



15 July 2024

Deputy Aindrias Moynihan
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Our Ref: GM/Communications

PQ29762/24: To ask the Minister for Health the number of Cervical Check smear testing samples contracted out to foreign laboratories for testing for the years 2022, 2023 and to the end of June 2024; to provide these figures also as a percentage for the same time periods of the total number of smear tests carried out by Cervical Check, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter.

Dear Deputy,

I refer to the above Parliamentary Question. In relation to your reference to “smear testing 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 all of our laboratory providers for ensuring we continue to meet our target 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 our laboratory partner outside of Ireland in 2022 and 2023, 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
2022	272,148	99.98
2023	247,368	96.37
2024 (01 January – 31 March)	53,939	85.25

I trust this information is of assistance to you, but should you have any further queries please

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An tSeirbhís Náisiúnta Scagthástála
National Screening Service

contact me.

Yours sincerely,

Fiona Murphy,
Chief Executive

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