

FOI 2378

19/06/24

---

**FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT 2000 – INFORMATION REQUEST**

---

**Q1: In the years 2013 – 2023, how many patients were given incorrect smear test results? Can you please supply the figure for each year as well as a cumulative total?**

**Response:**

This information is not available. Smear test samples are not routinely reviewed again once a result is issued.

**Q2: In the years 2013 – 2023, how many women got cancer as a result of a misleading smear test result? Can you please supply the figure for each year as well as a cumulative total?**

**Response:**

Every year there are about 80 new cases of cervical cancer in Northern Ireland.

It is important to note that a direct causal link between a smear test result and a death from cervical cancer cannot be assumed. Cervical screening is designed to identify those who may be at risk of developing cancer but it will only pick up 75% of abnormalities. Screening does not cause cervical cancer but it provides an opportunity for it to be identified early in many cases.

The screening history of patients diagnosed with cervical cancer is reviewed for learning and improvement purposes. This is undertaken in line with the Framework for the Audit of Invasive Cervical Cancers and Disclosure of Findings, 2019 and involves the whole screening pathway, not just the laboratory element.

**Q3: In the years 2013 – 2023, how many women have died as a result of cervical cancer which was detected after smear tests were misread? Can you please supply the figure for each year as well as a cumulative total?**

**Response:**

Each year around 20 women in Northern Ireland die from cervical cancer. It is important to note that a direct causal link between a smear test result and a death from cervical cancer cannot be assumed.

Data is provided below on the number of deaths from cervical cancer where an audit of the case had resulted in a notified SAI (2013-2018) or an 'unsatisfactory' audit outcome.

	Number of deaths from cervical cancer
2013-2018	<5 deaths where previous smear(s) were reviewed as discordant **
2019-2023 (associated with 'unsatisfactory' audit outcome)	0 deaths where previous smear(s) were reviewed as discordant

\*\*The Trust has a legal duty to protect patient confidentiality, in line with this duty the figure <5 has been provided where figures are very low. This is because of the potential risk of identification of an individual. In reaching this decision the Trust has taken into account the small geographical area which the Trust serves and the level of media reporting in respect of the subject matter. In addition the Trust has taken into account the fact that all information disclosed in response to an FOI is disclosed to the 'world at large' and is published on the Trust website.

S40 (2) (third party information) of the Freedom of Information Act 2000 has been applied to exempt the redacted information from disclosure. The Trust does not consider the disclosure of the redacted information to be fair to the individuals concerned as there is the potential risk of identification of an individual(s) which they would not expect, and which would therefore breach the fairness element of the first principle of the Data Protection Act 2018.

**Q4: In the years 2013 – 2023, how many investigations audits or reviews have been conducted by your Trust into the misreading of smear test results? Can you please supply the figure for each year as well as a cumulative total?**

**Response:**

Audits of all cases of cervical cancer is routine practice for learning and improvement purposes.

	Number of cancer cases audited
2013	0
2014	9
2015	7

2016	12
2017	<5
2018	7
2019	13
2020	8
2021	9
2022	5
2023	0

\*\*The Trust has a legal duty to protect patient confidentiality, in line with this duty the figure <5 has been provided where figures are very low. This is because of the potential risk of identification of an individual. In reaching this decision the Trust has taken into account the small geographical area which the Trust serves and the level of media reporting in respect of the subject matter. In addition the Trust has taken into account the fact that all information disclosed in response to an FOI is disclosed to the 'world at large' and is published on the Trust website.

S 40 (2) (third party information) of the Freedom of Information Act 2000 has been applied to exempt the redacted information from disclosure. The Trust does not consider the disclosure of the redacted information to be fair to the individuals concerned as there is the potential risk of identification of an individual(s) which they would not expect, and which would therefore breach the fairness element of the first principle of the Data Protection Act 2018.

Email: [Foi.Team@Southerntrust.hscni.net](mailto:Foi.Team@Southerntrust.hscni.net)