



11 March 2024

Deputy Róisín Shortall
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Our Ref: GM/Communications

PQ9225.24: To ask the Minister for Health the number of individuals who received an invitation to take part in BowelScreen on a quarterly basis from Q1 2016 to the end of 2023; and the absolute number and 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.

People are eligible to take part in the free BowelScreen programme when they reach the age of 59. Once the person gives consent to take part in the screening programme, they are sent a FIT (faecal immunochemical test) kit. The test is done at their home and returned by post at their convenience.

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

BowelScreen invitations

The table below shows the numbers invited and screened by BowelScreen per quarter, and the percentage uptake per quarter from the start of 2016 to the third quarter of 2023. Figures for the final quarter of 2023 are not yet available.

The people screened in a particular quarter are not necessarily those who were invited that quarter. It is normal for a person to be invited in a particular quarter, but be screened in the following quarter, or the one after.

In the following table, uptake refers to people who attended screening up to the end of the quarter following their invitation.

Please note that BowelScreen was paused between March and August 2020 because of the impact of COVID-19. In March 2020, all BowelScreen units stopped scheduling screening colonoscopies, and endoscopy staff were redeployed.



BowelScreen Invitation, Screening and Uptake Figures, 2016-2023

Year		Q1	% uptake	Q2	% uptake	Q3	% uptake	Q4	% uptake
2023	Invited	89,132	49.4%	63,374	51.1%	78,189	44.2%	Not yet available	
	Screened	41,016		41,007		31,979		32,260	
2022	Invited	72,051	39.8%	76,589	41.8%	78,189	50.6%	77,100	38.7%
	Screened	23,770		29,961		38,623		33,175	
2021	Invited	20,140	64.4%	57,264	51.2%	43,591	44.5%	46,403	41.7%
	Screened	19,950		30,353		21,236		19,990	
2020	Invited	38,545	36.7%	0	Not available*	15,594	60.4%	78,251	38.2%
	Screened	21,063		758		5,481		22,587	
2019	Invited	60,682	42.1%	75,402	44.5%	79,105	40.9%	69,766	40.6%
	Screened	24,507		32,545		34,292		31,380	
2018	Invited	72,812	38.7%	74,996	41.1%	50,906	40.3%	50,662	39.6%
	Screened	25,751		34,168		24,046		21,451	
2017	Invited	78,005	41.2%	65,476	39.7%	60,174	42.9%	61,664	43.5%
	Screened	33,324		28,466		30,448		28,526	
2016	Invited	82,276	39.0%	63,882	39.3%	63,119	37.8%	69,249	38.2%
	Screened	27,099		30,436		23,541		27,209	

*BowelScreen was paused between March and August 2020 due to the impact of COVID-19.

Increasing uptake rates

We are focused on increasing uptake rates for bowel cancer screening. In 2023, we conducted a large-scale survey of people aged 60-69 to understand their attitudes to screening, including the barriers and enablers that influence people's decision to accept a screening invitation. This [research](#) showed that levels of knowledge about bowel screening have increased when compared to previous studies. Research findings inform our public campaigns to help eligible people to choose screening.

We ran two large campaigns in 2023, one during Bowel Cancer Awareness Month in April and another from October 2023 to March 2024 highlighting the extension of the age range eligibility to include people aged 59-69 (previously 60-69 years). We will continue this campaign during 2024.

We provide BowelScreen materials in various formats to ensure that the eligible population has access to information on screening. We have information videos available in [25 languages](#) and EasyRead, plain English and photo story [resources](#).



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National Screening Service

We have developed a strategic framework outlining our priority areas for improving equity in screening for the years 2023-2027. Our report [Working to reduce inequity in screening](#) outlines our work in 2022 to improve equity across our screening programmes. This includes the Traveller Health Project where we partner with Pavee Point and the National Cancer Control Programmes to address the cancer prevention, early detection, and screening needs of the Traveller community in the Finglas and Blanchardstown area.

Symptom awareness

We continue to encourage anyone with [symptoms of bowel cancer](#) not to wait for their next screening but to contact their GP who will give them appropriate advice. For other queries, programme participants can call the Freephone information line on 1800 45 45 55; email: info@bowelscreen.ie.

Finally, you may be interested in our [programme reports and publications](#) that provide data about our screening programmes, and information about our work in areas including quality assurance, equity in screening and research.

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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An tSeirbhís Náisiúnta Scagthástála
National Screening Service



An Clár Náisiúnta Scagthástála Ciock
The National Breast Screening Programme



AN CLÁR NÁISIÚNTA SCAGHTÁSTÁLA CERIBHEACS
THE NATIONAL CERVICAL SCREENING PROGRAMME



An Clár Náisiúnta Scagthástála Púitige
The National Bowel Screening Programme



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