



BreastScreen WA Information for Women

Breast cancer and screening mammography



Fact Sheet 1

Breast cancer

Breast cancer is a group of abnormal cells which continues to grow and multiply. Eventually these cells may form a lump in the breast. If the cancer is not removed or controlled the cancer cells can spread to other parts of the body and may eventually cause death.

Breast cancer is the most common life threatening cancer in Australian women and cannot be prevented. Women in Australia have a 1 in 7 risk of developing breast cancer in their lifetime. Early detection of breast cancer, before there are any signs or symptoms, offers women a better chance of successful treatment.

BreastScreen WA

BreastScreen WA invites women aged 50 to 74 years to have a FREE screening mammogram every two years. The benefit from screening mammography is greatest for women in this age group. Over 75 per cent of breast cancers occur in women over 50 years of age.

Women 40 to 49 years can attend if they wish. Currently the scientific evidence for women aged 40 to 49 years is not strong enough to recommend regular screening mammography as an effective tool for detecting early breast cancer.

Once you turn 75 you will no longer be sent a letter reminding you to attend for your two-yearly mammogram. However, you are welcome to phone BreastScreen WA on 13 20 50 for a free appointment.

Women under 40 years are not eligible to attend a screening mammogram at BreastScreen WA. Young women under 40 years have much denser breast tissue than older women, so it is more difficult for screening mammograms to show the changes that may indicate cancer.

Some women may feel embarrassed about having a mammogram. BreastScreen WA respects each woman's privacy and dignity. Radiographers who perform screening mammograms at BreastScreen WA are specially trained to ensure that the screening mammogram is as comfortable as possible. It is a personal choice to have a screening mammogram. In making this decision a woman may wish to consider her risk of breast cancer, including family history and her age.

Detection rates

BreastScreen WA provides over 120,000 screening mammograms each year to Western Australian women. Some women may be recalled for further assessment, but this does not necessarily imply a breast cancer is present. For every 1,000 women screened, about 950 will have no abnormality detected, approximately 50 women will be called back for further tests and about 6 of these women may have a breast cancer detected.

Screening mammograms may detect up to 90% of breast cancers. For all women, there is a chance that mammography will either miss a change due to breast cancer (false negative) or that further tests will be performed to examine a change that is not due to breast cancer (false positive).

What is a screening mammogram?

A screening mammogram is a low dose X-ray of a woman's breast. Screening mammograms are performed on women with no breast symptoms, for the purpose of detecting breast cancer at an early stage before it can be felt or noticed.

How is a screening mammogram performed?

A specially trained female radiographer will take your mammogram. To obtain a clear picture and to minimise the radiation dose, the breast is positioned and compressed between two flat plates. This may be uncomfortable, but the compression lasts only a few seconds. Usually two X-rays are taken of each breast, one from the side and one from the top. The whole appointment takes about 20 minutes.

The low dose of radiation used in a screening mammogram has not been proven to cause harmful effects. The benefit of early diagnosis and treatment of breast cancer far outweighs the risk of the small amount of radiation received during a screening mammogram.

How often should I have a mammogram?

Every two years. Remember, once is not enough. Regular screening mammograms every two years assists detecting any unusual changes in your breasts at an early stage.

There are some cancers that cannot be detected by screening mammograms. See your GP promptly if you notice any unusual changes in your breasts such as lumps, nipple discharge or persistent new breast pain, even if your last screening mammogram was normal.

Before you come for a mammogram...

- Women whose breasts become tender before their periods find it more comfortable to have a mammogram during or just after a period.
- If you've had a previous mammogram elsewhere, please bring these images with you.
- Please don't wear talcum powder or deodorant on the day of your appointment. It may show on the X-ray picture.

Where can I have a FREE screening mammogram?

BreastScreen WA has metropolitan, regional and mobile screening services.

To find a location near you visit:

www.breastscreen.health.wa.gov.au/Breast-screening/Breast-screening-locations

Mobile breast screening services visit outer metropolitan areas and country towns every two years. Some towns are visited annually.

For approximate visit dates go to:

www.breastscreen.health.wa.gov.au/Breast-screening/Rural-and-remote-women

How do I book a FREE screening mammogram appointment?

Online bookings are available for most appointments **www.breastscreen.health.wa.gov.au**

Alternatively phone: **13 20 50** (for the cost of a local call)

If you need an interpreter, please call the Translating and Interpreting Service (TIS) first on 13 14 50 and ask to be connected to the BreastScreen WA call centre on **13 20 50**.

For information please call 9323 6700 or for country callers phone toll-free on 1800 800 003.

www.breastscreen.health.wa.gov.au

Telephone (08) 9323 6700 Email: breastscreenwa@health.wa.gov.au Bookings 13 20 50

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A joint Australian, State and Territory Government Program

