

5 July 2022

Deputy Thomas Pringle  
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Our Ref: HM/Communications

**PQ33059/22: To ask the Minister for Health the absolute number of persons who were invited to attend BreastCheck; the number and proportion who attended their BreastCheck appointment in Q1, Q2, Q3 and Q4 between 2015 and 2021 and to date in 2022, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter.**

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 from Q1 2015 – Q4 2021. This information is calculated and verified in arrears; therefore data for Q1 2022 is not yet available.

Year	Title	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
<b>2021</b>	Women Invited in the reporting period	13,236	45,488	44,333	67,456
<b>Uptake (%)</b>	Proportion of women who attended screening whose invite was in the reported period (%)	52	80.3	81.3	58.4

<b>2020*</b>	Women Invited in the reporting period	56,679	-	-	10,195
<b>Uptake (%)</b>	Proportion of women who attended screening whose invite was in the reported period (%)	58.6	-	-	87.1
<b>2019</b>	Women Invited in the reporting period	61,887	52,564	56,860	61,886
<b>Uptake (%)</b>	Proportion of women who attended screening whose invite was in the reported period (%)	72.2	69.3	75.9	65.3
<b>2018</b>	Women Invited in the reporting period	51,771	53,712	54,975	63,190
<b>Uptake (%)</b>	Proportion of women who attended screening whose invite was in the reported period (%)	76.3	76.2	71.1	68.4
<b>2017</b>	Women Invited in the reporting period	55,609	51,145	53,223	61,225
<b>Uptake (%)</b>	Proportion of women who attended screening whose invite was in the reported period (%)	70.5	74.9	71.5	70.3
<b>2016</b>	Women Invited in the reporting period	44,270	44,206	46,557	48,873

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<b>Uptake (%)</b>	Proportion of women who attended screening whose invite was in the reported period (%)	80.60%	72.6	72.8	70.6
<b>2015</b>	Women Invited in the reporting period	43,568	46,718	48,255	53,971
<b>Uptake (%)</b>	Proportion of women who attended screening whose invite was in the reported period (%)	84.20%	74.00%	78.90%	68.70%

\* 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.

We have lost nearly a year of screening time. 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. However, we aim to return to screening women every two years as soon as possible. This is dependent on the current situation with COVID-19 and the global challenge of staff recruitment in radiology and radiography.

Screening involves inviting well women into a healthcare environment where they may be at higher risk of contracting COVID-19. Understandably, some women have made the choice not to return to breast screening at this time. We are experiencing this in the current wave of COVID-19.

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.

Yours sincerely,

Fiona Murphy,  
Chief Executive.