

18 February 2022

Deputy Peadar Tóibín TD
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Our Ref: GM/HM/Communications

PQ5827/22: To ask the Minister for Health the total number of persons screened by CervicalCheck in each of the past ten years and to date in 2022.

PQ5828/22: To ask the Minister for Health the total number of smear test samples and slides which were outsourced to foreign laboratories in each of the past ten years and to date in 2022.

PQ5829/22: To ask the Minister for Health the total number of persons screened by BreastCheck in each of the past ten years and to date in 2022.

Dear Deputy,

I refer to the three Parliamentary Questions above, 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 lead to the detection of 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).

CervicalCheck: total number of people screened

The total number of persons screened by CervicalCheck - at either primary care or colposcopy - in each of the past ten years is shown in the following table. Verified data for 2022 is not yet available.

Year	No of persons screened
2011	296,479
2012	324,810
2013	344,500
2014	289,170
2015	272,471
2016	276,450
2017	279,893
2018	355,745*

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2019	229,176
2020	168,792
2021	333,437

*Year women availed of the offer of a free out-of-schedule screening test

The CervicalCheck programme was paused during April, May and June 2020 on public health advice because of the situation with COVID-19. Despite the many restrictions the pandemic placed on our operations, the programme is now up to date with invites for screening.

CervicalCheck: laboratory usage

The following table shows the number of samples CervicalCheck has sent to laboratory partners abroad for testing in each of the past ten years, up until the end of 2021. Verified data for 2022 is not yet available. This number has increased in recent years as some private laboratory providers have ceased processing samples.

Year	No. of tests sent to lab outside Ireland
2011	168,578
2012	178,448
2013	188,734
2014	138,600
2015	141,130
2016	133,877
2017	132,977
2018	146,959
2019	194,753
2020	144,499
2021	326,490

All cervical screening samples go to a quality-assured laboratory 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. We use a laboratory provider in the US because there are not enough quality-assured labs available in Ireland to meet our needs, and to ensure resilience in our system.



BreastCheck: persons screened

The total number of persons screened by BreastCheck in each of the past ten years is shown in the table below. Verified data for 2022 is not yet available.

BreastCheck	Number of women screened
2011	127,703
2012	128,852
2013	144,477
2014	138,762
2015	144,682
2016	141,878
2017	164,187
2018	170,583
2019	170,957
2020	56,270
2021	127,288

Regrettably, BreastCheck, along with many public services, has been impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic over the last two years. The programme was paused for several months in 2020 and 2021, but we have restarted women on their screening journeys since screening recommenced in October 2020.

For other queries, programme 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