



04 October 2021

Deputy Marian Harkin, TD
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Our Ref: HM/Communications

PQ46236/21: To ask the Minister for Health the plans he is putting in place as a matter of urgency to deal with the backlog in the CervicalCheck screening; his further plans with regard to the number of women who are required to have retests due to the time delay in testing; and if he will make a statement on the matter.

Dear Deputy,

I refer to the above Parliamentary Questions.

Despite the many restrictions COVID-19 has placed on our operations, today, CervicalCheck is up to date with invites for screening. All women and people with a cervix are being invited to attend for their cervical screening test when they are due. Each participant chooses when it is best for them to attend; they are responsible for making their appointment with their GP practice or a clinic.

We have increased our testing capacity and are monitoring this carefully. We are successfully achieving the maximum invitation rate that is compatible with a safe and controlled follow-up assessment, and our treatment capacity within the health service.

In line with screening programmes internationally, we are focused on 'restarting' our participants' screening journeys, while continuing to remain cognisant of the capacity pressures across the whole of the health services.

The CervicalCheck programme has experienced a 25% increase in estimated volumes in the first six months of the year. The programme is happy to note that women and GP practices continue to use the service despite the impact and restrictions from the COVID-19 pandemic.

We continue 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. Every GP surgery and clinic has measures in place to keep patients and staff safe. These include extra hand hygiene processes, social distancing, and the wearing of PPE. We will continue to follow public health guidelines; the health and safety of our patients and staff is our priority.

We 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 recently.

We ask women to keep in touch with their GPs, 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

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their own GP, and can book with any sampletaker in their area. A list of registered sampletakers is available on our website [here](#).

In January 2021 some women who were due screening and had been invited in 2020 had not yet attended for screening, due to their understandable concerns during the COVID-19 third wave. However, our largescale awareness campaign in March 2021 saw a high number of women returning to screening over a short period. We expected to process almost 300,000 cervical screening tests in 2021; however, by the end of the first six months of the year an unprecedented 200,000 tests had been processed.

While screening samples are being processed as normal, we are asking all sampletakers to maintain their regular screening clinics, and informing women that due to the high screening volumes it may take slightly longer to receive their test results.

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. We ask that those people contact their GP, who will arrange appropriate follow-up care.

For other queries participants can call the Freephone information line on 1800 45 45 55, email: 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

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