

# NHS breast screening for women who have had radiotherapy to the chest area involving breast tissue before the age of 36

## Patient Information Leaflet

### Why have I been sent this leaflet?

You have been identified by BARD (**B**reast screening **A**fter **R**adiotherapy **D**ataset) as having had radiotherapy to the chest area involving breast tissue before the age of 36. Radiotherapy to this area is most commonly given for Hodgkin or non-Hodgkin lymphomas but it can sometimes be used to treat other cancers too. You will probably have already spoken about this with your Oncologist or GP who explained that breast screening is offered at an earlier age to women who have had this type of treatment.

This leaflet tells you why you are being invited for breast screening from an earlier age than usual. It aims to help you make an informed choice about going for screening.

### How does BARD work?

Having radiotherapy involving breast tissue before the age of 36 means you are at a higher risk of developing breast cancer later in life. BARD is a confidential list of women in England who have received radiotherapy involving breast tissue before the age of 36. It has been set up to make sure all those at risk can be informed of screening options at the right time, even if they move to another address or a different part of the country. Current national guidelines recommend that screening should start 8 years after your radiotherapy or at age 25 or 30 (depending on circumstances), whichever is later.

In addition to making sure that screening appointments arrive at the right time, BARD will allow us to monitor the effectiveness of screening. It will also enable us to provide all the women listed with new information about their health following previous radiotherapy to breast tissue and opportunities to take part in relevant, ethically approved research. Being part of BARD does not however oblige you to take part in research – this will require your consent after being provided with written information about any project and an opportunity to ask questions and discuss with your family and GP.

### When is breast screening offered to women at increased risk following radiotherapy?

Every woman is at risk of developing breast cancer at some stage in her life. The increase in risk for women who have had radiotherapy to breast tissue will vary based on a number of factors:

- The age when you received radiotherapy
- The size (area) of the radiation field
- The dose of radiation received

The increased risk of breast cancer doesn't occur straight after the radiotherapy. It takes some years to develop. For women who were treated as young adults, there is thought to be no additional risk until approximately 10 years after treatment.

## How often will I be screened?

You will be offered breast screening once a year (annual screening) according to agreed imaging protocols.

Some women will have an abnormal result and will get an appointment for further tests.

## What type of screening is offered?

For women eligible for NHS breast screening because of previous radiotherapy before the age of 30 the following screening will be offered:

### *Women now aged 25 to 39*

You will be offered MRI (magnetic resonance imaging) every year.

### *Women now aged 40 to 49*

You will be offered MRI every year, and some women will also be offered mammography (x-rays of the breasts).

### *Women now aged 50+*

Once you reach the age of 50, you will be offered mammography every year, and some women will also be offered MRI. Mammography is a better examination for older breast tissue.

For women who received radiotherapy to breast tissue when aged 30-35, BARD will inform their GPs about the recommendation for screening. The GP will then make a referral to the local family history service.

## What is MRI?

MRI stands for magnetic resonance imaging. The MRI scanner is a large tube surrounded by a strong magnetic field, with a platform bed that slides into it. For breast screening, you will be asked to lie face down on this bed. There are cushioned holes for your breasts, and a special rest for your head. MRI involves taking many different images of the breast, which may take a while. The scanner makes a loud tapping noise as it scans the breasts.

During the examination process, you will be given a small injection in your arm. This contains a liquid (gadolinium contrast agent) which helps highlight different areas of breast tissue on the scans. It is known that small amounts of gadolinium may remain in the brain after an MRI scan, however there is currently no evidence that these deposits cause any harm.

The whole imaging session usually lasts between 30 minutes and an hour.

Before MRI is carried out, you will be asked some standard questions to ensure your safety as MRI is not suitable for everyone – for example those with metal stents in their coronary arteries shouldn't have an MRI scan. The questions you are asked will allow screening staff to decide if it is right for you. If you are having regular periods your appointment date for MRI will be organised at a specific time of the month as this can increase the effectiveness of the test.

MRI for breast screening is only carried out at certain centres, as both the equipment and screening staff are very specialised and must meet specific screening standards.

### **What is Mammography?**

Mammograms are X-rays of the breasts. These examinations are carried out by women who specialise in mammography screening. To have a mammogram you need to undress to the waist. It may be easier to wear a skirt or trousers instead of a dress.

First of all an explanation of the examination will be given and then your breasts will be placed one at a time onto the mammogram machine. A plastic plate will then be lowered onto it to flatten it. This helps to keep your breast still and get clear X-rays. Two X-rays of each breast are usually done - one from above and one from the side. The woman doing the examination will go behind a screen while the X-rays are taken. You need to keep still for several seconds each time.

The whole appointment takes less than half an hour and the mammogram only takes a few minutes.

### **What if I don't want to have breast screening from an earlier age?**

Having breast screening from an earlier age is entirely your choice. Choosing not to have screening doesn't affect any other aspect of your healthcare. If you do not wish your name to be included on BARD please let us know you would like to opt out by sending an email to [chn-tr.BARD@nhs.net](mailto:chn-tr.BARD@nhs.net) – please include your name and NHS number. This is a secure email account to which personal details can be sent safely. The BARD team will then ensure that your details are removed from the dataset.

If you have your name removed from BARD, you will still receive an invitation for routine breast screening between the ages of 50 and before your 53<sup>rd</sup> birthday. Routine breast screening is offered every three years to all women aged between 50 and before your 71<sup>st</sup> birthday.

If you decide not to have screening from an earlier age now, but later change your mind, then you can still be screened from that date. All you need to do is contact BARD (email address: [chn-tr.BARD@nhs.net](mailto:chn-tr.BARD@nhs.net)) who will add your name to the list.

### **What about having breast screening if I am pregnant or breastfeeding?**

You should not have breast screening while you are pregnant, or until 3 months after you have stopped breastfeeding or 3 months following the birth of your baby. If you are pregnant or are breastfeeding, then you can contact your local breast screening unit to change or postpone your screening appointment. Contact details for your local unit will be on the top of your invitation letter.

### **What if I notice any changes in my breasts?**

No screening method can detect every cancer; and cancer can sometimes develop in between screening appointments. If you notice any unusual changes in your breasts, please speak to your GP as soon as possible. Do not wait for your next screening appointment.

## Being breast aware

All women should be breast aware. This means knowing how your breasts normally look and feel, and reporting any unusual changes to your doctor as soon as possible. We advise following the 'touch look check' (TLC) 3 simple steps:

TOUCH your breasts. Can you feel anything unusual?

LOOK for changes. Is there any change in shape or texture?

CHECK anything unusual with your doctor.

(TLC information reproduced by permission of Breast Cancer Now.)

## Acknowledgement

Due to the nature of cancer registration processes, it is recognised that NDRS (National Disease Registration Service) cannot guarantee to hold data on all patients that would be eligible for inclusion in the BARD project screening. NDRS would not be held liable for any patient omitted from screening due to missing data and the BARD project is responsible for identification of the screening cohort. Areas where NDRS may be missing data on patients may include (but is not limited to):

- 1) Incomplete or inaccurate data received from health care providers
- 2) Patients who have opted-out from disease registration
- 3) Transgender patients who may be recorded as male on the NDRS database and therefore not identified as being eligible for inclusion

## More information

Your GP is aware that you have received this invitation for breast screening at an earlier age because of your previous radiotherapy treatment. If you wish to discuss this in more detail you may wish to arrange to see them. If required they can arrange for you to discuss your risk of breast cancer and the benefits of screening with an Oncologist from your local Radiotherapy Centre.

More information about NHS Breast Screening can be found [online](#) - visit the website at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/nhs-breast-screening-high-risk-women>

For more information about BARD, the contact details are as follows:

BARD  
National Disease Registration Service (NDRS)  
3 Piccadilly Place, 2nd Floor  
London Road  
Manchester  
M1 3BN

Email: [chn-tr.BARD@nhs.net](mailto:chn-tr.BARD@nhs.net)

Webpage: <https://www.christie.nhs.uk/bard>