

Published Thursday 8th July 2021



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

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

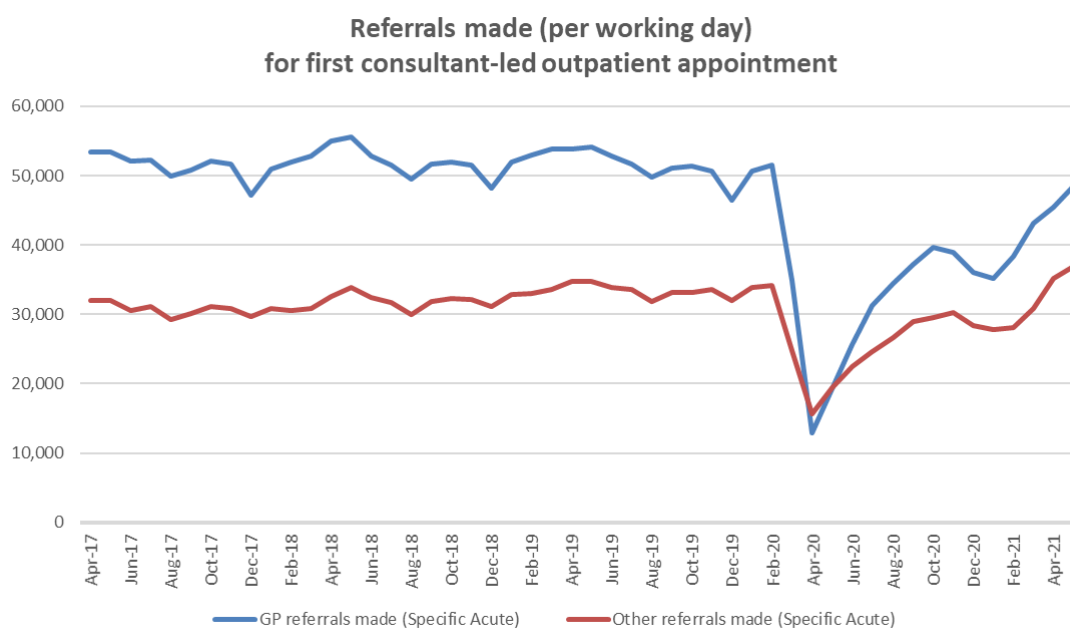
**NHS Outpatient referrals (May 2021)**

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

- GP referrals made during May 2021 were 921,482, a decrease of 10.4% per working day compared to May 2019 (1,136,458).
- Other referrals (non-GP) made during May 2021 were 700,956, an increase of 6.3% per working day compared to May 2019 (728,919).

The outpatient referrals data for individual months can be affected by the number of working days. Growth figures are therefore adjusted for the number of working days for comparison: May 2019 had 21 working days and May 2021 had 19 working days.

From March 2020, referral levels have been significantly impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic. Therefore, comparisons have been made with 2019/20 data. Whilst the number of referrals have increased they are still lower than levels seen prior to Covid-19 for GP referrals (see chart below).



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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.

Hand to Elbow Clinic Bath (NEJ01) submitted an estimated return.

University Hospitals Birmingham NHS Foundation Trust (RRK) merged their Patient Administration Systems in November 2020 which caused an issue with their GP referral data. Data from May 2021 now accounts for this issue.

## Revisions

Along with May 2021 data, revisions covering June 2020 to March 2021 data were also published in July 2021. 12 providers submitted revisions across the periods June 2020 to November 2020 inclusive resulting in 28 resubmissions in total. No revisions were submitted for periods December 2020 to March 2021.

The revisions have had a minimal impact on the data at a national level. The table below summarises the revisions to the England level figures for Specific Acute GP and Other Referrals.

Period	GP Referrals Made (Specific Acute)		Other Referrals Made (Specific Acute)	
	Original	Revised	Original	Revised
Jun-20	562,082	565,169	492,712	492,298
Jul-20	716,777	720,105	567,084	567,400
Aug-20	686,196	688,944	533,496	533,458
Sep-20	816,700	818,746	634,370	635,478
Oct-20	871,643	873,179	650,454	650,440
Nov-20	816,420	816,545	634,208	634,206

## 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](#).

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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.

### **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

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website. If anyone has any comments on this, or any other issues regarding the data and statistics, then please email: [england.nhsdata@nhs.net](mailto:england.nhsdata@nhs.net)

**Press enquiries:**

For press enquiries please email the NHS England media team at [nhsengland.media@nhs.net](mailto:nhsengland.media@nhs.net), or call 0113 825 0958 or 0113 825 0959.

The Government Statistical Service (GSS) statistician responsible for producing these data is:

Katie Tither

Performance Analysis Team (Elective, Activity and Planning),  
NHS England and NHS Improvement

Room 5E24, Quarry House, Quarry Hill, Leeds LS2 7UE

Email: [england.nhsdata@nhs.net](mailto:england.nhsdata@nhs.net)