



An tSeirbhís Náisiúnta Scagthástála  
National Screening Service

22 March 2021

Deputy David Cullinane  
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**Our Ref:** HM/Communications

**PQ11703/21: To ask the Minister for Health the operational status of each cancer screening clinic at each location; the plan to resume full services; and if he will make a statement on the matter.**

Dear Deputy,

I refer to the above Parliamentary Question.

You asked about the status of each cancer screening clinic. It is important to note that of the three cancer screening programmes, only BreastCheck has clinics. CervicalCheck screening takes place in primary care settings (general practice and women's health clinics). BowelScreening takes place in the person's home when the person uses a FIT kit.

The operational status of each cancer screening programme is as follows:

### **BreastCheck**

The BreastCheck programme resumed breast screening on 27 October 2020. The programme paused new invites during January 2021 and continued to undertake assessment and redeploy staff to support the symptomatic services of their host hospitals. BreastCheck began reissuing invitations to eligible women, and the first appointments took place on 08 March 2021 in line with outpatient cancer clinics resuming on that date. We are pleased to say that routine breast screening is again operating nationwide.

The numbers of COVID-19 positive patients in the host hospitals is reducing and we understand the hospitals are no longer in surge capacity. This means that the screening pathway will be available to service users and theatre access available to those who may need it.

### **CervicalCheck**

CervicalCheck began a phased and incremental approach to the recommencement of screening on 06 July 2020. By the end of December 2020, the programme had issued a first invitation letter to every eligible individual who was due a HPV screening test in 2020. CervicalCheck will now issue letters of invitation to all participants as their screening date falls due.

The programme is issuing invitations to people who received a letter of invitation pre-06 July 2020 but did not yet book a test. It is estimated that reminder letters will be up to date by April 2021.

### *Colposcopy clinics*

Colposcopy clinics have worked hard throughout COVID-19 to reduce the waiting lists that resulted from the offer in 2018 of free smears which was taken up by close to 100,000 women. The resulting waiting list for referrals to colposcopy continued into 2020. During the three-month pause in screening in primary care, colposcopy units continued to work through this waiting list as hospital resources allowed. When screening resumed, most colposcopy waiting lists had been cleared.

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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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BreastCheck  
An Clár Náisiúnta Scagthástála Cúc  
The National Breast Screening Programme



CervicalCheck  
AN CLÁR NÁISIÚNTA SCAETHÁSTÁLA CERVICÉAC  
THE NATIONAL CERVICAL SCREENING PROGRAMME



BowelScreen  
An Clár Náisiúnta Scagthástála Putóige  
The National Bowel Screening Programme



Diabetic  
RetinaScreen  
An Clár Náisiúnta Scagthástála Seimí de Dhiabéiteigh  
The National Diabetic Retinal Screening Programme



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Even though the number of new referrals has been lower, colposcopy clinics have been busy during 2020.

COVID-19 has affected capacity in colposcopy units. Despite the challenges faced by the service, c13,000 new patients and c36,000 return patients were seen and cared for in colposcopy clinics around the country in 2020.

All of the procedures put in place to protect patients and staff from COVID-19, including COVID-19 triage, increased decontamination after each patient, and extended time between appointments to ensure social distancing in waiting rooms, have impacted on the numbers of women seen per clinic.

Colposcopy clinics are continuing to work at capacity to see women referred for treatment.

#### *Primary care*

CervicalCheck is aware that some GP practices and community clinics may have been operating at reduced capacity in January 2021, due to unprecedented levels of COVID-19 in the community.

CervicalCheck continues to support GP practices and community 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 and participate in the vaccination programme.

We continue to ask women to keep in touch with their GP and to take the earliest appointment offered to them. We are also letting women know that they do not need to book for screening with their own GP, and can book with any sampletaker in their area. A list of registered sampletakers is available on our website [here](#).

#### **BowelScreen**

BowelScreen continues to monitor colonoscopy capacity closely and issues invitations relative to the units that are scheduling BowelScreen colonoscopies.

In February 2021 the following activity has taken place:

- Over 3,800 invitations issued
- Over 248 colonoscopies (index and surveillance) completed.

BowelScreen will continue to respond appropriately to the impact of COVID-19 on the delivery of the programme in support of the endoscopy units in conjunction with the National Endoscopy Programme.

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

Brenda Ryan on behalf of Fiona Murphy  
Chief Executive  
National Screening Service

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An Clár Náisiúnta Scagthástála Coik  
The National Breast Screening Programme



CervicalCheck  
AN CLÁR NÁISIÚNTA SCAETHÁSTÁLA CEIRBEACS  
THE NATIONAL CERVICAL SCREENING PROGRAMME



BowelScreen  
An Clár Náisiúnta Scagthástála Putóige  
The National Bowel Screening Programme



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