

Published Thursday 13th July 2023



STATISTICAL PRESS NOTICE NHS OUTPATIENT REFERRALS May 2023

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

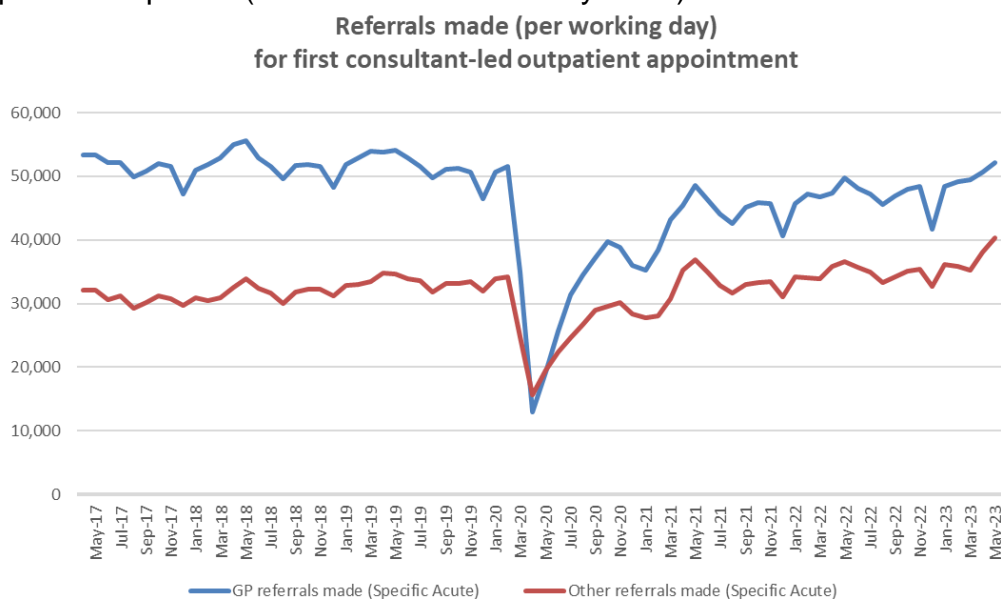
NHS Outpatient referrals (May 2023)

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

- GP referrals made during May 2023 were 1,042,920, a decrease of 3.6% per working day compared to May 2019 (1,136,458).
- Other referrals (non-GP) made during May 2023 were 807,370, an increase of 16.3% 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. Therefore, where appropriate growth figures are adjusted for the number of working days for comparison: May 2019 had 21 working days and May 2023 had 20 working days.

From March 2020, referral levels were significantly impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic. Whilst the number of referrals has increased, they are still slightly lower than levels seen prior to Covid-19 for GP referrals (see chart below). Therefore, comparisons are made with the same month in the 12 months pre-pandemic period (March 2019 to February 2020).



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

Revisions

Along with May 2023 data, revisions covering the 5 months from October 2022 to February 2023 data were also published in July 2023. Revisions were made by 9 providers resulting in 21 resubmissions in total across these periods.

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
Oct-22	1,005,010	1,008,180	736,060	738,020
Nov-22	1,062,128	1,066,570	777,136	778,116
Dec-22	830,242	834,007	653,361	653,876
Jan-23	1,015,765	1,017,101	759,673	759,826
Feb-23	983,801	983,834	716,744	718,137

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

Restricted access until 9.30am Thursday 13th July 2023

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 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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