

08 March 2022

Deputy Neasa Hourigan
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Our Ref: HM/EH/Communications

PQ9863/22: To ask the Minister for Health the number of persons that received an invitation to take part in BreastCheck on a quarterly basis from quarter 1 2020 to date in 2022; and the percentage of persons that accepted an invitation and subsequently attended a screening appointment in each of the specified periods in tabular form.

Dear Deputy,

I refer to the above Parliamentary Question.

BreastCheck, the national breast screening programme, was paused between March and end of October 2020, and again between January and March 2021. The programme was paused in order to protect participants and staff by complying with social distancing guidelines to prevent the spread of COVID-19. Since March 2021, breast screening services have been operating nationwide.

During the pause in breast screening services, BreastCheck staff were temporarily redeployed into symptomatic and other services, including the response to COVID-19. Support was provided to assess and treat women who were at high risk of breast cancer, and whose hospital appointments had been delayed because of COVID-19.

This temporary redeployment of services enabled high-risk patients who had symptoms to be seen quicker, with the aim of improving the outcome of any diagnosis during a time when breast health resources were constrained. This cohort of symptomatic women has been shown to have a significantly higher rate of cancer, and more time-dependent diagnosis, than the screened cohort.

The following table below highlights the number of women invited to BreastCheck screening and the percentage uptake from Q1 2020 – Q3 2021. This information is calculated and verified in arrears; therefore data for Q4 2021 and Q1 2022 are not yet available.

	Q1 2020	Q2 2020*	Q3 2020*	Q4 2020	Q1 2021	Q2 2021	Q3 2021
Invited (first invited in the reported period)	56,679	0	0	10,195	13,236	45,488	44,333
% uptake	58.6%	0%	0%	87.1%	52.0%	80.3%	81.3%

* breast screening was paused during this period

The pause in screening, along with COVID-19 infection control measures, which affect our capacity to screen, mean that women are waiting longer for their screening appointments.

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We have lost nearly a year of screening time because of the COVID-19 pandemic. Appointments in this screening round (where we invite women for screening once every two years) are delayed by up to a year. This means that if a woman was due to be screened in 2021, we will now aim to invite her in 2022.

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

Yours sincerely,

Fiona Murphy
Chief Executive
National Screening Service

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