



Published Thursday 13th May 2021

**STATISTICAL PRESS NOTICE
NHS OUTPATIENT REFERRALS
March 2021**

The following statistics showing the number of referrals for first consultant-led outpatient appointments were released today by NHS England and NHS Improvement:

NHS Outpatient referrals (March 2021)

The key points for referrals for specific acute first consultant-led appointments from the latest release are:

- GP referrals made for year-to-date (YTD) March 2021 decreased by 34.1% per working day compared to March 2020. These referrals had shown a 4.5% decrease per working day at the same stage last year.
- Other referrals (non-GP) made for YTD March 2021 decreased by 20.2% per working day compared to March 2020. These referrals had shown a 1.5% increase per working day at the same stage last year.

The outpatient referrals data for individual months can be affected by the number of working days. To counter this, figures are adjusted for the number of working days for comparison: inclusive periods April 2018 to March 2019 had 253 working days, April 2019 to March 2020 had 254 working days and April 2020 to March 2021 had 253 working days.

Please note that April 2020 to March 2021 referral levels have been significantly affected by the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Full tables showing data for England and individual organisations are available at the link below:

<https://www.england.nhs.uk/statistics/statistical-work-areas/outpatient-referrals/>

Data Quality

All organisations submitted data this month and no organisation submitted an estimated return for this month.

Statistical notes

The data represents a count of outpatient referrals made in a given month.

A consultation took place to seek feedback from users regarding proposals to terminate the Quarterly Activity Return (QAR), and significantly reduce the scope of the Monthly Activity Return (MAR). The rationale was that much of the information could be similarly derived from patient-level data sets, thereby reducing the NHS data collection burden. Responses to the consultation were reviewed and a decision made to retire QAR following the publication of Q4 2019/20 and reduce the scope of MAR to collect referrals information only following the publication of May 2020 data. The consultation and outcome document with further details can be found [here](#).

From June 2020 data, the Monthly Referrals Return (MRR) replaced MAR and QAR. Click the link [here](#) to visit the MRR webpage. The MRR is a streamlined version of MAR and QAR focusing on referral elements only. New guidance for Monthly Referral Return was published on the MRR webpage to reflect updated definitions in line with the NHS Data dictionary.

Replacement information covering the consultant-led outpatient and inpatient activity previously collected in MAR and QAR will be published as part of NHS Digital's existing monthly official statistics publication series ([Monthly Hospital Episode Statistics for Admitted Patient Care, Outpatients and Accident and Emergency](#)) released on the same day as the previous MAR data.

Provider and Commissioner based data

Monthly Referrals Return (MRR) is a Provider Commissioner (Prov Comm) collection with Trust and Independent Sector providers submitting their data broken down by Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) responsible for the patient. Data can therefore be broken down by provider, commissioner or provider and commissioner.

Commissioner-based webfiles show referrals broken down by the commissioner responsible for the patient. They also include data for specialised commissioning. These are separate from the CCGs as there are different arrangements for commissioning specialised services.

Provider-based webfiles cover all English NHS commissioned referrals for patients who were treated in hospitals in England.

Restricted access until 9.30am Thursday 13th May 2021

GP referrals made (specific acute)

This is a count of the referrals made by GPs (whether doctors or dentists) to consultants for a first outpatient appointment in specific acute treatment functions.

Other referrals made (specific acute)

This is a count of the other (non-GP) referrals made to consultants for a first outpatient appointment in specific acute treatment functions.

Guidance and Definitions

Detailed guidance and technical definitions for the Monthly Referrals Return (MRR) can be found at the link below:

<https://www.england.nhs.uk/statistics/statistical-work-areas/outpatient-referrals/>

Feedback welcomed

We welcome feedback on the content and presentation of the statistics within this Statistical Press Notice and those published on the NHS England website. If anyone has any comments on this, or any other issues regarding the data and statistics, then please email: england.nhsdata@nhs.net

Press enquiries:

For press enquiries please email the NHS England media team at nhsengland.media@nhs.net, or call 0113 825 0958 or 0113 825 0959.

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