

An Overview of Breast Cancer Screening Programme

The breast screening programme covers the whole of Northern Ireland. Women aged 50 to 70, who are registered with a GP, are invited every three years.

So you may be invited for the first time, either:

- the year you turn 50 (so you may still be 49 or 50)
- before your 52nd birthday (the year you turn 51)
- before your 53rd birthday (the year you turn 52)

In order to be invited women must ensure that their GP has their correct name and current address on their computer system.

When you receive an invitation to attend for breast screening:

- Read the information leaflet that comes with the invitation. It is called **[Northern Ireland: Helping you Decide Leaflet and can be found by clicking here](#)** If you want more information or advice speak with your GP
- If you have special requirements speak to the breast screening unit
- Plan in advance how you will get to the appointment on the day, including transport, time off work, someone to look after the children or other dependents. If the appointment doesn't suit you phone the breast screening unit and arrange to attend at a different time

Resources:

- Publications section of PHA site - A series of information leaflets published in various languages is available on the publications section of this website ([search terms breast screening](#))
- NIdirect website - [Breast screening overview](#); [NI Direct - Breast Screening](#)
- Pioneering charity Beyond Words has updated its wordless picture stories about bowel cancer screening, breast screening and cervical screening. These resources are available at [Free downloads — Beyond Words](#) (booksbeyondwords.co.uk) They are accessible to everyone, whether or not they can read words.

Video - breast screening video

The Breast Screening programme has produced a video to show what happens when women attend their appointment for a mammogram.

To view the video click [here](#)

Available also in:

- [British sign language](#)
- [Irish sign language](#)

Video - breast screening video for individuals with learning disabilities

The Clinical Nurse Specialist team at Avon Breast Screening has in collaboration with Biggerhouse film, produced a film by and for women with learning disabilities, to take the fear out of going for breast screening.

This is a breast screening film for women with learning disabilities, showing clearly what happens during the process of having a mammogram. Whilst breast screening is always an individual choice, the film is intended to take the fear out of going for breast screening and encourage women with learning disabilities to come and have the test.

The film can be watched in full, or in short segments, showing different aspects of the screening journey. To watch the film click [here](#)

Breast surveillance screening for women with a very high risk of breast cancer

Breast surveillance screening is offered to women who have been assessed by a specialist in genetics, family history or oncology and are considered at very high risk of breast cancer. Women may have an increased risk of developing breast cancer because of a genetic disorder (usually BRCA) or because they had radiotherapy to their chest when younger.

Women in the Very High Risk Breast Surveillance Screening Programme may:

- be offered annual mammography, MRI, or both, depending on age and specific level of risk
- begin screening at an earlier age than routine breast screening
- attend for screening at a Specialist Imaging Unit in Antrim Area Hospital
- arrange to attend their local screening unit for surveillance screening (if only mammography screening is required)

In September 2020, the programme title was changed to reflect national guidance. Although the title changed from the 'Higher Risk Breast Surveillance Screening Programme' to the 'Very High Risk Breast Surveillance Screening Programme', this does not indicate any increase in cancer risk for those in the programme.

If you think you may have an increased risk of breast cancer talk to your GP so you can be referred to a hospital Family History Clinic. The clinic may refer you for genetic testing if they feel it's appropriate.

Further information:

- Patient information leaflet for the [Very High Risk Breast Screening Programme](#)
- The Very High Risk Breast Screening Unit at Antrim Hospital may be contacted on: **028 9442 4426**
- BRCA Link NI is a voluntary organisation helping people to access information and support about BRCA genetic mutations whilst raising awareness of Hereditary Cancers linked within families who are at risk **www.brcani.co.uk**, **info@brcani.co.uk**.
- For more information on breast cancer genetics, including a support telephone line, please visit: **www.breastcancergenetics.co.uk**
- NIdirect website - [Breast screening overview](#); [NI Direct - Breast Screening](#)

[Data protection - frequently asked questions](#)

Where did you obtain my contact details?

For routine breast screening, your details were obtained from your GP's list, so it is important that he or she has your correct name, address and date of birth. GP practices are contacted, in turn, every 3 years so you will not necessarily get your

invitation in the year that you turn 50. As long as you are registered with your GP, you will be invited for breast screening by your 53rd birthday.

For women with a very high risk of breast cancer, your details were shared with the Very High Risk Breast Screening Unit at Antrim Hospital by your referring Health Professional.

How is my screening information used?

Screening records are regularly reviewed in order to monitor and improve the quality of the programme and to increase the expertise of specialist staff. This is an important part of any screening programme. Staff working for the Northern Ireland breast screening programme may see and review your records. If you need any further information on how your records are kept and shared, you can contact the Public Health Agency, Young Person and Adult Screening Team on **0300 555 0114**.

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