

27 October 2021

Deputy Peadar Tóibín TD  
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Our Ref: GM/Communications

**PQ49679.21: To ask the Minister for Health the number of CervicalCheck smear tests carried out in each of the past ten years and to date in 2021.**

**PQ49282.21: To ask the Minister for Health the number of samples or slides which CervicalCheck has sent abroad to foreign labs for testing in each of the past five years and to date in 2021.**

Dear Deputy,

I refer to the above two Parliamentary Questions, which I intend to answer as one. I trust you are agreeable with this approach.

CervicalCheck plays an important role in preventing cervical cancer in Ireland. The number of women who developed cervical cancer fell by 7% year-on-year between 2010 and 2015. In the first ten years of the programme it provided almost 3.2 million cervical screening tests, and detected over 115,000 abnormalities (including 64,000 high grade abnormalities), many of which could have developed into cervical cancer if not detected through screening.

However, there are limitations to screening, in that it will not prevent all cases of cervical cancer. Screening will not find every abnormal cell change. This is a limitation of all cancer screening programmes, not just in Ireland, but globally. Every cervical cancer screening programme will have cases of interval cancer (i.e people who are diagnosed with cancer after a previous negative screening test and before their next screening tests are due).

The following table shows the number of cervical tests conducted by CervicalCheck in the past ten years.

Year	No tests for unique women
2011	296479
2012	324810
2013	344500
2014	289170
2015	272471
2016	276450
2017	279893
2018	355745
2019	229176
2020	168792
2021*	244643

\*to 31st August 2021

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There was a substantial increase in screening numbers in 2018 as many women availed of the Minister for Health's offer of a free out-of-schedule screen.

The CervicalCheck programme was paused during April, May and June 2020 on public health advice because of the situation with COVID-19.

The following table shows the number of samples that CervicalCheck has sent abroad for testing in each of the past five years, and to date in 2021. The number of screening samples sent abroad in recent years has increased as other private laboratory providers have ceased processing samples.

Year	No. of tests sent to lab outside Ireland
2016	133877
2017	132977
2018	146959
2019	194753
2020	144499
2021*	237846

\*to 31st August 2021

All cervical screening samples go to a quality-assured lab provider. The quality assurance requirements and standards for the cervical screening programme are based on European guidance, as set out in the *European guidelines for quality assurance in cervical cancer screening*, and our Standards for Quality Assurance in Cervical Screening.

Two quality-assured laboratories process all CervicalCheck tests. They are Quest Diagnostics in the USA, and the Coombe Women and Infants University Hospital (CWIUH) in Dublin. They perform HPV primary testing and reflex cytology. Both laboratories have had formal QA inspections by the programme in 2021.

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, programme participants can call the Freephone information line on 1800 45 45 55; email: [info@screeningservice.ie](mailto:info@screeningservice.ie); or contact their 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

