

Information on breast cancer screening program offered at ASL3 Genovese (ASL3 Local Health Unit)

Mammography screening is recommended for women aged 50-69 every 2 years, since in this age group it is able to reduce breast cancer-related mortality rate by approximately 35%.

The mammography screening program is a preventive interventional program offered free of charge to women **aged 50-69 years**, living in the "ASL3 Genovese" territory. It is provided to all healthy women who have not previously had a diagnosis of breast cancer and do not present any symptom of the disease. Women are invited (by a personalized invitation letter) to attend for a mammogram every two years: location, date and time of the appointment are indicated in the invitation letter. **Joining the program is free of charge and on a voluntarily base and all tests carried out within the program are free of charge.**

Women participating to the program have to go to the specified location on the day and time of the appointment: **neither the attending physician's prescription nor the booking are necessary, it is sufficient to show the invitation letter.** Women may change date and time by contacting the breast cancer screening organizational unit.

Women undergoing the screening program for the first time are asked to sign the confirmation of their acceptance of the program.

The assisted women participating to the program may, at any time, ask the organizational unit to be excluded from the program and then they will no longer be invited, "without prejudice" to the possibility of requesting to be included again. The assisted ones who do not undergo the program and do not contact the organizational unit will continue to receive two yearly invitation for screening test (they will receive a first invitation letter and a second reminder letter).

Two modalities can be used in order to invite the women to perform screening mammography (personalized invitation, via letter): scheduled appointment (in case time and place are clearly indicated in the letter) or free appointment (woman is asked to contact the Local Health Unit to book the appointment).

Women who have previously undergone mammograms or other breast investigations elsewhere, are asked to bring them on the day of the examination because for radiologists it is very important to consult them **not only during the examination of the mammography but also after**, in case further clinical investigations should be necessary. Women who have had a mammogram within 12 months prior to invitation are recommended to contact the organizational unit and postpone the examination date (in the prevention regimen, it is generally not recommended to perform a new mammogram if at least 12 months are not elapsed from the previous one).

The screening test (also called first level test) is the **mammogram** (X-ray examination of the breasts) in two projections, carried out every two years. The **radiologist** is not present at the time of the execution of the test and **the mammography is performed by expert radiographers**: before carrying out the examination, the technicians collect the clinical data of women. The test takes little time and it is made by compressing the breast. This can be slightly annoying, but lasts a few seconds and it is essential to obtain a good result. The screening program use digital mammography machines (X-rays are no longer produced): these devices are subjected to quality controls that ensure maximum reliability.

The mammograms are examined by two radiologists independently from each other: in the presence of conflicting reports, a third one is consulted.

If the mammogram is negative, the organizational unit sends the examination result at home, by letter. The period that must elapse before the next test is indicated in the letter. In case of a negative result, the time interval between a screening mammogram and the next one is two years (in some cases the radiologist may recommend a shorter time interval); after this period the assisted woman receives another personal letter inviting her for a new mammography.

When the mammogram needs additional diagnostic investigations instead, the woman is contacted by phone by the organizational unit and is sent to have a clinical breast examination at a so-called 2nd level radiology center: date and time of the appointment are agreed with the woman. **Usually the telephone contact occurs from 7 to 2 days before the date that is proposed for the appointment.** The radiologist of the 2nd level center who takes care of the woman, decides whether further examinations are necessary and when. After the investigations, the physician draws conclusions and proposes to the woman the subsequent work up.

The breast screening program is not able to obtain a total reduction of cancer mortality. Even though mammography is considered to be the gold standard for breast cancer detection, it may give false negative and false positive results. Mammography sensitivity may not identify all tumors: it may happen that some tumors arise and manifest themselves in the time interval between a screening mammogram and the next one (interval cancers), but it also may happen that repeated and close controls delay the moment of diagnosis. For these reasons, the response letters always advise women to check their breast.

Clinical documents and data belonging to the woman can be accessed:

- ⇒ in the I level screening center (where the mammography was carried out: this after the woman received at home a letter with negative response)
- ⇒ in the II level screening center (where further clinical investigations have been carried out, after the end of the diagnostic plan)
- ⇒ in the I level screening center (where the mammography was carried out, if the woman denies to be examined for further clinical investigations in the II level screening center).

With relation to the examinations carried out in the program of oncological screening, you can access all the clinical documents and data.