



An tSeirbhís Náisiúnta Scagthástála  
National Screening Service

25 February 2021

Deputy Alan Kelly  
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Our Ref: GM/Communications

**PQ7680/21: To ask the Minister for Health the status of the BreastCheck screening programme; the number of women that have been screened in each month since May 2020, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter.**

Dear Deputy,

I refer to the above Parliamentary Question.

Breast screening restarted in October 2020 after it was paused last March on Public Health and Government advice due to the global COVID-19 pandemic.

Whilst screening remains a safe procedure, we closely monitor our capacity to screen and continue to review our decisions in accordance with government guidelines. At the beginning of 2021, the risk to healthy women posed by unprecedented levels of COVID-19 in the community was judged to outweigh the benefits of routine breast screening. Therefore, BreastCheck has been operating a reduced service since the beginning of January 2021.

With levels of the virus now dropping within the community, and the opening up of treatment pathways, routine screening is resuming this week. **Invitations for routine screening are now being sent out to eligible women for screening appointments dated from 08 March 2021.**

The focus of the resumption of routine screening is to achieve a maximum invitation rate that is compatible with a safe and controlled follow-up assessment and our treatment capacity within the health service.

**We are resuming by inviting those who have waited longest for routine screening:**

- Invitation letters will be sent first to those who had their appointments cancelled in January 2021
- Invitations for all other women due routine screening will follow
- Screening will resume in our BreastCheck units on a countrywide basis
- Women in the assessment phase of breast screening will continue to be seen

Breast screening capacity is reduced due to social distancing and potential staff limitations due to COVID-19. Therefore we are asking all participants, including new entrants, to check their telephone details on the register as our new text management system is in place to maximise appointment uptake.

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



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An Clár Náisiúnta Scagthástála Coik  
The National Breast Screening Programme



AN CLÁR NAISIÚNTA SCAGTHÁSTÁLA CEIRBEACS  
THE NATIONAL CERVICAL SCREENING PROGRAMME



An Clár Náisiúnta Scagthástála Putóige  
The National Bowel Screening Programme



AN CLÁR NAISIÚNTA SCAGTHÁSTÁLA REITIN DE DRIBEIRIGHE  
The National Diabetic Retinal Screening Programme



If women cannot make their appointments, we are asking them to let us know, so that we can rearrange their appointment and offer the slot to someone else.

Anyone who has symptoms of COVID-19 should not attend a screening appointment until they are sure that they are clear of the illness. They should visit HSE.ie for guidelines and advice.

### Screening and Level 5 restrictions

Our clinics and mobile units are working hard to keep people safe when they go for their appointment. BreastCheck's programme of vaccination of all patient-facing staff will further reduce the risk to participants and staff of COVID-19 and will support the safe restart of services. Measures to ensure participant and staff safety include:

- The vaccination programme for our radiographers is complete.
- Vaccination of remaining BreastCheck staff is continuing as per the HSE vaccination-roll out protocol.
- Mobile vans and static units have been upgraded to meet infection control and physical distancing requirements.
- Staff use of PPE and social distancing will be observed in both static and mobile units.
- Reduced cross-county flow of staff and participants.

### Screening capacity

Since BreastCheck restarted in October, the need for comprehensive PPE and other infection-control measures has limited the capacity of the programme to screen women in a safe environment within the same timeframe pre-COVID. This can mean that appointments may take longer and that it may also take longer to get an appointment.

Ways in which we are maximising capacity include:

- a structured approach to scheduling appointments
- a new invitation process, including the use of new technology for notifying women of their appointments
- priority invites issued to those waiting longest
- further recruitment rounds for radiography staff to maximise workforce capacity.

The number of women therefore who were screened in each month since May 2020, in tabular form, is as follows:

	May 2020	June 2020	July 2020	Aug 2020	Sept 2020	Oct 2020	Nov 2020	Dec 2020	Jan 2021
<b>No. of women in the eligible population who have had a complete mammogram</b>	0	0	0	0	0	0	8,953	9,164	0

We continue to emphasise to our participants that BreastCheck is a screening service for well women within the population age range and is not a symptomatic service. If a person has any

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concerns or symptoms concerning their breasts, we strongly encourage them to contact or attend their GP to ensure that they are given the appropriate advice/referral regarding a symptomatic clinic for breast symptoms, which are still in operation.

We will provide regular updates to our schedule changes on [www.breastcheck.ie](http://www.breastcheck.ie). Women can also contact us on [info@breastcheck.ie](mailto:info@breastcheck.ie) or Freephone 1800 45 45 55.

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

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Fiona Murphy  
Chief Executive  
National Screening Service

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