

SCREENING FOR BREAST CANCER



Embætti landlæknis
Directorate of Health

Screening invitation

Breast cancer is the leading cancer in women in Iceland. On average, 260 Icelandic women (in most cases older than 50) are diagnosed with breast cancer every year. Women aged 40-74 years are invited to breast cancer screening.

This brochure provides further information on screening, allowing you to decide whether to respond to the invitation.

The health authorities recommend the screening based on a comprehensive assessment of useful and harmful effects. However, it is important that you make up your mind.

Self-examination of breasts is also an important preventative measure. Women who regularly examine their breasts tend to notice if anything has changed. You should contact a physician if you find a lump during self-examination.

Seek the advice of a physician regarding this screening invitation if you are already undergoing treatment for a breast disease.

If you are not sure when your last screening was, you can seek information about your most recent screening on www.heilsuvera.is (view your electronic medical file) or obtain information from the Co-ordination Centre for Cancer Screening (Samhæfingarstöð krabbameinsskimana) or Breast Centre (Brjóstamiðstöð Landspítala).

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The guidelines are based on the Danish guidelines, *Tilbud om screening for brystkræft*, published by Sundhedsstyrelsen, 2018.

What is screening?

Breast screening is an examination of symptom-free women.

The purpose of the screening is to diagnose the disease during its early stages, offer treatment options and prevent women from dying from breast cancer.

Screening is not a comprehensive investigation of breast cancer, and even if you undergo screening, you may have or get breast cancer. As a result, you must always contact a physician if you become aware of symptoms.

Further information on how to book an appointment can be found on the website; skimanir.is.

If you do not want to receive an invitation to cancer screening, please contact the Co-ordination Centre for Cancer Screening or Breast Centre. If you change your mind about that decision, you can always contact us again and let us know. If two years or more have passed since the last screening, you can make an appointment for breast screening without an invitation.

Advantages

- **Lower breast cancer mortality rates:** Simpler treatments are available when cancer is diagnosed early. When you undergo screening, you are also reducing the risk of dying from breast cancer.
- **Simpler treatment:** When cancer is diagnosed early, it is more likely you can undergo a simpler and less invasive breast surgery (segmental mastectomy) and avoid armpit lymph node removal.
- **Reduced risk of needing drug therapy:** At the same time, there is less risk that you will need to undergo drug therapy after surgery if the cancer is detected early.

Disadvantages

- **False positive screening:** If your screening results give rise to suspected breast cancer, you will be invited for further examination. This does not necessarily mean that you have breast cancer. The cause may be benign changes in the breasts or dense breast tissue. This is called a false positive result.
- **Overtreatment:** Screening may show a mass in the breast, which otherwise would not have affected your life. Therefore, when you participate in screening, there is a risk that you will receive unnecessary treatment.
- **Anxiety:** The wait for results can cause fear and anxiety. Consult a nurse if you feel anxious.
- **False sense of safety:** Even if no breast cancer is suspected after the screening procedure, you may have, or may develop breast cancer. The screening image may show a false negative, i.e. does not detect a malignancy that is present. Therefore, it is important to do regular breast self-examination.

Screening procedure

The screening process involves taking an x-ray of both breasts (mammogram). A radiographer performs the examination while radiologists examine your images. Some women experience some discomfort and pain during the screening process, as the breast is compressed during the examination. But otherwise, the test is safe.

If there is no suspicion of breast cancer after the screening, you will receive an invitation for a new screening after two years.

If there is suspicion of breast cancer after the screening, you will receive an invitation for further examination (clinical breast examination).

Breast implants do not usually interfere with the performance of breast screening. This may depend, however, on the positioning of the implant, i.e. whether it is front or behind the pectoral muscles. It is important to let the radiographer know if you have breast implants, then less pressure is used when taking the x-ray and additional images are taken.



Further checks

If cancer is suspected after screening, you will be invited for further examination (clinical breast examination) within 14 days. A physician will carry out such examination, usually by means of an ultrasound. It may be necessary to take additional X-rays and aspiration or a tissue sample.

If you reject the clinical breast examination, you will still be invited for a new breast screening appointment after two years.

POSSIBLE RESULTS FROM FURTHER EXAMINATION

Clinical Breast Examination

- **No sign of cancer:** Nothing abnormal was seen in your breasts. The reason for such suspicion may result from benign changes or dense breast tissue. You will be invited again to screening in accordance with the screening instructions.
- **You have cancer:** If breast cancer is discovered, you will be referred to the physicians of Landspítali University Hospital for further treatment.

PREGNANT WOMEN AND BREAST-FEEDING WOMEN

- Breast screening is not recommended for symptom-free women during pregnancy and not until three months after cessation of breast-feeding.

Screening statistics

Breast cancer statistics in ICELAND 2018-2022

- An average of 260 women are diagnosed yearly with breast cancer.
- The average age when diagnosed is 62 years.
- An average of 49 women die each year.

How do I book an appointment for breast screening?

You can make an appointment at the **Breast Centre** (Brjóstamiðstöð Landspítala) by phone or email.

Telephone: **543-9560** between 9:00-15:30 Monday – Friday.

Email: brjostaskimun@landspitali.is

You will receive an invitation from The Co-ordination Centre for Cancer Screening (Samhæfingarstöð krabbameinsskimana) but you must book appointments.

Results from screenings can be found on heilsuvera.is and island.is within three weeks.

Where do screenings take place?

In Reykjavík, breast cancer screening takes place in the Breast centre (Brjóstamiðstöð), Eiríksgata 5.

In Akureyri, the service is located at Akureyri Hospital, entrance C.

Breast cancer screening is also carried out regularly in rural areas in spring and autumn. Dates appear on the website skimanir.is when available.

FURTHER INFORMATION

If you have any questions regarding breast screening, you can ask your physician or check out the following websites:

www.heilsuvera.is • Healthcare centre and the Directorate of Health

www.skimanir.is • Co-ordination Centre for Cancer Screening

www.krabb.is • Icelandic Cancer Society