

21 March 2023

Cervical Screenings

I was wondering if you could answer the following questions:

1. What was the waiting time for smear test results in 2019?

Waiting time in 2019 was approximately three to four weeks.

2. What is the current waiting time for smear test results? How has COVID-19 affected these waiting times and when does the Trust hope for the service to return to normal?

The approximate reporting time for cervical cytology screening results at Belfast Trust is up to 2 weeks for urgent cases, and approximately 9 weeks for routine cases (practitioners are asked to allow 12 weeks before contacting the Lab as additional tests may be required).

The NI Cervical Screening Programme was paused during COVID-19. The time of the programme re-start unfortunately coincided with a regional reduction in the number of trained scientific staff, due to retirements and career changes.

Waiting times are unlikely to reduce regionally until the Public Health Agency has introduced primary HPV screening.

3. What is the current waiting time for a colposcopy appointment?

Colposcopy New Routine: Longest waiter Feb 23 and 28 patients on the list

Colposcopy New Urgent: Longest waiter Feb 23 and 16 patients on the list.

Red Flag Colposcopy: Approximately 4 weeks

4. Has COVID-19 affected these waiting times?

Routine colposcopy was paused during Covid and the urgent service continued. Clinic templates were reduced slightly as per the Belfast Trust Covid Risk Assessments and health and safety.

5. What is the current waiting time for treatments such as LLETZ and cone biopsy? How many people are on this waiting list?

There are currently 26 LLETZ procedures on waiting list.

Waiting time for day case is 4 to 5 weeks.

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There is one LLETZ with plasma jet procedure waiting 3 months for an inpatient date. This case is brought to scheduling each week and, so far, has not been highest priority for a TCI date.

- 6. England, Scotland and Wales now use HPV primary screening as the testing method on samples collected at cervical screenings, does the Trust have any plans to introduce this type of screening?**

The Northern Ireland Cervical Screening Programme is run by the Public Health Agency. Implementation of primary HPV screening is being planned regionally by this organisation.