

Screening Matters

December, 2025

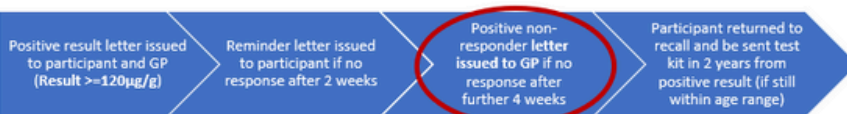


In this edition of Screening Matters:

- Bowel Cancer Screening Programme Positive Non-Responders
- Cervical Screening: General Information Update
- Cervical Screening following Radiotherapy
- Promoting Informed Choice in Breast Screening
- Very High Risk (VHR) Breast Surveillance Screening - guidance changes

BOWEL SCREENING PROGRAMME POSITIVE NON-RESPONDERS

N.I. Bowel Cancer Screening invites participants every two years, via post, to complete a home FIT test kit. Positive non-responders are participants who have **received a positive FIT screening result** ($\geq 120 \mu\text{g/g}$) **but have not contacted the freephone helpline** to arrange further assessment. A positive result identifies a participant as having an increased risk of having bowel cancer due to the detection of blood in the sample and warrants further investigation. Screening can detect cancer early, before symptoms, and can also detect polyps that can develop into cancer over time. Removing polyps can reduce the chance of developing bowel cancer in the future.



- Early investigation is vital to ensure the disease is detected at the most treatable stage
- Your encouragement can help ensure participants in the bowel screening programme understand the importance of completing the diagnostic pathway and can help improve outcomes
- Participants can contact the freephone helpline at anytime to arrange an appointment with the Specialist Screening Practitioner (SSP)
- Approximately 7 participants in N.I. identified weekly as a positive non-responder

Your input here could improve patient outcomes!

A brief text message, telephone call, or opportunistic discussion by GP or practice team may encourage participation and prevent delayed diagnosis.

Cervical Screening: General Information Update

The PHA receive queries from staff and participants working in or accessing the Cervical Screening Programme. Some key themes raised in the last number of weeks include:

Women with symptoms:

- The cervical screening pathway is not appropriate for women presenting with symptoms. Symptomatic cases should be actioned in line with agreed symptomatic pathways.

What is screening:

- Research has shown that many women believe cervical screening also checks for other cancers, such as ovary, womb, vulval or vaginal. Smear takers can help by ensuring that all women are fully informed when attending for their smear test.

Communication of results:

- Results are issued from the new Laboratory Information Management System to GP Practices electronically.
- Once received the GP Practice should communicate the results to participants in a timely manner. Template results letters are available on our website [Resources for Health Professionals | Cancer Screening Northern Ireland](#)

Turnaround times since the introduction of the Regional Laboratory:

- Current turnaround time for the majority of results is approximately 2-4 weeks.
- All samples received prior to 10th September 2025 have been reported by the laboratory and results will have been issued to GP Practices for all cases prior to this date.

Screening Matters

December, 2025

Very High Risk (VHR) Breast Surveillance - guidance changes

The VHR Programme invites women identified as being at higher risk of developing breast cancer for surveillance screening.

NI have recently implemented revised guidance, published by NHS England. This guidance has resulted in changes to:

- review of background radiodensity for women aged 50 to 70,
- additional proven pathogenic variants in high-risk genes,
- changes to the management of women aged 71 and over,
- age extension of women who had radiotherapy to sites involving breast tissue (formerly referred to as ‘supra-diaphragmatic radiotherapy’) from age 10-29 to 10-35 eligible for the programme.

Women aged over 71 years are no longer invited for VHR surveillance screening, but rather may self-refer for annual screening.

Further information is available on the [Cancer Screening Website](#). A [leaflet](#) for the public is also available on our website. Please contact Amy McGowan, Programme Manager, amy.mcgowan@hscni.net if you have any queries.

Cervical Screening following Radiotherapy

Individuals who have been treated with radiotherapy to their cervix are generally expected to cease from further cervical screening. This is because radiotherapy can lead to late side effects, such as changes to the cervix, which may not be detectable through standard screening methods.

Business Services Organisation call / recall team can only action an instruction to cease from cervical screening if it is issued by the individuals GP or from the colposcopy service.

A GP can request an individual is ceased for radiotherapy by emailing the call / recall team on screening.bso@hscni.net.

Once an individual is ceased they will not be issued any further letters from BSO call / recall inviting them to attend for screening as part of the NI Cervical Screening Programme.

Promoting Informed Choice in Breast Screening

The PHA Breast Screening Team, in partnership with Breast Screening Units, Trusts and other stakeholders, work to ensure that all eligible women in Northern Ireland can make an informed choice about attending for breast screening and that the service is as accessible as possible.

GPs play an important role in enabling women to make an informed choice about participation in breast screening. Breast Screening Promoting Informed Choice Teams within Trusts can identify and work alongside local GP practices with low uptake rates. Examples of work include:

- Setting up promotional stands in GP surgeries;
- Using digital information boards and text messaging to remind eligible patients of the availability of breast screening;
- Providing breast screening information packs for GPs;
- Virtual breast screening information sessions for GPs;
- Providing breast screening posters to be advertised on GP practice Facebook pages.

Contact Details

The contact details for the Promoting Informed Choice Leads within each Breast Screening Unit are listed below. For further information, please contact the lead in the relevant area or visit the [Public Health Agency Cancer Screening Team](#) webpage.

Promoting Informed Choice Leads in the Northern Ireland Breast Screening Programme

Breast Screening Unit	Lead	Contact Number	Email Address
Eastern	Paula Kennedy	02890333700	breastscreeninglhst@belfasttrust.hscni.net
Northern	Suzy Moore	02894424425	breast.screening@northerntrust.hscni.net
Southern	Christine Robinson	02837560820	breast.screening@southerntrust.hscni.net
Western	AnnMarie Wilson	02871611443	altnagelvin.breastscreening@westerntrust.hscni.net