



An tSeirbhís Náisiúnta Scagthástála
National Screening Service

9 November 2023

Deputy Róisín Shortall
Roisin.Shortall@oireachtas.ie

Our ref: GM/Communications

PQ48092/23: To ask the Minister for Health the percentage of cervical screening samples that will be processed in the National Cervical Screening Laboratory at the Coombe, now that the service has resumed; the percentage that will continue to be outsourced to secondary laboratory contractors; the timeline he is working towards for increasing the number of cervical screening samples processed at the National Cervical Screening Laboratory and ending the overreliance on secondary laboratory contractors; and if he will make a statement on the matter.

Dear Deputy,

I refer to the above Parliamentary Question.

The National Cervical Screening Laboratory at The Coombe Hospital resumed processing CervicalCheck screening samples on Tuesday 24 October. The laboratory processes around 10% of all CervicalCheck programme slides. A second laboratory processes around 90% of programme slides. Since resumption the national lab has been building back up to its target volume.

All CervicalCheck samples go to one of two quality-assured lab providers. These are: Quest Diagnostics Inc in the US; and the National Cervical Screening Laboratory at The Coombe Hospital 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](#).

There will always be a requirement for a second laboratory in a quality-assured national population screening programme. Maintaining a second supplier ensures that, in all eventualities, the screening programme continues to deliver for women.

In his [Review of the Implementation of Recommendations of the Scoping Inquiry into the CervicalCheck Screening](#) in November 2022, Dr Gabriel Scally recommended using two laboratories, saying “there must be provision for back-up cytology laboratory services that can be called upon if an adverse event disables the primary laboratory provision”.

The long-term aim is for the National Cervical Screening Laboratory to become the main processor of CervicalCheck samples, though it has been widely acknowledged that reaching that point will take a number of years. This means that recruitment of skilled staff will remain a top priority as the National Cervical Screening Laboratory increases the number of CervicalCheck samples it receives.

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BreastCheck
An Clár Náisiúnta Scagthástála Cerebheacs
The National Breast Screening Programme



CervicalCheck
AN CLÁR NÁISIÚNTA SCAGTHÁSTÁLA CEREBHEACS
THE NATIONAL CERVICAL SCREENING PROGRAMME



BowelScreen
An Clár Náisiúnta Scagthástála Puitéige
The National Bowel Screening Programme



Diabetic RetinaScreen
An Clár Náisiúnta Scagthástála Retine do Dhiabaitigh
The National Diabetic Retinal Screening Programme



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A key factor for the long-term success of the national lab is the availability and recruitment of cytopathology staff, namely consultant cytopathologists and cytology medical scientists, in the face of increased market demand and the continued decline of the cytology industry in Ireland and globally.

Commissioning two laboratories is key to the delivery of a quality-assured national population screening programme. In recent years, the availability and capability of a flexible laboratory has ensured the continued operation of the national cervical screening programme. We are grateful to 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.

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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