**Information about the offer of a breast screen for women aged 70-79, May 2018**

Some women aged between 70 and 79 are being offered the opportunity for a breast screen. The offer of a screen comes after some women did not receive an invitation for a final screen, as part of the routine NHS Breast Screening Programme.

The Breast Screening Programme usually invites women to have a screen once every three years when aged between 50 and 70 (up to their 71st birthday). This means women will usually receive their final screen sometime between their 68th and 71st birthdays.

Most women can be reassured that they will have received their final invitation but there are some women, now aged between 70 – 79 years, who have missed an invitation due to a problem which dates back to 2009.

We are very sorry this has happened and we are now offering the opportunity for a further screen. We will be writing to all affected women registered with a GP by the end of May with further information. **A helpline is also available: 0800 169 2692**.

**How do I know if I did not receive my final screening invitation?**

All women affected who are registered with a GP are being offered the opportunity for a screen and will be informed by letter from Public Health England (PHE) by the end of May 2018.

Women affected aged up to their 72nd birthday will receive a letter inviting them for a catch up screen.

Other women, those aged 72-79, will receive a letter providing clear information on what to do next if they choose to have a screen (see ‘Making a decision about whether or not to have a screen below’).

These women, aged 72-79, will be asked to contact the helpline on 0800 169 2692 (set up to support women about this issue) who will link with their local Breast Screening Service to arrange an appointment and invitation letter on their behalf.

Women, aged 70 -79, currently registered with a GP, who do not receive a letter from PHE can be assured they are not affected and do not need a catch-up screen.

However**, if you are not currently registered with a GP** and believe you did not receive an invitation for a screen sometime between your 68th - 71st birthdays then we advise that you get in touch with the helpline on **0800 169 2692**.

**Making your decision about whether or not to have a screen**

We do not routinely invite women aged 71 or over for breast screening because the benefits of this are unclear. Women over the age of 71 years can however make their own appointments for breast screening every three years if they wish.

Our experts say the research evidence is uncertain about the benefits and harms of breast screening for a woman of your age. For some older women, screening may diagnose and treat a breast problem that would never go on to cause harm if left alone. We call this ‘over diagnosis’. As women get older, there is a higher chance of ‘over diagnosis’ than there is of having their life saved by screening.

To help with your decision you may find it helpful to read the following leaflet: [Breast Screening For Women Over 70](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/breast-screening-for-women-over-70)

**If you have noticed any changes to your breasts**

If you have noticed any changes to your breasts or had any breast symptoms, then please do go and see your GP. See below for more information on breast cancer symptoms.

**Women who have developed breast cancer**

If you are over 70 and have developed breast cancer we understand finding out you did not receive an invitation for a screen at the right time may be upsetting.

Our experts say that in many cases missing a single breast screen at around 70 years of age is unlikely to make a significant difference to the course of a woman’s breast cancer diagnosis and treatment. However, we understand the importance of looking at your individual case to see if it has affected you.

If you would like to discuss this with a nurse, please ring our free helpline on **0800 169 2692.** Please tell the helpline operator you have breast cancer and they will be able to support you.

**Getting support and advice**

We understand that finding out we did not send your invitation for screening at the right time might be upsetting for those women affected and apologise for a fault in the system that has led to invitations not being sent at the scheduled time.

For further information, see the FAQs below. A dedicated advice line has been set up for the women affected and also for those that think they did not receive an invitation - **call 0800 169 2692** if you need further support and advice.

As usual, all women should continue to be aware of any changes to their breasts and if they have any concerns then they should see their GP.

**FAQs**

**How will I know if I missed a screen?**

The women who have missed a screening invitation will now be aged between 70 -79 years. Women being offered the opportunity for a screen will be informed by letter from Public Health England by the end of May 2018. If you choose to take up the offer of a screen, information on what you need to do will be provided in your letter.

**What should I do now?**

As usual, you should continue to be aware of any changes to your breasts and if you have any concerns you should see your GP.

If you **do not** receive a letter from PHE by the end of May 2018, and are registered with a GP in England, you can be reassured that you did not miss a screen.

If you **do** receive a letter from PHE informing you that you are affected, you will be offered the opportunity for a screen. To help you choose you may find it helpful to read the following leaflet: [Breast Screening For Women Over 70](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/breast-screening-for-women-over-70)

If you do choose to have a screen, information on what you need to do will be provided in your letter.

**Should I contact my GP?**

You do not need to contact your GP as all women affected will receive a letter from PHE by the end of May, which will provide information about what you need to do if you choose to have a screen.

At all times women should continue to be aware of any changes to their breasts and if changes occur, then you should see your GP.

**Why wasn’t I sent my screening appointment at the right time?**

During work to upgrade the NHS Breast Screening computerised invitation system, PHE identified a number of complex issues, which overtime have contributed to variations in how local breast screening services send out their invitations.

The issues identified have only impacted on invitations to women when they were at the upper age limit of the programme, aged 68 – 71 years.

**What is being done to ensure breast screening invitations are issued on schedule in future?**

Urgent work has been carried out on the computerised invitation system and an additional failsafe has been introduced to ensure that the problem does not reoccur.

We are confident that all the issues have now been fixed and no further women will be affected. All the women registered with a GP in England who did not receive their final invitation will be written to by PHE and offered the opportunity for a catch up screen.

**Is anyone under age 70 or over 80 affected?**

No. A thorough review of the NHS breast screening invitation system has shown that only a small proportion of women at the upper age limit of the NHS programme, who were aged between 70 -71 years were affected.

**What are the symptoms for breast cancer?**

* a lump in the breast
* a change in the size or shape of the breast
* dimpling of the skin or thickening in the breast tissue
* a nipple that’s turned in (inverted)
* a rash (like eczema) on the nipple
* discharge from the nipple
* swelling or a lump in the armpit
* pain or discomfort in the breast that doesn’t go away.

A lump in the breast is the most common symptom of breast cancer.

Most breast lumps are not cancer. They are usually fluid-filled lumps (cysts) or a fibroadenoma, made up of fibrous and glandular tissue. But it is important to get anything that is unusual for you checked by your GP. The earlier breast cancer is treated, the more successful treatment is likely to be.

For more information on the symptoms please see:

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/breast-cancer/symptoms/>

For general information about the NHS breast screening service, including when screening is needed, see [here.](https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/breast-cancer-screening/)