

# A&E Attendances and Emergency Admissions

## March 2020 Statistical Commentary

### Main findings

All growth rates are adjusted for the leap year.

### Attendances

- The total number of attendances in March 2020 was 1,531,100, a decrease of 29.4% on the same month last year. Of these, attendances at type 1 A&E departments were 26.3% lower when compared with March 2019 and at type 3 departments were 34.7% lower.
- These are the lowest number of attendances reported since this collection began and are likely to be a result of the COVID-19 response.
- Type 1 growth over the last 3 months, compared to the same period last year, is -10.5% and type 3 growth on the same basis is -11.8%. Growth over the last 12 months, compared to the preceding 12 months, for type 1 is 0.6% and for type 3 is 0.5%.

### Emergency Admissions

- There were 427,921 emergency admissions in the month, 23.0% lower than the same month last year. Emergency admission growth over the last 3 months is -8.9% and over the last 12 months is 0.3%.
- Emergency admissions via type 1 A&E departments decreased by -22.0% compared to the same month last year. Growth over the last 3 months is -8.7% and over the last 12 months is 0.6%
- SUS+ based analysis estimates a 3.3% February 2020 YTD growth in emergency admissions. This is composed of 7.0% growth for those with zero length of stay (LoS) and 1.4% growth with a LoS of 1 or more days.
- SUS+ based analysis estimates a 2.9% February 2020 YTD growth for non-elective admissions. This is composed of 6.9% growth for those with zero length of stay (LoS) and 1.0% growth with a LoS of 1 or more days. 33.9% of non-elective admissions had a length of stay of zero days in February 2020 YTD. A full provider breakdown is available on the NHS England statistics website here: <https://www.england.nhs.uk/statistics/statistical-work-areas/ae-waiting-times-and-activity/ae-attendances-and-emergency-admissions-2019-20/>
- 31.5% of patients that attended a type 1 major A&E department required admission to hospital, which compares to 29.8% for the same month last year.

### Performance

- The number of attendances admitted, transferred or discharged within 4 hours was 1.2m, a 31.4% decrease on the equivalent figure for March 2019. Of these,

684,172 were type 1 attendances, a decrease of 29.1%, and 448,260 were type 3 attendances, a decrease of 34.5%.

- The number of attendances admitted, transferred or discharged within 4 hours is the lowest reported since the collection began and is likely to be a result of the COVID-19 response.
- 84.2% of patients were seen within 4 hours in all A&E departments this month compared to 82.8% in February 2020 and 86.7% in March 2019. The 95% standard was last met in July 2015.
- 76.2% of patients were seen within 4 hours in type 1 A&E departments compared to 73.0% in February 2020 and 79.4% for the same month last year.
- 99.1% of patients were seen within 4 hours in type 3 A&E departments, compared to 98.6% in February 2020 and 98.9% in the same month last year.
- There were 51,795 four-hour delays from decision to admit to admission this month, which compares to 59,510 in the same month last year
- Of these, 1,184 were delayed over twelve hours (from decision to admit to admission), which compares to 331 in the same month last year.
- 3 out of 118 reporting trusts with type 1 departments achieved the 95% standard on all types during the month. With additional local activity (mapped attendances) taken into account, 5 out of 118 reporting trusts with type 1 departments achieved the standard.

## Data Notes

Full tables for May 2019 and an England level time series can be found on the NHS England statistics website here:

<http://www.england.nhs.uk/statistics/statistical-work-areas/ae-waiting-times-and-activity/>

The following organisations that did not submit for March 2020 are Clevedon Hospital and Market Harborough Medical Centre.

On 22<sup>nd</sup> May 2019 fourteen trusts began field testing new A&E performance standards. As a result of this these providers were not required report the number of attendances over 4hrs from May 2019. All comparisons to previous months are on a like for like basis (i.e. excluding those fourteen providers). An adjusted time series file is available on the NHS England statistic website.

The fourteen field testing sites are:

- Cambridge University Hospitals
- Chelsea and Westminster Hospitals
- Frimley Health
- Imperial College Healthcare
- Kettering General Hospital

- Luton and Dunstable University Hospital
- Mid Yorkshire Hospitals
- North Tees and Hartlepool
- Nottingham University Hospitals
- Plymouth Hospitals
- Poole Hospital
- Portsmouth Hospitals
- Rotherham
- West Suffolk

## Background

A&E waiting times form part of the NHS Constitution, which contains a list of expected rights and pledges for patients that NHS England and NHS Improvement take into account when assessing organisational delivery. The operational standard for A&E waiting times is that 95% of patients should be admitted, transferred or discharged within 4 hours of their arrival at an A&E department.

A fuller analysis of the A&E data is available in the form of an annual report which will be published in conjunction with which was published in conjunction with NHS Digital on 13th September 2018. This report draws on A&E data from both the Monthly A&E Attendances and Emergency Admissions Sitrep published by NHS England and the Hospital Episode Statistics dataset published by NHS digital. The Hospital Episode Statistics dataset is based on patient level data and so can be broken down in numerous ways that the Monthly Sitreps data cannot. This includes breakdowns of attendances and admissions by age and by diagnosis. The report for 2017-18 can be found here: <https://digital.nhs.uk/data-and-information/publications/statistical/hospital-accident--emergency-activity/2017-18>

## Methodology

NHS England and NHS Improvement compiles A&E attendances and emergency admissions data through a central return that is split into two parts:

- A&E Attendances: This collects the number of A&E attendances, patients spending greater than 4 hours in A&E from arrival to discharge, transfer or admission and the number of patients delayed more than 4 hours from decision to admit to admission.
- Emergency Admissions: This collects the total number of emergency admissions via A&E as well as other emergency admissions (i.e. not via A&E).

The above data items are split by the following categories of A&E department:

- Type 1 Department (Major A&E Department) - A consultant led 24 hour service with full resuscitation facilities and designated accommodation for the reception of accident and emergency patients.
- Type 2 Department – A consultant led single specialty A&E service (e.g. ophthalmology, dental) with designated accommodation for the reception of emergency patients.
- Type 3 A&E department / Type 4 A&E department / Urgent Care Centre = Other type of A&E/minor injury units (MIUs)/Walk-in Centres (WiCs)/Urgent Care Centre, primarily designed for the receiving of accident and emergency patients. A type 3 department may be doctor led or nurse led. It may be co-located with a

major A&E or sited in the community. A defining characteristic of a service qualifying as a type 3 department is that it treats at least minor injuries and illnesses (sprains for example) and can be routinely accessed without appointment. An appointment based service (for example an outpatient clinic) or one mainly or entirely accessed via telephone or other referral (for example most out of hours services), or a dedicated primary care service (such as GP practice or GP-led health centre) is not a type 3 A&E service even though it may treat a number of patients with minor illness or injury.

NHS Trusts, NHS Foundation Trusts, Social Enterprises and GP Practices submit data to NHS England via The Strategic Data Collection Service (SDCS). The Strategic Data Collection Service (SDCS) is a secure data collection system used by health and social care organisations to submit data. Once data is submitted and signed-off, NHS England performs central validation checks to ensure good data quality.

Note that the activity growth rates used in this document have been adjusted to take into account the extra day due to the leap year in February 2016.

### **Sustainability and Transformation Plan Areas**

From April 2017, the data is also presented aggregated to a Sustainability and Transformation Plan (STP) area basis, to better reflect A&E performance in each local area. This has been done by allocating data for each provider to one of the 44 STPs on a geographical one to one basis

### **Acute Footprint Mapping**

From November 2017, the data is also presented with type 3 activity mapped to partner acute trusts to reflect the performance of that trust footprint as a whole. Type 3 activity is assigned to the closest type 1 provider(s).

### **Data availability**

A&E attendances and emergency admissions data are published to a pre-announced timetable, usually every second Thursday of the month. The data is published on the NHS England website here:

<http://www.england.nhs.uk/statistics/statistical-work-areas/ae-waiting-times-and-activity/>

### **Data revisions**

Revisions to published figures are released on a six monthly basis and in accordance with the NHS England and NHS Improvement's revision policy. The revisions policy can be found here:

<https://www.england.nhs.uk/statistics/code-compliance/>

### **Data comparability**

Data has been published monthly since June 2015. Before this, data was published weekly from November 2010 to June 2015. Prior to November 2010, data was briefly collected monthly between August 2010 and October 2010 and was collected quarterly from 2003/04 until September 2011.

In order to provide meaningful comparisons of recent monthly data to previous years, we have created an estimated monthly time series from the official weekly data. Monthly figures prior to June 2015 should be regarded as estimates. This monthly time series forms the basis of the analysis, and is also published on our web page.

Revised guidance for the A&E attendances and emergency admissions collection applied from December 2015 data onwards. The definition for delays for emergency admissions via A&E from decision to admit to admission was amended to include patients who are transferred to another provider (disposal code 7). This was to ensure that such patients are counted in the number of patients spending more than 4 or more than 12 hours from decision to admit to admission. This change did not affect the measures of A&E attendances, the numbers waiting four hours from arrival to discharge, transfer or admission, and total emergency admissions which still focus purely on attendances at the same healthcare provider (disposal code 1).

Analysis based on Hospital Episode Statistics A&E data suggested that up to around 9% per year more additional patients may be brought in scope for the time from decision to admit to admission measure. It also suggested the monthly A&E return might capture in the order of an extra 40 to 240 (3% to 20%) 12 hour waits per year.

The data can also be compared to A&E data for Wales collected by the Welsh Government, data for Scotland collected from Information Services Division (ISD) Scotland and data for Northern Ireland collected from the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety. A description of the technical differences between data from the four administrations can be found here:

<https://gss.civilservice.gov.uk/health-waiting-time-statistics/>

The Welsh Government publishes monthly data on A&E attendances and performance against the 4-hour standard. Data can be found here:

<https://statswales.wales.gov.uk/Catalogue/Health-and-Social-Care/NHS-Hospital-Waiting-Times/Accident-and-Emergency>

ISD Scotland now publishes a weekly update on A&E attendances and performance against the 4-hour standard. This can be found here:

<http://www.isdscotland.org/Health-Topics/Emergency-Care/Publications/index.asp?ID=1251>

The Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety publishes quarterly data on A&E attendances and performance against the 4-hour standard. Data can be found here:

<http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/index/statistics/hospital/waitingtimes-emergency.htm>

The UK Comparative waiting times group has published a summary of the differences in methodologies between the 4 countries:

<https://gss.civilservice.gov.uk/health-waiting-time-statistics/>

## **Glossary**

### **4-Hour Standard**

The national standard whereby 95% of all patients are admitted, transferred or discharged within 4 hours of arrival.

### **A&E Attendance**

The presence of a patient in an A&E service seeking medical attention.

### **A&E Type**

Collectively the term All Types includes the following department types:

Type 1) Major A&E Departments

Type 2) Single Specialty A&E service (e.g. ophthalmology, dental)  
Type 3) Other type of A&E such as Minor Injury Units and Walk-in Centres

### **Emergency admission**

Admission to a hospital bed as an emergency. These can be split into admissions via an A&E department or from other sources (e.g. direct from a GP).

### **Provider**

An organisation that provides NHS treatment or care, for example, an NHS acute trust, mental health trust, community provider, or an independent sector organisation.

### **Type 1 A&E**

A large hospital department which provides a consultant-led, 24 hour service with full resuscitation facilities and designated accommodation for the reception of emergency patients.

### **Waiting Time**

The time of arrival until the time of admission, transfer or discharge.

### **Delay to admission**

The time a patient waited for an admission and is measured from decision to admit to admission (also known as a 'trolley wait').

### **Feedback Welcomed**

We welcome feedback on the content and presentation of the A&E and emergency admissions statistics within this quarterly statistical report and those published on the NHS England website. If anyone has any comments on this, or any other issues regarding A&E data and statistics, then please email [england.nhsdata@nhs.net](mailto:england.nhsdata@nhs.net)

### **Additional Information**

Full details of A&E and emergency admissions data for individual organisations are available at:

<http://www.england.nhs.uk/statistics/statistical-work-areas/ae-waiting-times-and-activity/>

For press enquiries please contact the NHS England and NHS Improvement media team on 0113 825 0958 or 0113 825 0959.

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