



03 May 2023

Deputy Sorca Clarke  
[sorca.clarke@oireachtas.ie](mailto:sorca.clarke@oireachtas.ie)

Our Ref: HM/Communications

**PQ16658/23: To ask the Minister for Health in relation to the mobile breast screening units that will not return to Mullingar and Athlone until the end of 2023, the number of women who were scheduled to attend these units for screening who will now have to make the trip to Tullamore to avail of this service; and if he will make a statement on the matter.**

Dear Deputy,

I refer to the above Parliamentary Question.

### About BreastCheck

There are four regional centres responsible for the delivery of BreastCheck throughout the country: Eccles Street and Merrion Road in Dublin; Newcastle Road in Galway; and Infirmary Road in Cork.

However, not all eligible women wish, or are able, to travel to one of these regional units. An important principle for the BreastCheck programme is to offer screening services locally to women in counties and locations convenient to where they live. To achieve this, each of the four screening units operates in tandem with mobile units. We have 24 mobile units, including three new units added since 2020. The majority of women participating in BreastCheck have their mammogram in one of these units. We update our breast screening locations regularly on our website, [here](#).

### How we invite women for breast screening

We invite women aged from 50 to 69 years for breast screening on an area-by-area basis every two years (a screening 'round'). Our mobile units move around the country, depending on the number of women eligible for screening in each area. Our unit stays in location until all eligible women in the catchment area have been invited, before moving on to the next area.

The first invitation will depend on when screening is available in a woman's area. This is normally within two years of her 50th birthday. Appointments are issued based on when we are screening in the area and the length of time a person has been waiting for an appointment. (This is either from the date of their previous screening test or, if new to the programme, from the date they first became known to BreastCheck).

### BreastCheck and the impact of COVID-19

Along with many public services, BreastCheck was impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. The programme was paused for several months in 2020 and 2021, and because of this, it is taking longer to get through the current screening round. Despite the ongoing challenges in recruitment and retention of staff and COVID-19 related absences, BreastCheck is back to nearly normal numbers attending for screening daily. Overcoming delays to invitations for BreastCheck screening is dependent on meeting the critical challenge of staff recruitment and retention.

### Screening in Mullingar and Athlone

We began our last screening rounds in Mullingar and Athlone in late February 2020. Around 80 and 430 women respectively were screened in each unit before screening was paused in March

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)





An tSeirbhís Náisiúnta Scagthástála  
National Screening Service

2020. The majority of women in the round were screened in 2021. The next screening round is now due to begin in Mullingar and Athlone later this year. However, we are taking an equitable approach to managing delayed invitations nationally, targeting the women who have been waiting longest for their invitations. This means that we have been offering women in Athlone and Mullingar who were screened at the beginning of 2020 appointments in the nearest mobile unit (Tullamore), before screening returns to their area.

We understand it may not suit all women to travel to Tullamore for screening. Our participants can contact the BreastCheck Eccles Unit to see if there are any other suitable locations that can accommodate them or ask that their screening appointment be placed on hold until the screening round officially begins in their area.

Our Eccles Unit looks after the scheduling of all appointments for the Westmeath area and will be happy to assist any woman who contacts the service directly regarding her appointment. Women can contact the BreastCheck Eccles unit on 01 8826200; Monday to Friday between 8am–5pm.

### Being breast aware

We continue to emphasise to our participants that BreastCheck is a screening service for well women within the population age range (50-69 years) and is not for women with symptoms. If a person has any concerns or symptoms concerning their breasts, they should not attend screening and should instead contact their GP who will give them the appropriate advice.

It is important that every woman is breast aware. This means knowing what is normal for her so that if any unusual change occurs, she will recognise it. If cancer is found early, treatment is more likely to be successful. It is therefore important for women to get into the habit of looking at and checking their breasts at least on a monthly basis. More information on techniques for checking your breasts is available on [www.breastcheck.ie](http://www.breastcheck.ie)

Women who have additional questions regarding breast screening can contact Freephone 1800 45 45 55 from 9am-6pm, Monday to Friday; or email [info@breastcheck.ie](mailto:info@breastcheck.ie)

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.

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)



An tSeirbhís Náisiúnta Scagthástála  
National Screening Service

