



An tSeirbhís Náisiúnta Scagthástála
National Screening Service

13 January 2021

Deputy Denise Mitchell
denise.mitchell@oireachtas.ie

Our Ref: GM/Communications

PQ1665/21: To ask the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to BreastCheck appointments being cancelled; and if he will make a statement on the matter.

Dear Deputy,

I refer to the above Parliamentary Question.

The third wave of COVID-19 is causing unprecedented levels of the virus within our community. Government and Public Health advice is that we greatly restrict our movements and limit the people with whom we interact, in order to suppress the virus and sustain our essential services.

The safety of our participants and the staff who care for them continues to be our highest priority at this time. Safety precautions are in place throughout the health services to protect against the spread of COVID-19 and screening services have implemented advised safety measures to reduce the risk of infection.

We are monitoring the situation carefully and will communicate any changes to participants via the COVID-19 information sections on our websites.

While breast screening remains a safe procedure, we believe the risk to healthy women posed by current levels of COVID-19 in the community outweighs the benefits of routine breast screening. Therefore, BreastCheck is operating a reduced service at this time. We are closely monitoring our capacity to screen and reviewing our decision at local levels on a weekly basis and in accordance with government guidelines.

This means that:

- We have delayed routine screening and will resume sending out appointments when it is deemed safe to ask women to reattend.
- We are continuing to operate follow-up clinics for women scheduled for further assessment.
- We are contacting participants to either confirm or cancel their appointment, where required.
- Cancelled appointments will be rescheduled at the earliest opportunity.
- Those for follow-up assessment should continue to attend on the date and time given.

We know this is disappointing for women, and undertake to continue routine screening in their area as soon as it is safe to do so. We will provide regular updates to our schedule changes on www.breastcheck.ie. Women can also contact us on Freephone 1800 45 45 55 or info@breastcheck.ie

Teach Óstaí an Rí, 200 Sráid Parnell, Baile Átha Cliath D01 A3Y8. King's Inn House, 200 Parnell Street, Dublin 1, D01 A3Y8.
☎ 353 1 865 9300 ✉ info@screeningservice.ie www.screeningservice.ie



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An Clár Náisiúnta Scagthástála Coek
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 Náisiúnta Scagthástála Netim de Dhráibéigh
The National Diabetic Retinal Screening Programme



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These actions are in line with government guidance on halting the spread of the virus in the community. This is because:

- Screening involves carrying out mammograms on large numbers of healthy women who would be exposed to high levels of COVID-19 in the community – including new variant COVID-19.
- A significant number of women attending BreastCheck are in the COVID-19 vulnerable age group.
- Screening is only the first step in the BreastCheck pathway. Treating women with screen detected abnormalities involves many hospital departments, beds and theatre resources that are currently under pressure.
- Hospitals are suspending or reducing routine activity to accommodate the COVID-19 surge.

We continue to emphasise to our participants that BreastCheck is a screening service for women who are well, and within the population age range. It is not a symptomatic service.

If a person has any 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.

For other queries patients can call the Freephone information line on 1800 45 45 55, email info@screeningservice.ie or contact your 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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An Clár Náisiúnta Scagthástála Meirín de Dhráibéigh
The National Diabetic Retinal Screening Programme