



Update on the English National Breast Screening Programme in Kent and Medway,
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NHS England and NHS Improvement - South East Region

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Breast screening is undertaken every three years for women aged 50 to 71 and mainly operates from eight mobile screening units (vans) which move around Kent and Medway. Screening is also carried out at Medway Maritime Hospital (which also covers the Dartford area), the Kent and Canterbury Hospital and Maidstone Hospital.

Services were operating routinely until March 2020 when the [NHS](#) was asked to conduct routine and diagnostic appointments remotely, where possible, to protect both staff and patients. Breast screening involves direct contact with women and cannot be conducted remotely, so a decision was taken to pause until patients could be seen in a COVID secure way with the exception of high risk women who continued to be screened at our hospital sites.

The changes involved refurbishing mobile units and adjusting appointment times to accommodate social distancing and increased cleaning. Prior to COVID we had around 2,000 appointment slots a week where women could be screened. The COVID secure changes mean appointment slots are currently reduced to 1,300 a week. In addition, as a result of the pause, there has been an increase in the numbers of women waiting to be called for the first time and in those due to be recalled for follow-up appointments.

We are working hard to reduce the number of women waiting for appointments and expect this to happen by May 2021 in Canterbury, June 2021 in Medway and with further intensive work required in Maidstone.

Screening for those re-scheduled during lockdown restarted at all three hospital sites by the end of July 2020 in line with advice [in our national Phase three letter](#) to restart all cancer screening programmes. From mid-August six of the eight vans came back into operation following refurbishment. A further refurbished mobile unit will come back on stream on Monday 9 November and a new replacement van for Medway will be operational from January. The service at Medway Hospital has also been expanded.

In addition, women are now asked to make contact to book an appointment rather than being given a fixed time. This increases the numbers attending, reduces the risk of missed appointments and maximises the capacity we have available – with 97% of women who have booked attending their appointment.

Patient safety remains our priority whilst at the same time exploring ways, working with Cancer Alliances, Clinical Directors, regional and national teams to seek innovative solutions to provide high quality cancer screening services that can meet future demands while the NHS responds to further surges of Covid.

The restoration of NHS screening services is a priority for NHS England. We will continue to monitor attendance and uptake of services and use interventions to ensure a maximum number of women are seen.

To encourage attendance for cancer screening the NHS ran a campaign in May. A further publicity campaign, 'Help Us Help You', was launched nationally and regionally to run throughout November to again encourage patients to seek help if they have concerns and build confidence in the safety of NHS services.

With the dynamic way in which we are working, the number of patients we are able to see and the number who are waiting does frequently change and so it is not possible to give an exact number until data has been verified and published by [NHS Digital](#). We will gladly return to discuss progress with members at a future meeting.