

20 January 2022

Deputy Francis Noel Duffy  
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Our Ref: HM/Communications

**PQ1646/22: To ask the Minister for Health the reason cervical screening test appointments were cancelled in December 2021 with no prior warning; and if he will make a statement on the matter.**

Dear Deputy,

I refer to the query above.

We are pleased to report that by the end of 2021 CervicalCheck had screened the same number of women as in any other two-year period. We have increased our testing capacity and are monitoring this carefully.

- CervicalCheck is up-to-date with invites for screening.
- Screening samples continue to be processed as normal.
- The turnaround time for test results is now 4 weeks, reduced from 6 to 8 weeks in 2021.

#### Sample taking and seasonal post

We asked sample takers to post December cervical screening samples by Friday December 17 and resume normal screening from 27 December 2021. This was to ensure sample delivery was not affected by the increased seasonal pressures on An Post, and to enable the programme to continue to process all samples in a timely manner. This is a normal part of managing a cervical screening programme to ensure samples do not expire before they are processed. CervicalCheck did not ask for any appointments to be cancelled and samples were taken and processed over this period.

#### Sample taking and COVID-19

We are aware that in recent weeks some women and people with a cervix may have found it difficult to arrange a screening appointment. CervicalCheck is mindful of the pressures our GP colleagues have been under during the fourth wave of COVID-19, and of their commitment to the roll-out of the COVID-19 vaccination programme in late December/ early January.

- We are aware that GP practices and community clinics may have reduced capacity for cervical screening in the short-term.
- We are advising people who are due a screening test that their sample taker may not be able to offer an appointment for a number of weeks.
- We are advising our participants that cervical screening is for well people who do not have symptoms. Anyone who is worried about symptoms at any time is advised to contact their surgery immediately, and request a consultation with their doctor. The doctor will advise on next steps.

The majority of cases of cervical cancer develop slowly, over a 10-15 year period. This means that for the majority of people who come for screening regularly, any short delay in screening is not likely to negatively impact their outcome.

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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National Screening Service

We continue to ask that people do not attend their screening test 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.

The safety of our participants and all those involved in their care continues to be our highest priority at this time.

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, should you have any further queries please contact me.

Yours sincerely,

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Fiona Murphy  
Chief Executive  
National Screening Service

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