

UK: 450,000 women missed out on breast cancer test

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In this Tuesday, May 1, 2018 file photo, Britain's Health Secretary Jeremy Hunt arrives for a cabinet meeting at 10 Downing Street in London. Britain's health minister has apologized for what he called a "serious failure" that resulted in hundreds of thousands of women not being invited to their final screening test for breast cancer. Hunt has said in Parliament that the mistake appears to be the result of a "computer algorithm failure" dating back to 2009. He says about 450,000 women between 68 and 71 weren't given a chance to have a mammogram. Of those women, Hunt says experts estimated up to 270 might have died prematurely. (AP Photo/Matt Dunham, File)

Britain's health minister apologized Wednesday for what he called a "serious failure" that resulted in hundreds of thousands of women in England not being invited to a screening test for breast cancer.

Jeremy Hunt said Wednesday in Parliament that the mistake appeared to be the result of a "computer algorithm failure" dating back to 2009.

"The fact is that for many years, oversight of our [screening program](#) has not been good enough," Hunt said. He said about 450,000 women aged between 68 and 71 weren't given a chance to have a mammogram. Of those women, Hunt said experts estimated up to 270 might have died prematurely.

"Many families will be deeply disturbed by these revelations," he acknowledged, adding that the glitch meant some breast cancers were only diagnosed at a later stage, when the disease might have been harder to treat. The risk of [breast cancer](#) increases with age.

Hunt apologized "wholeheartedly and unreservedly" for the suffering caused and promised there would be an independent review of the national breast screening program. Breast [cancer](#) screening is offered to all women aged 50 to 70 in England every three years; they are sent invitation letters to make an appointment for the test.

"Tragically, there are likely to be some people in this group who would have been alive today if the failure had not happened," Hunt said. He noted that all general practitioners would be briefed on how they should respond, and said the issue was first raised as a potential problem in January.

Hunt said that any women who missed their mammogram will be contacted by the end of May.

"It's very concerning to learn that so many women have not received an invitation to screening over a prolonged period of time," said Emma Greenwood, Cancer Research U.K.'s director of policy and public affairs, in a statement.

Greenwood said that many breast cancers are still found by women themselves, and recommended that [women](#) concerned about missing their test should contact their doctors.

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