



11 April 2023

Deputy Johnny Guirke  
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Our Ref: HM/Communications

**PQ15588/23: To ask the Minister for Health the number of individuals who received an invitation to take part in BreastCheck on a quarterly basis from Q1 2020 and to date in 2023; the percentage of individuals who accepted an invitation and subsequently attended a screening appointment in each of the specified months, in tabular form.**

Dear Deputy,

I refer to the above Parliamentary Question.

### BreastCheck data

The following table shows the number of eligible BreastCheck participants invited in 2019, 2020, 2021, and 2022; and the percentage of those who were screened. We hold this data yearly not quarterly. Please note the programme's national target coverage rate is 70%. The data for 2023 is not yet validated.

	2019	2020	2021	2022
Number of eligible BreastCheck participants invited	234,111	77,691	171,633	214,146
BreastCheck invitees screened (%)	71.6	74.4	72.0	71.6*

\*Figure subject to change as reminder/Did Not Attend appointments issued.

### 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. 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





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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 in 2021, meaning 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.

### 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,

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Fiona Murphy,  
Chief Executive

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