

NHS England's winter health check

The latest position on A&E, winter pressures and influenza for the week ending 13 December 2013 by NHS England

This weekly summary offers an overview of the system and pulls together information on waiting times in A&E, daily situation reports from the NHS, and information on flu rates.

Overview

Dame Barbara Hakin, Chief Operating Officer and Deputy Chief Executive for NHS England, said:

“It is of course disappointing that any patient has to wait longer than they should in A&E however we are now seeing many more patients than ever before.

“Last week was the busiest so far this year, with 415,400 attendances and 105,800 emergency admissions - the highest number of emergency admissions since we started collecting data in November 2010.

“We know the A&E standard is ambitious and that is only right. This is the first week since April the 95 per cent standard has not been met, however we do know that sometimes this will happen. Every year we see a dip in the figures for December, with week on week variations which is why we fully assess how local systems are coping with winter pressures over a longer period.

“We knew this winter would be difficult but it is important to stress the NHS continues to deliver a good service with 94.8 per cent of people going to hospital for urgent care this week treated, admitted or discharged within four hours. This is thanks to the hard work and dedication of our frontline staff.

“The number of emergency admissions has been consistently high now for the past three weeks, and is in line with the emerging trend which has seen a 31 per cent rise in number of people needing emergency admission to hospital over the last ten years.

“Over winter, many of those most needing admission tend to be the frail and elderly who require hospital care predominantly with respiratory conditions. Again, I encourage everyone to look out for their relatives and neighbours as the weather turns, and if they are feeling unwell, seek early help and advice.

“The volume of emergency admissions has impacted on broader activity, and this week we see a slight rise in the number of cancelled operations and ambulance handover delays.

“We have also seen the number of calls to NHS 111 that are answered within 60 seconds dip below 95 per cent for the first time since August although satisfaction with the service remains high. With over 7,000 more calls to the service last week compared to the week before, we will continue to watch the situation closely to ensure NHS 111 continues to provide a good service.

“It is good to see a fall in the number of delayed transfers of care this week but we remain vigilant to ensure it does not become problem.

“We are determined to do better than last winter and we are already starting to see how the extra £400m invested in local systems is helping us see many more patients. We will continue to add capacity to ensure local health and care systems continue to provide the good service patients have come to expect as we get deeper into winter.”

“As Christmas approaches, if you are feeling unwell, don’t be afraid to ask for help or advice. The local pharmacy and NHS 111 both offer expert advice and if your symptoms don’t go away, visit your GP.”

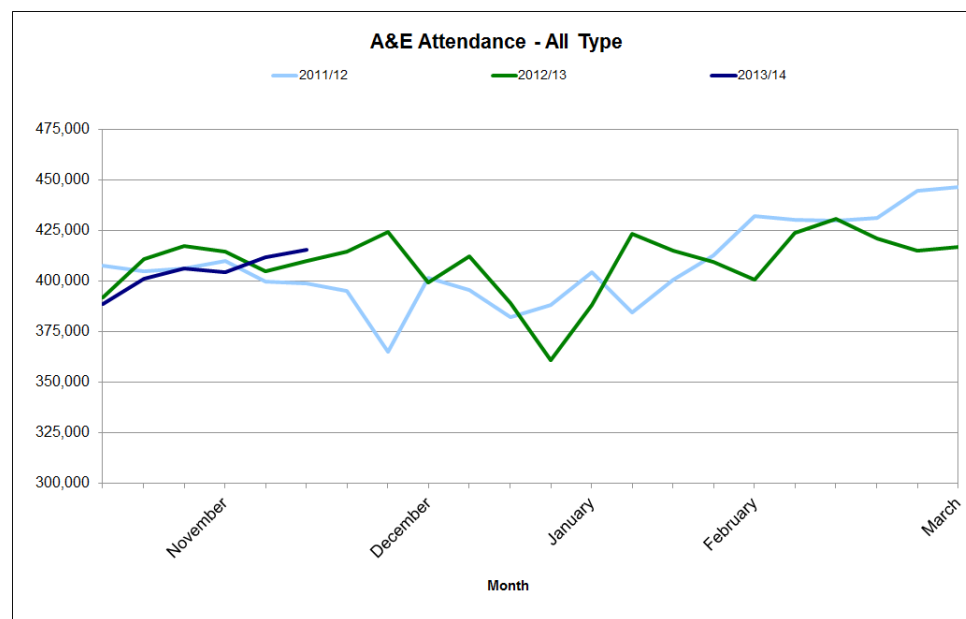
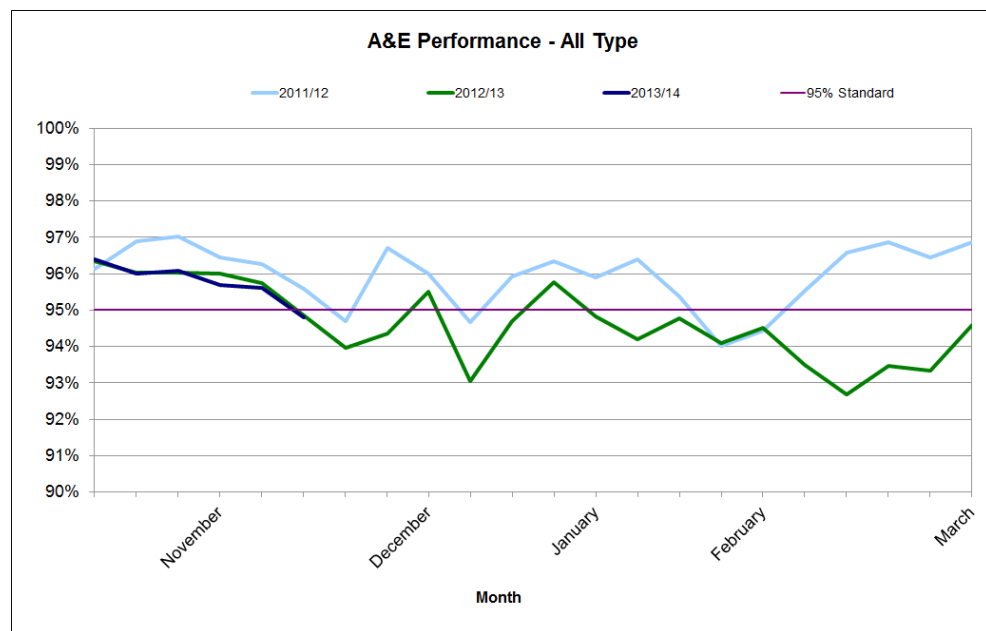
Weekly A&E standard

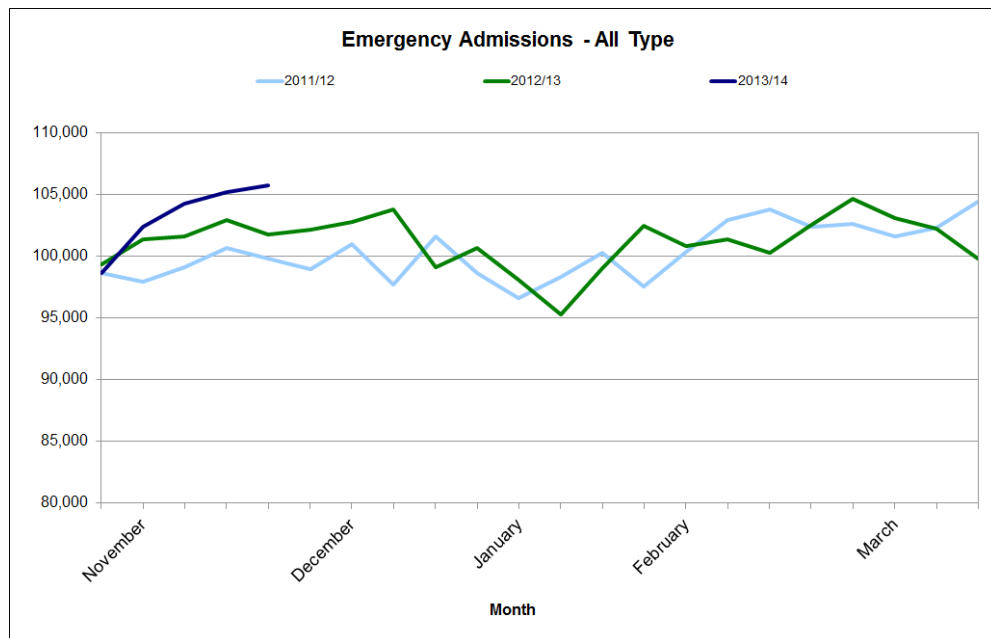
Summary

The percentage of patients spending under 4 hours in A&E stands at 94.8% this week, down from 95.6% last week. Performance is currently following the same pattern seen last year, as shown in the graph below. Attendances at A&E have increased once again this week, although are not unusually high, but emergency admissions have risen again, and are higher than the same time last year.

Indicator	w/e 8 Dec 2013	w/e 1 Dec 2013	w/e 9 Dec 2012
Total A&E attendance	415,375	411,840	409,890
A&E 4 hour standard	94.8%	95.6%	94.9%
Emergency admissions	105,772	105,184	102,138
Number of 12 hour trolley waits	5	0	3
Number of 4 hour waits for admission	3,683	3,005	3,802

The full dataset can be found [here](#)





Situation reports (SITREPs)

Daily situation reports, or SITREPs, are collected from all hospitals during winter and indicate where there are any winter pressure on the service, such as A&E closures, cancelled operations, bed pressures or ambulance delays. Collection for this year started on 4 November and the reporting requirement will be reviewed at the end of February. The data is published weekly on the NHS England website.

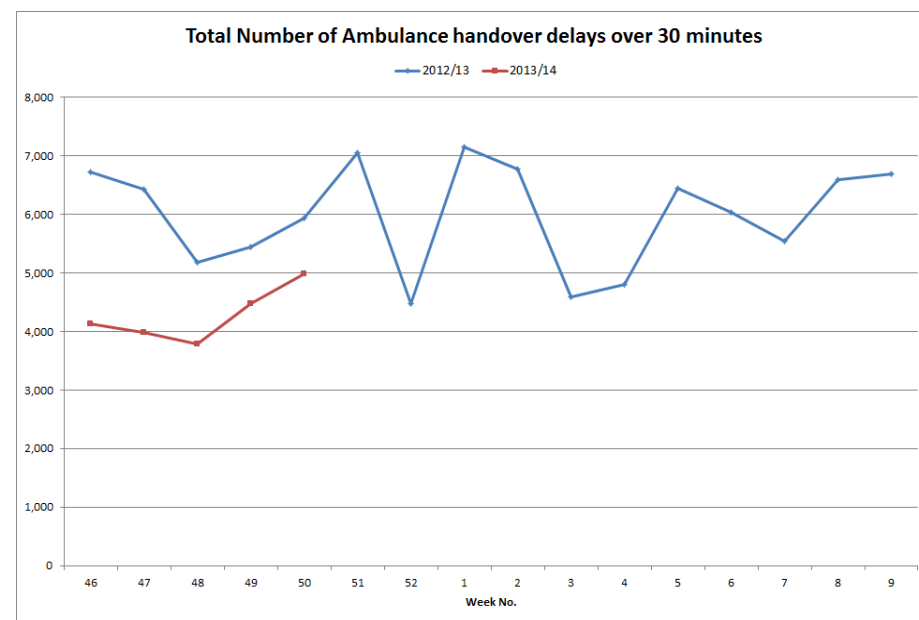
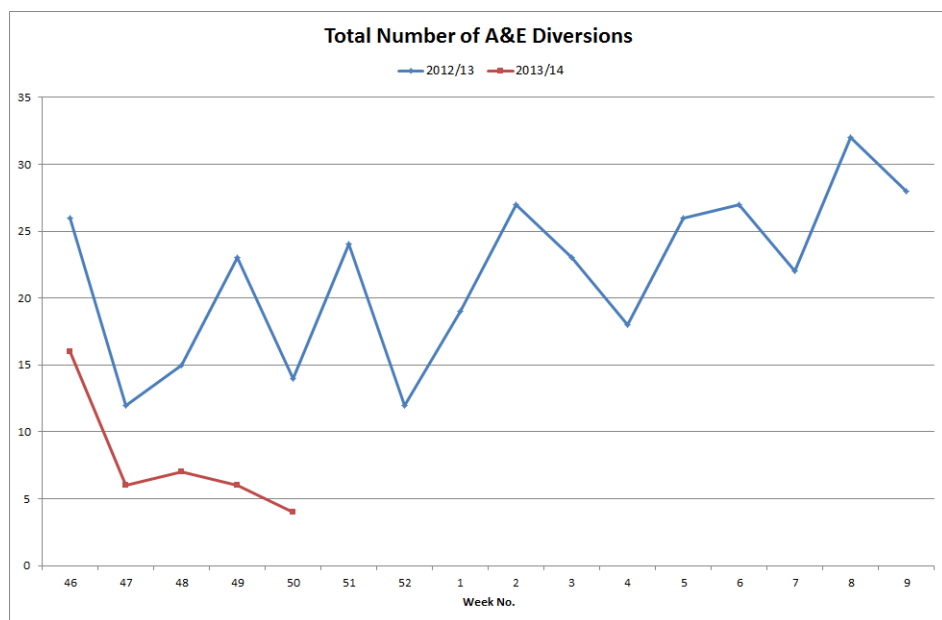
The NHS never shuts but it does sometimes have to alter the way it delivers services. Hospitals sometimes close their accident and emergency departments for short periods of time to walk-in patients and but remain open to those people who need its services. This can happen for many different reasons which might include a major incident in the local area such as a road traffic accident, a breakout of norovirus, or if the hospital is full. Local areas have robust plans in place to deal with temporary closures, which include ambulances directed to nearby hospitals.

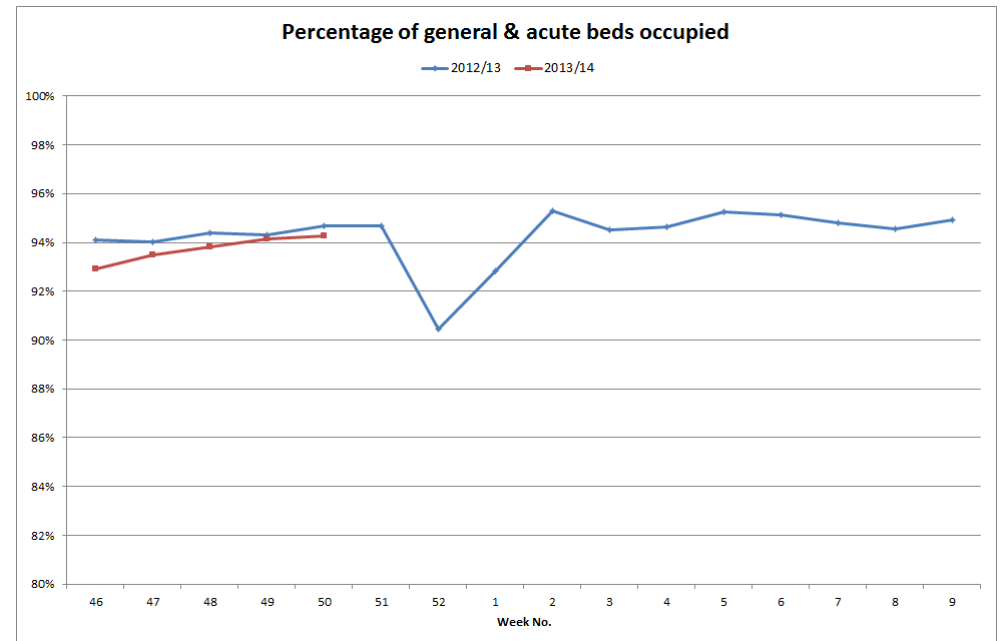
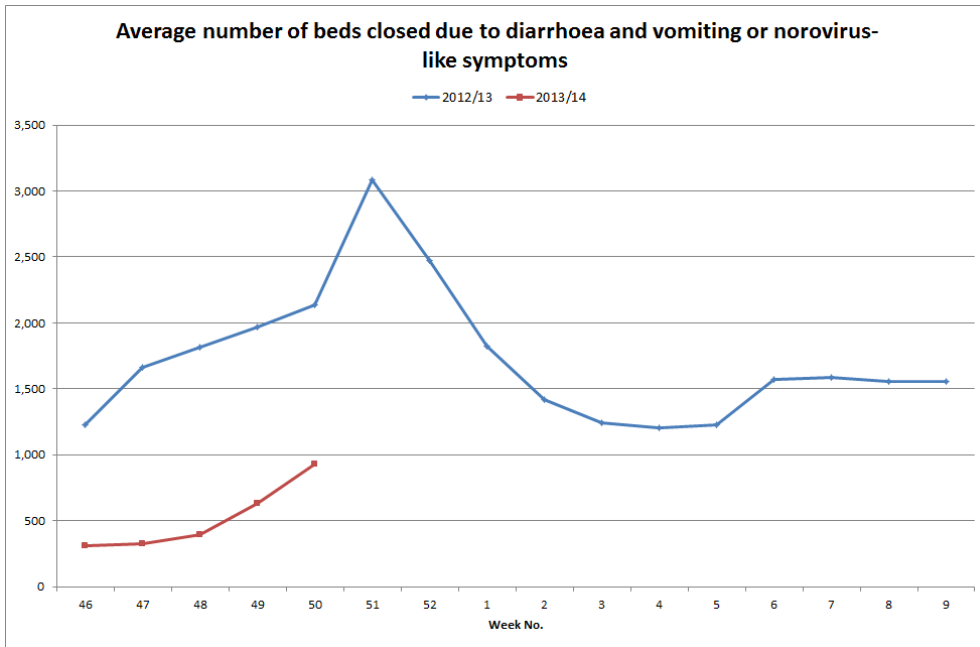
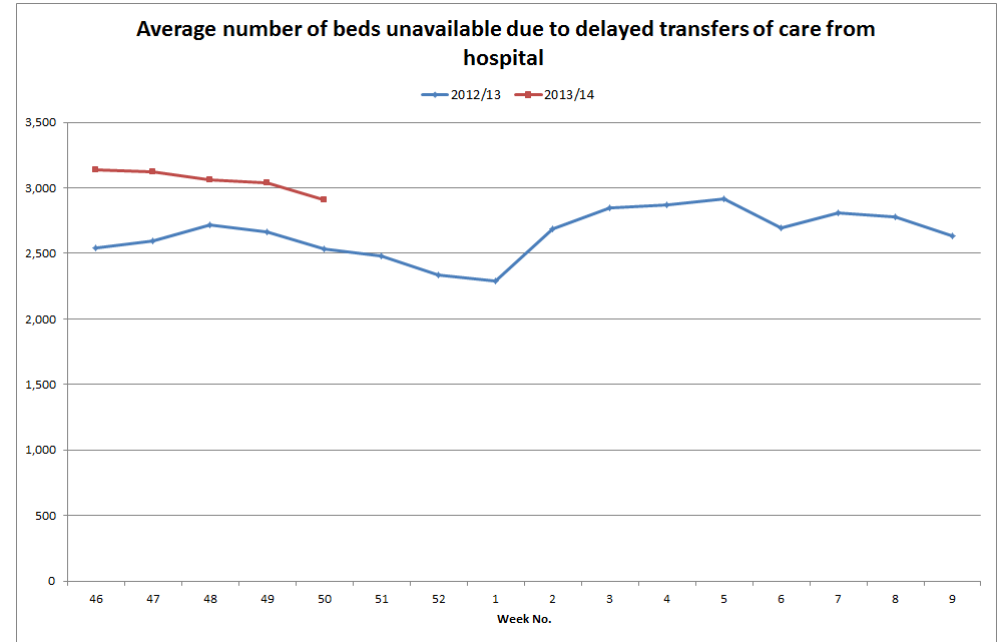
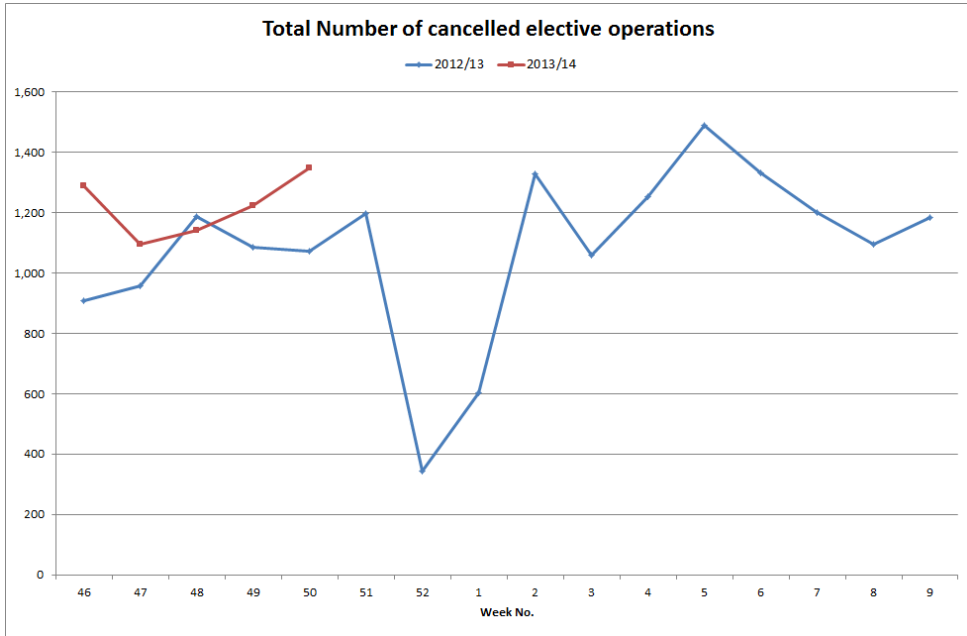
Summary

This week's figures suggest that the current pressures remain broadly comparable with the same period last year and that there are no major problems, although signs of winter pressure are increasing, particularly with increasing beds closed due to norovirus like symptoms. Ambulance handover delays and cancelled operations have also increased, although handover delays remain at lower levels than last year. Delayed transfers have fallen this week but remain higher than the equivalent period last winter, although some of this increase can be attributed to data quality last year.

Indicator	Measure	Week 50, 2013 (w/e 8am 12 Dec)	Week 50, 2012 (w/e 8am 13 Dec)	Cumulative since week 45 (4 Nov)
A&E diverts	Total number of diversions during the week	4	14	44
Ambulance handover delays of over 30 minutes	Total number of delays during the week	4,991	5,940	18,163
Cancelled operations	Number of elective operations cancelled at last minute during the week	1,349	1,071	5,487
Number of beds closed due to diarrhoea and vomiting or norovirus-like symptoms	Average number of beds closed per day	927	2,138	
Number of beds unavailable due to delayed transfers of care from hospital	Average number of beds unavailable per day	2,905	2,531 ¹	
General and acute beds occupancy rate	Percentage of beds occupied	94.3%	94.7%	
A full breakdown of the data can be found at here				

¹ Data quality issues remain with 2012 figures from daily return





The NHS 111 number is an easy to remember number to make it easier for the public to access urgent healthcare services. NHS 111 is free to call and is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year to respond to people's healthcare needs when:

- you need medical help fast, but it's not a 999 emergency;
- you don't know who to call for medical help or you don't have a GP to call;
- you think you need to go to A&E or another NHS urgent care service; or
- you require health information or reassurance about what to do next.

NHS England collects and publishes data on the NHS 111 service on a monthly basis. Over the winter months, this information will be made available weekly.

Summary

This week there were 209,334 calls to NHS 111. The number of callers satisfied with the service remains high at 89 per cent.

Indicator	Week Ending: 11/12/2013	Cumulative since 4 Nov
Per cent of calls answered in 60 seconds	94.15%	95.86%
Per cent of calls abandoned	1.03%	0.83%
Per cent of answered calls transferred to clinical advisor	21.92%	22.44%
Per cent of calls triaged	85.56%	84.75%
Per cent of calls offered a call back	7.73%	7.11%
Per cent of calls offered a call back where call back was within 10 minutes	50.28%	53.17%
Per cent of calls triaged where an ambulance was called	11.02%	11.20%
Per cent of calls triaged recommended to A&E	6.90%	7.17%
Per cent of calls triaged recommended to primary care	62.85%	62.66%
Per cent of calls triaged recommended to another service	4.56%	4.66%
Per cent of calls triaged not recommended to another service	14.69%	14.71%

Public Health Surveillance

Summary

The figures this week from Public Health England show indicators of flu activity are at minimal levels, suggesting no community transmission at this week. More information on mortality and syndromic surveillance, as well as circulating infections is available from Public Health England and can be found at <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/winter-health-watch>

Key facts

Key facts:

- Last year, there were over 21 million visits to A&E or nearly 60,000 attendances every day
- Attendances at hospital A&E departments have increased by more than two million over the last decade
- There were 6.9 million attendances at walk in centres and minor injury units in 2012/13, with activity at these facilities increasing rapidly since these data were first recorded a decade ago.
- The average number of consultations in general practice per patient rose from 4.1 to 5.5 per year between 1999 and 2008
- The number of calls received by the ambulance service over the last decade has risen from 4.9 million to 9.1 million
- Emergency admissions to hospitals in England have increased year on year, rising 31 per cent between 2002/03 to 2012/13.