



10 January 2022

Deputy Colm Burke
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Our Ref: GM/Communications

PQ61696/21: To ask the Minister for Health the actions being taken by his Department to target reported low attendance rates for CervicalCheck appointments by women aged over 50 in certain counties; and if he will make a statement on the matter.

Dear Deputy,

I refer to the above Parliamentary Question.

While there are counties that report a slightly lower uptake of screening, in the context of ongoing strong engagement in CervicalCheck by women across Ireland, these counties could not be accurately described as having low attendance rates.

The internationally accepted standard for measuring uptake in cervical screening programmes is coverage over five-year periods. This mirrors screening rounds, which usually take five years to complete; and it reduces anomalies that can arise, for example, when a person is invited in particular year, but attends the following year.

The programme's national target coverage rate is 80%, and the latest available figures from CervicalCheck show the five-year coverage was 78.5%. There was some variation within this with 20 counties exceeding 75%, however six counties had coverage below 75%, these were Clare (74.5%), Dublin (73.9%), Kilkenny (69.7%), Laois (69%), Monaghan (74.3%) and Roscommon (74.5%). A table showing the screening coverage in each county is included in our reponse to your questions, PQ61695/21 and PQ61697/21.

We do not collate data that shows the coverage by age within those counties.

In the attached table, the data shows screening attendance does decline among those aged 50 years and over. In the five-year period ending 31 March 2020, the attendance rate of those eligible for screening was 71.8% for those aged 50-54 years; 66.9% for those aged 55-59 years; and 59.7% for those aged 60+ years. CervicalCheck stops calling women and people with a cervix for screening at age 65.

A similar trend is evident in England, where data from the National Health Service* also shows a steady decline in participation with age. Its figures for 2020 show the attendance rate of those eligible for cervical screening was 78.5% for those aged 50-54 years, dropping to 72.1% for those aged 55-59 years; and 68.9% for those aged 60-64 years.

Through the work of our Equity Strategy we are continually working to encourage uptake and identify and address gaps in coverage. In 2022 we are implementing a targeted information campaign which aims to increase uptake among women and people with a cervix aged 50 and above, as well as those living in counties where uptake is lowest.

In addition to our advertising campaigns, our press work will focus on using regional media outlets, to support us in highlighting the benefit of attending for screening when invited.

These activities have proven successful previously. In March 2021, we ran a large-scale public awareness campaign which resulted in a high number of women attending for a cervical screening test. The programme operated at around 14% above our target for 2021. The target

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number of cervical tests set for 2021 was 280,000, but it is expected that more than 300,000 tests were conducted. (Verified figures will be available in late February.)

In 2021, we produced culturally appropriate, multilingual video messages for migrant people. The videos are presented by doctors, nurses and other healthcare professionals who originally came to Ireland from another country. They explain the importance of screening; what it is and how to book a test. These videos are available in 21 languages on www.cervicalcheck.ie.

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. We ask that those people contact their GP, who will arrange appropriate follow-up care.

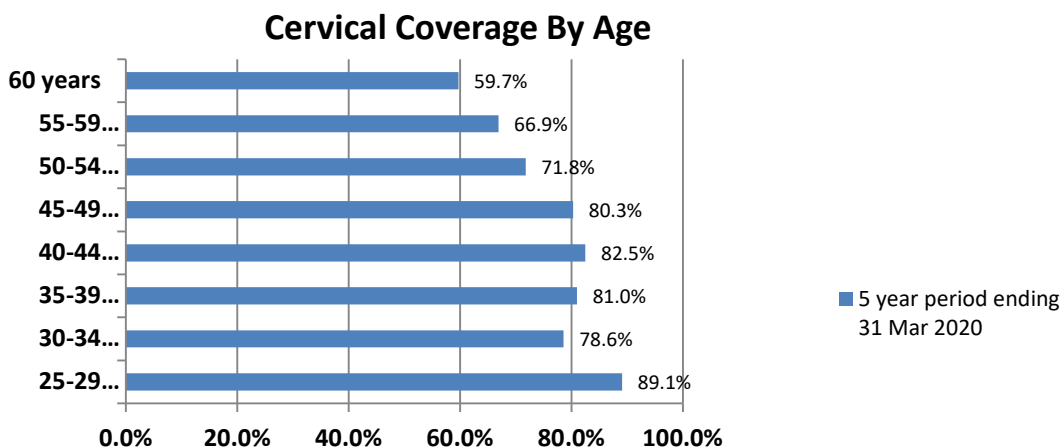
Women and people with a cervix are encouraged to check that they are on the CervicalCheck register on www.cervicalcheck.ie. If they have further questions, they can call the Freephone information line on 1800 45 45 55, email: info@screeningservice.ie.

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

*Source of data: National Health Service Cervical Screening Programme England – 2019-20 data tables. <https://digital.nhs.uk/data-and-information/publications/statistical/cervical-screening-annual/england--2019-20>

Table showing CervicalCheck coverage by age in the five-year period to end March 2020.



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