



An tSeirbhís Náisiúnta Scagthástála
National Screening Service

26 February 2021

Deputy Claire Kerrane
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Our Ref: HM/Communications

PQ10840/21: To ask the Minister for Health if changes were made to the upper age limit in which women are invited for a smear test by CervicalCheck; the reason a person who turned 61 years of age before 30 March 2020 was not invited for further screening; and if he will make a statement on the matter.

Dear Deputy,

I refer to the above Parliamentary Question.

On March 30, 2020 CervicalCheck introduced the HPV test as the primary screening method for the detection of abnormal cervical cells which could develop into cervical cancer. This policy change was recommended in a report by HIQA in 2017 and was made after approval by the Department of Health. This brings the Irish cervical screening programme in line with international best practice in cervical screening.

Screening tests are designed to detect individuals at risk and are not diagnostic tests. With HPV screening we are testing for a risk factor in the development of cervical cancer: the presence of the human papillomavirus (HPV).

If 1,000 people are screened, about 20 people will have abnormal (pre-cancerous) cervical cells:

- 15 of these 20 people will have these cells found through the old smear test - 5 people will not and may go on to develop cervical cancer
- 18 of these 20 people will have these cells found through new HPV cervical screening - 2 people will not and may go on to develop cervical cancer.

We know that HPV screening is better at predicting that your cervix is normal, than a screening test looking at the cells (smear test).

CervicalCheck now screens people aged 25 to 65 every 3 or 5 years, depending on their age (those above 30 are screened in five year intervals).

If a person is on the CervicalCheck register, they will be sent an invitation letter. A person does not need to wait for an invitation. If they know their appointment is due, they can book an appointment with a GP or clinic registered with CervicalCheck. If someone is unsure if they are on the register or when they are due their screening test they can check the register [here](#).

Prior to the transition to HPV cervical screening in March 2020, CervicalCheck screened people aged 25 to 60. The increase in the age range from 60 to 65 will mean a greater number of post-menopausal women will potentially be screened. **Please note if a woman's 61st birthday was before 30 March 2020 her screening journey is now completed as she would not need to be called again before 65. She will not receive an additional invitation. A person's sampletaker can check their eligibility within this extended age limit.**

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National Screening Service



An Clár Náisiúnta Scagthástála Coak
The National Breast Screening Programme



AN CLÁR NÁISIÚNTA SCAETHÁSTÁLA CERVICÉAC
THE NATIONAL CERVICAL SCREENING PROGRAMME



An Clár Náisiúnta Scagthástála Putóige
The National Bowel Screening Programme



An Clár Náisiúnta Scagthástála Seirbhíse do Dhiabéiteigh
The National Diabetic Retinal Screening Programme



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A person can ask their GP for a free screening test if they have never been screened before and are under 65.

Screening is a population health measure for people who are presumed healthy and do not have symptoms. The NSS continues to encourage all people who are between screening appointments, or waiting for rescheduled appointments, to be aware of symptoms. We ask that those people contact their GP, who will arrange appropriate follow-up care.

We continue to ask that people do not attend their appointment if they are unwell or self-isolating because they have symptoms of COVID-19. People should not attend either if they are a confirmed close contact of someone who has tested positive for coronavirus.

Cervical screening is for well people who do not have symptoms. Anyone who is worried about symptoms at any time is advised not to wait for screening but to contact their GP immediately, for appropriate follow-up care.

For other queries patients can call the Freephone information line on 1800 45 45 55, email info@screeningservice.ie or contact their clinic directly.

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

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The National Diabetic Retinal Screening Programme