principles for the restart, including prioritisation and managing waiting lists
- A risk assessment tool
- Guidance on infection control considerations for screening programmes and use of PPE
- Support to modelling of the programme capacity to inform planning
- Clear communications to the public and stakeholders of the restart in each of the programmes.

When restart dates are finalised, screening will be re-introduced on a phased basis over a period of months, with invitations for screening issued according to clinical prioritisation, and taking the screening and treatment pathways into account.

It is important to note that screening is not the correct pathway for people with symptoms. Therefore, people who are between screening appointments, or waiting rescheduled appointments, are being encouraged to be aware of and act upon any symptoms associated with the conditions being screened for. If a person has concerns about symptoms they should contact their GP immediately. Information on symptoms can be found on the programme websites.

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

Celine Fitzgerald  
Interim CEO  
National Screening Service

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BreastCheck  
An Clár Náisiúnta Scagthástála Cere  
The National Breast Screening Programme



CervicalCheck  
AN CLÁR NÁISIÚNTA SCAGHTÁSTÁLA CERVICHEACS  
THE NATIONAL CERVICAL SCREENING PROGRAMME



BowelScreen  
AN CLÁR NÁISIÚNTA SCAGHTÁSTÁLA Fíoláige  
The National Bowel Screening Programme



Diabetic RetinaScreen  
AN CLÁR NÁISIÚNTA SCAGHTÁSTÁLA Fíoláige  
The National Diabetic Retinal Screening Programme