Cancelled Elective Operations

NHS England

Cancelled Elective Operations

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Contents

Commentary

This release covers NHS cancelled operations in England for NHS providers, excluding Independent Sector Organisations, during the quarter ending 31st December 2025 (Q3 2025/26).

The main points from the latest release are:

- During Q3 2025/26 21,456 operations were cancelled at the last minute for non-clinical reasons by NHS providers. In the same period in 2024/25, there were 22,681 cancelled operations.

- Cancelled operations during the quarter represented 1.0% of all elective activity, which is the same as the corresponding percentage in the same period in 2024/25 (1.0%).

- Of these cancellations 4,821 (22.5%) of patients were not treated within 28 days of the cancellation. In the same period in 2024/25, 4,856(21.4%) of patients were not treated within 28 days.

Table 1: A summary of the above results compared to previous quarters

Year	Quarter	Elective Spells	Breaches of Standard	Cancelled Operations	Breach Rate (%)	Cancelled Operations (%)
2025/26	Q3	2,221,110	4,821	21,456	22.5	1.0
2025/26	Q2	2,248,285	4,274	20,189	21.2	0.9
2025/26	Q1	2,180,895	4,303	19,268	22.3	0.9
2024/25	Q4	2,213,209	5,122	21,820	23.5	1.0
2024/25	Q3	2,229,226	4,856	22,681	21.4	1.0
2024/25	Q2	2,205,153	4,825	21,249	22.7	1.0

National % cancelled operations excludes Trusts reporting to QMCO but with NULL elective spells. These Trusts are included in the figures in Table 1 for breaches of standard and cancelled operations.

Figure 1: Cancelled Operations Time Series
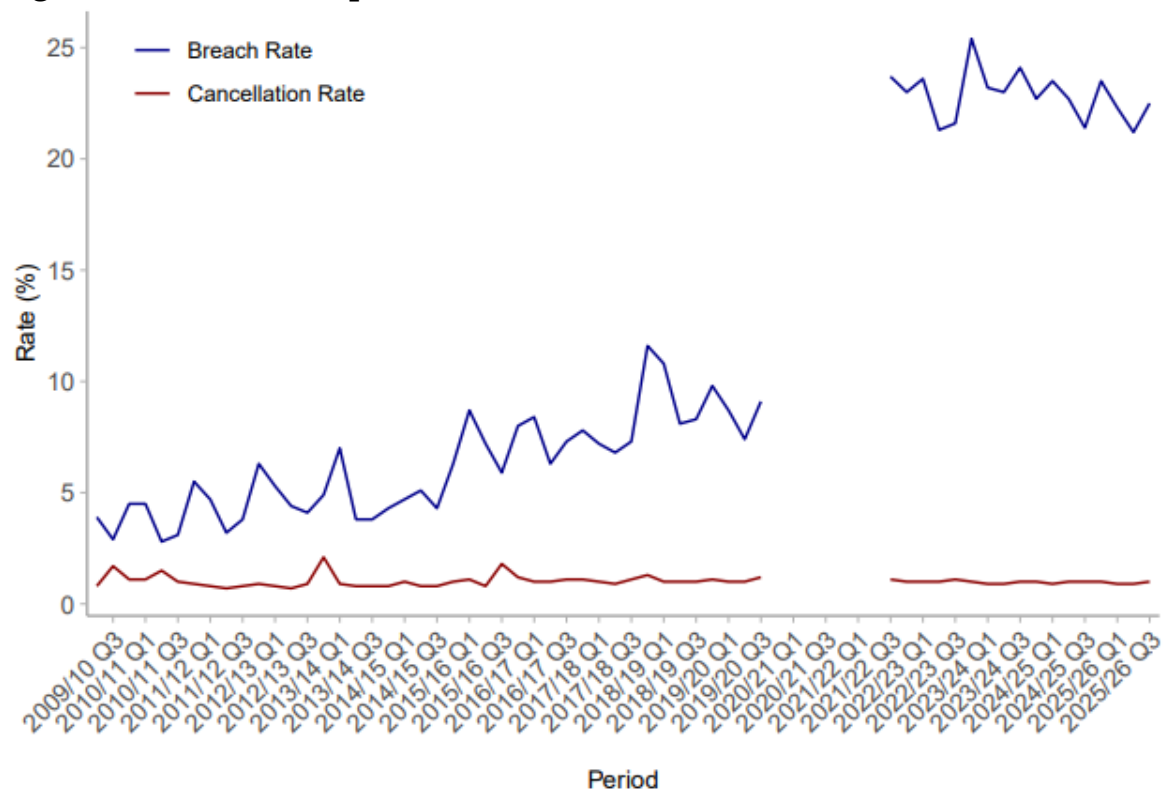
Statistical Notes

1. Cancelled Elective Operations (QMCO) Data Collection

Cancelled elective operation data is signed off locally and then supplied to NHS England by NHS providers (NHS Trusts and other providers). This report presents a summary of the number of last minute cancelled operations for non-clinical reasons and, of those, the number subsequently re-admitted within 28 days, during the quarter.

The elective cancelled operations standard is a pledge in the Handbook to the NHS Constitution which states "all patients who have operations cancelled, on or after the day of admission (including the day of surgery), for non-clinical reasons to be offered another binding date within 28 days, or the patient's treatment to be funded at the time and hospital of the patient's choice."

The NHS Constitution contains pledges which the NHS is committed to achieve. Pledges go above and beyond legal rights. This means that they are not legally binding, but represent a commitment by the NHS to provide high-quality services.

Data Availability

Data has been published since Q1 2003-04 in the current format as a Provider collection. Prior to this it was collected and published as part of the QMPC return from Q1 1996-97.

The QMCO collection was suspended between Q4 2019/20 and Q2 2021/22 (inclusive) due to Covid-19 and the need to release capacity across the NHS. The collection resumed from Q3 2021/22 data onwards.

The data is published quarterly to a pre-announced timetable. Publication occurs on the second Thursday of the month, around six weeks after the end of the reference quarter.

Data Collection

NHS England compiles quarterly data from a return (QMCO) collected from all NHS providers of elective operations via Strategic Data Collection Service (SDCS), the standard online tool for the collection and sharing of NHS performance data.

The information provides a total of the number of last minute elective operations cancelled for non-clinical reason and the number of patients not treated within 28 days of a last minute elective cancellation (breaches). Breaches are counted at the point in which they occur, i.e. if after 28 days of a last minute cancellation the patient has not been treated then the breach should be recorded.

The quarter's figures are presented in Excel, PDF and Comma Separate Values (CSV) file formats.

Data Quality

The collection is a census so we aim to have a complete return, with data from all providers. Any exceptions to this are noted. To minimise the risk of definitions being

interpreted incorrectly, guidance is published on the NHS England Statistics website to help aid providers and commissioners.

Data providers are responsible for submitting accurate data in accordance with the national guidelines and data definitions. High level validation checks are applied to the data centrally as an extra precaution. Queries arising from the validation checks are raised with data providers. Trusts are then able to resubmit data or provide NHS England with further explanation of the figures. We are happy to answer any queries from users in regards to difficulties in interpreting the data.

UK Data Comparison

Wales

Data on cancelled operations in Wales are not published.

Scotland

Public Health Scotland publish monthly information on cancelled planned operations (not necessarily last minute). The published statistics for Scotland are not comparable to NHS England data due to definitional differences. Further information can be found on the Public Health Scotland website.

Background information on Cancelled Operations in Scotland.

Public Health Scotland - Cancelled Operations.

Northern Ireland

Data on cancelled elective operations in Northern Ireland are not published. Health and Social Care Board (HSCB) now dissolved, did publish numbers of cancelled electives during the Covid-19 pandemic. This was discontinued on 31 March 2022 when HSCB ceased and functions transferred to the Department of Health.

Data on inpatients and day cases operated on as well as outpatient activity (including outpatient cancellations by reason) can be found on the Department of Health for Northern Ireland website

Hospital activity statistics - Department of Health for Northern Ireland.

2. Data Revisions Policy

Along with Q4 2022-23 data, revisions for Q3 2021-22 cancelled operations data were also published in May 2023. Revisions were made by 2 providers and had a minimal impact on the data at a national level.

The NHS England's revision policy can be found on the NHS England Statistics Code of Practice compliance page.

3. Glossary

Elective Operations

Operations that are organised in advance.

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.

Last Minute

A cancellation is last minute if it occurs after the patient has arrived in hospital or on the day of the operation or surgery.

Non-Clinical

Some common non-clinical reasons for cancellations by the hospital include:

- ward beds being unavailable;
- surgeon being unavailable;
- emergency cases needing the theatre;
- theatre list over-running;
- equipment failure;
- administrative errors;
- anaesthetists unavailable;
- theatre staff unavailable;
- critical care bed not available

These examples are based on information from the Modernisation Agency's Theatres Project and do not necessarily cover all non-clinical reasons.

4. Feedback

We welcome feedback on the content and presentation of these statistics and those published on the NHS England website. If anyone has any comments or feedback, then please email england.electivepublications@nhs.net

5. Additional Information

Data for individual organisations is available on the NHS England Statistics website

6. Press enquires

For press enquiries please e-mail the NHS England media team at nhsengland.media@nhs.net or call 07768 901293

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