



An tSeirbhís Náisiúnta Scagthástála
National Screening Service

14 January 2021

Deputy Robert Troy
robert.troy@oireachtas.ie

Our Ref: HM/Communications

PQ45009/20: To ask the Minister for Health when patients awaiting CervicalCheck and mammogram appointments will be accommodated (details supplied).

Details supplied: As the Minister will be aware there are many patients who urgently require such tests.

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. Individual programme updates are given below:

BreastCheck

Whilst 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:

- Routine screening of well women is being delayed.
- We will resume sending out appointments for routine screening when it is deemed safe to ask women to reattend.
- We are continuing to operate follow-up clinics for women scheduled for further assessment.
- Those for follow-up assessment should continue to attend on the date and time given.
- We will be in touch with each participant to confirm or reschedule their appointment.

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

- Breast screening involves carrying out mammograms on large numbers of healthy women who would be exposed to high levels of COVID-19 in the community.
- A significant number of women participants are in the COVID-19 vulnerable age group.

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An Clár Náisiúnta Scagthástála Coak
The National Breast Screening Programme



AN CLÁR NÁISIÚNTA SCAETHÁSTÁLA CERVICÉAC
THE NATIONAL CERVICAL SCREENING PROGRAMME



An Clár Náisiúnta Scagthástála Púidige
The National Bowel Screening Programme



An Clár Náisiúnta Scagthástála Retiní de Dhiabéiteag
The National Diabetic Retinal Screening Programme



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- 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 great 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 well women within the population age range and 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.

We will provide regular updates to our schedule changes on www.breastcheck.ie. Women can also contact us on info@breastcheck.ie or Freephone 1800 45 45 55.

CervicalCheck

CervicalCheck understands the pressure faced by those in general practice and community-based clinics at this time. We continue to offer our support to clinics making individual decisions about the level of screening that is safe for them to provide, as they adhere to government guidelines and Public Health advice about the spread of COVID-19.

We are aware that, as a result, GP practices and community clinics may not be able to offer cervical screening appointments, or may be operating at reduced capacity, in the short-term.

- We are advising participants who are booked for screening that their sample taker may reschedule their appointment, and that their new test date may be some weeks away.
- We are advising those seeking to book appointments that they may not be able to do so at this time. We are asking them to keep in touch with their clinic and rebook as soon as possible.
- We will continue to keep in touch with sample takers about screening, and to offer advice in line with HSE and NPHET recommendations.
- We will update our website with any changes to screening, and provide participants with information on booking with alternative sample takers in their area.

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 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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