



An tSeirbhís Náisiúnta Scagthástála
National Screening Service

27 March 2023

Deputy Sorca Clarke
sorca.clarke@oireachtas.ie

Our Ref: HM/Communications

PQ13577/23: To ask the Minister for Health when the mobile BreastCheck unit last operated in Mullingar; the reason it will not return to this highly populated area until late in 2023, given that the journey to Tullamore is a 40km roundtrip with irregular and infrequent transport links.

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. The majority of women participating in BreastCheck have their mammogram in one of these units. Three new, fully kitted-out BreastCheck mobile units are now in operation, increasing our capacity to screen around the country. We update our breast screening locations regularly on our website, [here](#).

BreastCheck and the impact of COVID-19

BreastCheck invites eligible 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. Please note that BreastCheck 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).

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

In each screening round we carry out screening from two sites in Westmeath:

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 www.screeningservice.ie



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Mullingar – Springfield Centre, St Loman's Campus, Delvin Road, Mullingar, Co. Westmeath

The Mullingar mobile screening unit commenced its last screening round on the 18 February 2020 with a small amount of people screened prior to the pauses in screening that took place in March 2020 and early 2021. The Mullingar mobile restarted their screening round in July 2021 and completed this round of screening in April 2022.

Athlone – On the grounds of St Vincent's Hospital (beside the Health Centre), Athlone, Co. Westmeath

The Athlone mobile screening unit commenced its last screening round on the 04 February 2020 with a small amount of people screened prior to the pauses in screening that took place in March 2020 and early 2021. The Athlone mobile restarted their screening round after the pauses in screening and completed this round of screening in June 2021.

BreastCheck are managing delayed invitations nationally with an approach that is focused on equity, targeting the people who have been waiting the longest. There is a logistical challenge in offering screening from mobile locations that has been exacerbated by significant pauses in screening that took place in 2020 and again in early 2021.

It is for this reason that due to the small numbers that were screened in January and February 2020 in Athlone and Mullingar, we have taken the decision to offer these participants screening at the earliest opportunity in Tullamore at this time. Regrettably, similar decisions have had to be made in other counties to be able to overcome the challenges posed to the BreastCheck programme due to pauses in screening and to offer people the opportunity to attend at the earliest possible date.

We appreciate that this location may not be suitable to all participants, however the mobile units in Athlone and Westmeath are planned to return to site to commence their next round of screening later in 2023 which will account for the majority of the population in Westmeath. Participants can contact the BreastCheck Eccles Unit to see if there are any other suitable locations that may be more suitable than Tullamore or request that their screening appointment is placed on hold until the mobile unit returns to their nearest location.

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

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and checking their breasts at least on a monthly basis. More information on techniques for checking your breasts is available on 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

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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