

COVID-19 Impact on Breast Cancer Screening Programme

Routine breast cancer screening was temporarily paused for four months in 2020. This was in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The number of women the programme can currently screen is reduced due to the need for social distancing and appropriate infection control measures. This has led to a backlog of women awaiting screening. The programme is working to address this issue.

Invitation for screening

If you or any members of your household have any symptoms of COVID-19 or are currently self-isolating after being diagnosed with COVID-19, please do not attend your appointment. Also, do not attend if you live in the same household as someone with COVID-19 symptoms or you have been identified as a close contact of someone who has tested positive for COVID-19; even if you are fully vaccinated. If this applies to you, please contact us to reschedule for a different time. Further information can be found online at: [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): testing and isolation advice | nidirect](#)

FAQs

What Infection control measures are in place?

We have implemented infection control measures in accordance with national guidance. Personal protective equipment (PPE) is used by the staff for every mammogram. Please **wear a face covering to attend your appointment**. If you wear disposable surgical gloves you will be asked to remove these and sanitise your hands before entering the breast screening unit. Equipment and furniture will be cleaned after each client and we have extended our appointment times accordingly.

What about social distancing?

We aim to reduce contact at appointments. We are asking that you come at the designated time, not earlier or later. Hand sanitisers are available prior to entering the unit. If your appointment is for the mobile, we would encourage people to remain in their vehicle until their appointment time where possible and to be prepared for a potential wait outside in any inclement weather. If your appointment is at the static unit please report to reception.

Can I bring someone with me to my screening appointment?

We would ask that, where possible, clients attend their appointments on their own. In exceptional circumstances it may be possible to have a carer or family member present this will be treated on a case by case basis.

What can I do while I wait for my screening appointment?

It's important to be symptom aware. See your GP if you notice any changes that aren't normal for you, especially if the changes are only in one breast.

Breast changes to look out for include:

- changes in appearance, size or outline of either breast, especially those caused by arm movement
- any puckering, dimpling or redness of the skin or veins that stand out more than usual
- any lumps or thickening in either breast that feels different from the other breast
- any swelling or lumps under your armpit or around your collarbone
- changes to your nipples, including nipples that have become pulled in, changed shape or show signs of discharge, bleeding, rash or crusted, flaky skin

For more information see our leaflet on [Breast Awareness](#)

These symptoms don't mean that you have breast cancer, but if you have them, make an appointment to see your GP immediately.

I have been invited to attend for further assessment. Should I still attend my appointment?

Yes. It is important that you attend your assessment appointment. If you are concerned about attending, or you'd like to discuss your attendance with a member of our clinical team, please phone the breast screening unit. The number to phone is on your assessment letter. In addition, the contact numbers for each of the breast screening unit are given below. Please quote your SX number, beginning with CS0, on any correspondence (located on bottom left-hand corner of the invitation letter). Also note due to COVID-19 restrictions, refreshments in the waiting area will not be available at this time.

If you or any members of your household have any symptoms of COVID-19, or are currently self-isolating after being diagnosed with COVID-19, please do not attend your appointment. Also do not attend if you live in the same household as someone with COVID-19 symptoms or you have been identified as a close contact of someone who has tested positive for COVID-19; even if you are fully vaccinated. If this applies to you, please contact your breast screening unit to reschedule for a different time.

In exceptional circumstances it may be possible to have a carer or family member present. Please contact us on the telephone number on your assessment letter to discuss this. In most cases you will have all your tests performed and results will be given on the day.

I normally attend the Very High Risk Breast Surveillance Screening Programme; will I still be called for my appointment?

This programme was not paused and has continued to run as normal. Women who require mammography only may have their screening at their local breast screening unit.

If you or any members of your household are experiencing COVID-19 symptoms, or are self-isolating, please do not attend your appointment. If this applies to you, contact the Unit at Antrim Hospital to reschedule for a different time. Please quote your SX no. beginning with CS0 on any correspondence (located on bottom left- hand corner of the invitation letter).

I am over 70 can I still self-refer?

Yes. We have re-introduced breast cancer screening for women over 70 who self-refer. However, this position will be kept under review in light of further impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Eastern Area Breast Screening Unit 12-22 Linenhall Street Belfast BT2 8BS Tel: 028 9033 3700	Northern Area Breast Screening Unit Level A Antrim Area Hospital 45 Bush Road Antrim BT41 2RL Tel: 028 9442 4425
Western Area Breast Screening Unit Glenshane Road Londonderry BT47 6SB Tel: 028 7161 1443	Southern Area Breast Screening Unit The Maples Craigavon Area Hospital Lurgan Road Craigavon BT63 5QQ Tel: 028 3756 0820

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.

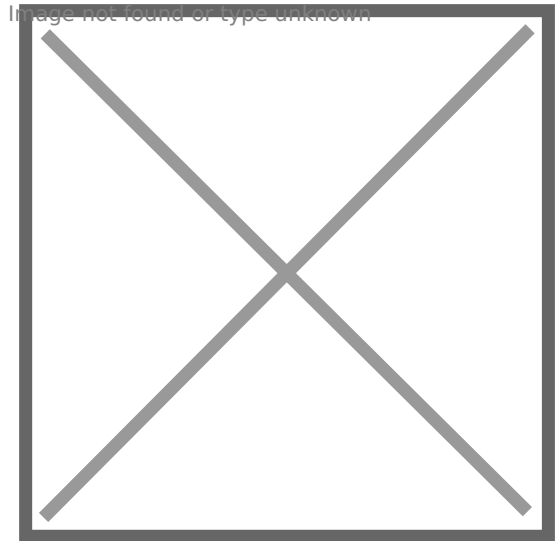
So you may be invited for the first time, either:

- 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



A series of information leaflets is available on the publications section of this website by clicking [here](#)

For more information on breast screening please also see [NI Direct - Breast Screening](#)

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 for women 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](#)

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 \(booksbeyondwords.co.uk\)](https://booksbeyondwords.co.uk)

They are accessible to everyone, whether or not they can read words.

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

[Print](#)