



25 July 2023

Deputy Seán Crowe  
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Our Ref: HM/Communications

**PQ35439/23: To ask the Minister for Health the number of persons who are overdue for cervical screening; and the number of those who have waited for longer than six months.**

**PQ35440/23: To ask the Minister for Health the number of persons who are overdue for bowel screening; and the number of those who have been waited longer than six months.**

**PQ35441/23: To ask the Minister for Health the number of persons who are overdue for BreastCheck screening; and the number of those who have been waiting for longer than six months.**

Dear Deputy,

I refer to the above Parliamentary Questions, which I intend to answer as one. I trust this approach is agreeable.

Ireland's three national cancer screening programmes – BreastCheck, CervicalCheck and BowelScreen – invite people to take part in screening at regular intervals from the time they become eligible for screening.

A screening test is designed for people who do not have symptoms. It aims to identify those who are at a higher risk of developing disease and provides an opportunity for those who have a positive screen to receive further checks and, if needed, go on to diagnosis and treatment.

Uptake of screening is crucial to ensuring screening is effective. It is a priority for us that all eligible people can access our services. Ensuring the delivery of a participant-centred service is a central focus of our new 5-year strategy, [Choose Screening](#).

### **BreastCheck**

BreastCheck invites women aged from 50 to 69 years for breast screening on an area-by-area basis every two years. We call this process a screening 'round'. Our mobile units move around over the course of each round depending on the size of the population that is eligible for screening in each area. The BreastCheck mobile stays in location until all eligible women who are in the catchment area for that mobile unit have been invited.

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. However, along with many public services, BreastCheck was impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic with the programme paused for a total of nine months in 2020/2021. The programme was impacted by both the pauses and subsequent social distancing requirements, which meant that when screening re-started, fewer appointments could be scheduled than would normally be possible.

During the pause in screening, we redeployed BreastCheck services to assist acute hospitals in managing their waiting lists of women with breast symptoms. This temporary redeployment

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of BreastCheck resources enabled high-risk patients with symptoms to be seen quicker, with the aim of improving the outcome of any diagnosis during a time when breast health resources were constrained. You can read more about this [here](#).

Following the pauses in the programme, we have restarted women on their screening journey. The impact of the pauses has meant that some women have received their screening invitation within three years, rather than within two years.

Despite ongoing challenges in recruitment and retention of staff and COVID-19 related absences, BreastCheck is back to nearly normal numbers attending for screening daily. Returning to previous screening intervals is dependent on meeting the critical challenge of staff recruitment and retention.

We do not keep waiting lists for breast screening. BreastCheck screened 156,786 women in 2022.

### **CervicalCheck**

CervicalCheck offers free primary HPV cervical screening every three years to women and people with a cervix aged 25 to 29; and every five years to those aged 30 to 65 years. The programme is up to date with invites for cervical screening and does not hold a waiting list. Once eligible, it is up to each individual to make an appointment with a registered sampletaker. Women can check if they are eligible for their free screening test [here](#).

We do not keep waiting lists for cervical screening. CervicalCheck screened 248,369 women and people with a cervix in 2022.

### **BowelScreen**

People are eligible to take part in the BowelScreen programme once they reach the age of 60. Once the person gives consent they are issued with a FIT kit (screening test) which is a test done at home and returned by post at their convenience.

Colorectal cancer screening is a preventative health opportunity. The primary objective of BowelScreen is to reduce people's risk of developing bowel cancer in the future, by detecting and removing pre-cancerous adenomas in the lining of the bowel. Also, if bowel cancer is found early through bowel screening, it's easier to treat and there's a better chance of recovery.

BowelScreen was paused between March and August 2020 due to the impact of COVID-19. During COVID-19 restrictions, endoscopy services did not operate at full capacity and invitations for screening were delayed by up to a year.

We do not keep waiting lists for bowel screening. BowelScreen screened 125,529 people in 2022.

### **Screening updates**

We provide updates on breast, cervical and bowel screening on [www.breastcheck.ie](http://www.breastcheck.ie), [www.cervicalcheck.ie](http://www.cervicalcheck.ie), and [www.bowelscreen.ie](http://www.bowelscreen.ie) respectively. People can also contact us on Freephone 1800 45 45 55 and by email at [info@breastcheck.ie](mailto:info@breastcheck.ie), [info@cervicalcheck.ie](mailto:info@cervicalcheck.ie), and [info@bowelscreen.ie](mailto:info@bowelscreen.ie).





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National Screening Service

I trust this information is of assistance to you, but should you have any further queries please contact me.

Yours sincerely,

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Fiona Murphy,  
Chief Executive

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