



10 July 2024

Deputy Peadar Tóibín  
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Our Ref: HM/Communications

**PQ27315/24: To ask the Minister for Health the number of CervicalCheck smear test samples sent to foreign laboratories for testing in each of the past five years and to date in 2024; and if he can provide this figure as a percentage, in each year, of the number of smear tests carried out by CervicalCheck during that time, in tabular form.**

Dear Deputy,

I refer to the Parliamentary Question above concerning the use of laboratories outside Ireland by our national cervical screening programme, CervicalCheck. In relation to your request relating to the “number of smear test samples”, please note that cervical screening in Ireland changed from cytology screening (‘smear test’) to HPV cervical screening in March 2020. The figures outlined below relate to the number of HPV screening samples in the period.

All our cervical screening samples are processed by one of two quality-assured laboratories. These are: Quest Diagnostics Inc. in the US and the National Cervical Screening Laboratory in Dublin. The quality assurance requirements and standards for our cervical screening programme follow international best practice and are set out in our [Quality Assurance Standards](#). You can read more about the laboratories we use [here](#).

A second laboratory is key to the delivery of a quality-assured national population screening programme. In recent years, the availability of a flexible second laboratory has ensured the continued operation of the national cervical screening programme. This was outlined in the [Review of the Implementation of Recommendations of the Scoping Inquiry into the CervicalCheck Screening](#) in 2022, which found that “there must be provision for back-up cytology laboratory services that can be called upon if an adverse event disables the primary laboratory provision”. We are grateful to both of our laboratory providers for ensuring we continue to meet our key performance indicator of getting result letters to women within four weeks in 90% of cases.

The following table shows the number of CervicalCheck samples, taken in both the community and colposcopy settings that were sent to laboratories outside of Ireland in each of the past five years, and for the first three months of 2024. Later verified data for 2024 is not yet available. The table also shows these numbers of samples as a percentage of all samples taken in that year.



Year	No. of samples sent to lab outside Ireland	Percentage of all CervicalCheck samples
2019*	170,745	71.94
2020	156,995	96.17
2021	310,064	88.50
2022	272,148	99.98
2023	247,368	96.37
2024 (01 January – 31 March)	53,939	85.25

\*We used two laboratories outside of Ireland to process samples until mid-2019

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.