



02 November 2022

Deputy Seán Crowe
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Our Ref: HM/Communications

PQ54043/22: To ask the Minister for Health when the National Cervical Screening Laboratory will open; the fully-staffed annual testing capacity of the laboratory; the number of samples sent abroad for testing in each year for the past five years; and the total cost of sending samples abroad for testing in each year for the past five years.

Dear Deputy,

I refer to the above Parliamentary Question.

National Cervical Screening Laboratory (NCSL)

The NCSL is being developed by the HSE and the CWIUH to become a national centre of excellence for cervical screening. It will be commissioned by Ireland's cervical screening programme, CervicalCheck, to process women's cervical screening samples. It is expected to be operating by year-end.

The new laboratory is designed to become CervicalCheck's main provider of cervical screening laboratory services. However, recruitment of skilled staff will be a top priority for several years as the NCSL increases the number of CervicalCheck samples it receives. The Coombe has recruited 11.9 WTE staff for the NCSL, with 5.3 WTE posts under recruitment.

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 five years, up until the end of 2021. Verified data for 2022 is only available for January to July.

Year	No. of tests sent to lab outside Ireland
2018*	302,921
2019	188,828
2020	135,291
2021	286,502
2022†	159,206

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

† Provisional data from the beginning of January to the end of July 2022, and subject to change. During this period the Coombe was unable to process screening slides due to a significant cyber-attack and continued staff absence due to illness.

Two quality-assured laboratories process all CervicalCheck tests. They are Quest Diagnostics in the US, and the Coombe Women & Infants University Hospital (CWIUH) in Dublin. They perform HPV primary testing with reflex cytology. 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*.

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We are grateful to our laboratory provider in the US for processing samples as we build processing capacity in Ireland, and ensuring we continue to meet our key performance indicator of getting result letters to women within four weeks in 90% of cases.

Due to ongoing tendering process, we are unable to release the figures requested on the cost of sample processing abroad.

Cervical screening

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.

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.

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National Screening Service



An Clár Náisiúnta Scagthástála Ciock
The National Breast Screening Programme



AN CLÁR NÁISIÚNTA SCAGTHÁSTÁLA CERVICHEACS
THE NATIONAL CERVICAL SCREENING PROGRAMME



An Clár Náisiúnta Scagthástála Púitige
The National Bowel Screening Programme



An Clár Náisiúnta Scagthástála Ráiteil do Dhiabéitigh
The National Diabetic Retinal Screening Programme