



An tSeirbhís Náisiúnta Scagthástála  
National Screening Service

01 April 2021

Deputy Holly Cairns  
[holly.cairns@oireachtas.ie](mailto:holly.cairns@oireachtas.ie)

**Our Ref:** EG/Communications

**PQ15908/21** - To ask the Minister for Health the steps he is taking to highlight the importance of cervical screening for persons under 25 years of age who are not yet screened but need to be aware of the significance of the screening process; and if he will make a statement on the matter.

Dear Deputy,

I refer to the above Parliamentary Question.

Ireland's cervical screening programme, CervicalCheck, moved to HPV cervical screening on 30 March 2020. The HPV test is a machine-based test that looks for the presence of HPV. If HPV is found, your test sample is checked for abnormal cells ('smear' test). The previous testing process looked for abnormal cells first. But finding HPV first is a better way to screen for cervical cancer. If we find a HPV infection early, we can monitor it and offer treatment if there are any changes to the cells of the cervix.

The move to HPV cervical screening was informed by an Irish 2017 Health Information and Quality Authority (HIQA) Health Technology Assessment report that focused on the human papillomavirus (HPV) - a virus which can cause cell changes that can lead to cancer. HIQA is an independent authority established to drive high-quality and safe care for people using health and social care services in Ireland.

HIQA recommended that CervicalCheck invite women and people with a cervix between the ages of 25 and 65 for cervical screening. Anyone outside of that age range is not eligible for free cervical screening. This is because evidence to date shows there to be no additional public health benefit in offering cervical screening to well women below the age of 25.

In the CervicalCheck screening programme, people aged 25 to 29 years old are invited every three years and people aged 30 to 65 years old are invited every 5 years, depending on their results. People aged 25 to 29 are screened more often because they are more likely to have HPV.

The HIQA report concluded that HPV cervical screening within this age range, together with a HPV vaccination programme, was the recommended strategy for the reduction in the incidence of cervical cancer and the prevalence of abnormal cells. This type of cervical screening has been introduced, to date, in Australia, England, Scotland, the Netherlands and Wales.

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](mailto:info@screeningservice.ie) [www.screeningservice.ie](http://www.screeningservice.ie)



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An Clár Náisiúnta Scagthástála Coak  
The National Breast Screening Programme



AN CLÁR NAISIÚNTA SCAGTHÁSTÁLA CEIRBEACS  
THE NATIONAL CERVICAL SCREENING PROGRAMME



An Clár Náisiúnta Scagthástála Púitige  
The National Bowel Screening Programme



An Clár Náisiúnta Scagthástála Retiní do Diaibéiteigh  
The National Diabetic Retinal Screening Programme



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There are however special circumstances in which the programme will offer screening to a woman under 25.

These include:

- Referral from colposcopy
- Renal failure
- Renal dialysis
- Renal transplantation
- HIV infection
- Post organ transplant
- Pre organ transplant

If a woman comes under any of the categories listed above, we ask that they contact any doctor/nurse registered with the CervicalCheck programme. A list can be found [here](#)

Screening is a population health measure for people who are presumed healthy and do not have symptoms. The aim of a population screening programme is to reduce the incidence of disease in a population. It is important that all screening programmes balance benefits and risks. There are significant risks associated with screening women less than 25. Abnormal cells in this age group usually go back to normal without intervention. Identifying and treating abnormal cells in this age group risks causing cervical damage which increases the future risk of late miscarriage and preterm birth in women. Screening in this age group is more likely to cause overall harm rather than overall benefit for the population. Screening is not a diagnostic tool and no screening test is completely accurate.

CervicalCheck is currently running a communications campaign on digital, social and national media (radio and out-of-home advertising) to inform women about the new HPV screening test and to encourage all those who are due their screening test from 2020 and in 2021 to book their appointment when due. This will enable us to raise awareness around and ensure more people know about the significance and benefits of screening.

The NSS continues to encourage all people who are between screening appointments, or waiting for rescheduled appointments, to be aware of, and act upon, any symptoms associated with the conditions for which they are being screened. We ask that those people contact their GP, who will arrange appropriate follow-up care. For other queries patients can call the Freephone information line on 1800 45 45 55, or email: [info@screeningservice.ie](mailto:info@screeningservice.ie) or contact their clinic directly.

Should you wish to speak with a member of the CervicalCheck screening programme for more discussion on the matter please email: [communications@screeningservice.ie](mailto:communications@screeningservice.ie)

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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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