



9 June 2022

Deputy Bríd Smith TD  
[brid.smith@oireachtas.ie](mailto:brid.smith@oireachtas.ie)

Our Ref: GM/Communications

**PQ26872.22:** To ask the Minister for Health when the proposed new testing laboratory at the Coombe Hospital will be completed and operating; the number of medical laboratory scientists who are required to fully staff the facility; the estimated percentage of the CervicalCheck programme that this facility will conduct when fully operational; the locations in which the remaining testing for CervicalCheck programmes will be conducted; and if he will make a statement on the matter.

Dear Deputy,

I refer to the above Parliamentary Question.

CervicalCheck - the national cervical screening programme, 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. More recent data shows that the decreasing incidence has been sustained even as the programme matures, with a 2.8% annual percentage decrease from 2010-2018. 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.

### Screening locations

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. A laboratory provider in the US is used because there are not enough quality-assured laboratories available in Ireland to meet our needs.

### National Cervical Screening Laboratory completion

A strategic decision was made (arising from recommendations in the report by Dr Gabriel Scally) in 2018 to develop a National Cervical Screening Laboratory (NCSL) in Ireland, in conjunction with the Coombe Women and Infants University Hospital (CWIUH) in Dublin. The new bespoke laboratory will comprise 1,340 square metres of accommodation over four floors, providing cytology, HPV testing, training, audit, and research facilities. Construction of the new laboratory is due to be completed in the second quarter of 2022. The laboratory is due to be operational in quarter three of 2022.

### Services to be provided by NCSL

The opening of the new NCSL at the CWIUH will build capacity and resilience into the public element of the laboratory services required for the national cervical screening programme in Ireland. The NCSL will enable NSS to reduce its dependency on third party providers to meet the needs of CervicalCheck. The new laboratory is designed to become the principal provider of cervical screening laboratory services for the NSS.

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)





### Additional screening locations

As the 2021 cyber-attack on the Coombe hospital has shown, a level of service from a second screening provider will continue to be necessary to provide resilience in the system. The current main cervical screening contract is held by Quest Diagnostics until December 2022. We are progressing a new contract which will continue to provide a service for women.

### Staffing requirement

A key factor for the immediate and long-term success of the NCSL is the availability and recruitment of cytopathology staff, namely consultant cytopathologists, in the face of increased market demand and the continued decline of the cytology industry in Ireland and globally. Engagement is taking place with stakeholders across the health service to ensure that the NCSL will have a suitable supply of qualified staff to facilitate its increasing workload in the years ahead. This includes engagement with the RCPI (Royal College of Physicians of Ireland) Faculty of Pathology to introduce a post-CSCST (Certificate of Satisfactory Completion of Specialist Training) fellowship, and include cervical cytology in the histopathology training curriculum.

There are currently 25.7 whole-time equivalent staff employed across a number of disciplines, including medical scientists, to provide primary HPV screening and reporting of samples at the Coombe Hospital. Further posts have been identified and staff will be recruited as the Coombe increases its work on behalf of CervicalCheck.

### Additional information

As part of our work to promote a better understanding of the services we provide, we are making accurate information available to assist those writing and talking about our service and related issues. To assist in that purpose we have produced *A Guide to Talking About Cervical Screening in Ireland*, which you can access by clicking [here](#).

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.

---

Fiona Murphy  
Chief Executive  
National Screening Service

