

NHS England's winter health check

The latest position on A&E, winter pressures and influenza for the week ending 27 December 2013 and 3 January 2014 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

Dr Barbara Hakin, Deputy Chief Executive for NHS England, said:

"I am pleased to report the NHS delivered an excellent service over the Christmas and New Year period with 95.5 per cent and 96.4 per cent of those attending A&E treated, admitted or discharged within four hours for the weeks ending 22 and 29 December.

"Not only is this above the 95 per cent standard, it is a significant improvement on the equivalent period last year, despite a further increase in the number of patients that needed to be admitted. It is clear the additional measures put in place locally to help the NHS cope with winter pressures are having an effect.

"I want to thank the frontline teams from across the NHS who pulled out all the stops to make this happen. Up and down the country, NHS staff worked tirelessly to keep waiting times down for patients and responded professionally to all situations. A really good example was the rapid response of the NHS and emergency services to the incident at the Apollo Theatre in London.

"However this is not time for complacency. We know this period immediately after Christmas is the toughest of the year so we fully anticipate a relative dip in performance in this early part of January as would be consistent with previous winters. The NHS will need to redouble efforts again to ensure we minimise any issues and get back up to standard as soon as we possibly can.

"While data is published on a weekly basis, it is important not to over-interpret week-to-week fluctuations, often driven by local circumstances. To get the full picture you need to view the overall position on a quarterly basis – the target is a quarterly one for that very reason. Some weeks will inevitably see a reported number less than 95 per cent.

"I am confident the NHS can continue to hit the quarterly standard and is in a strong position to deliver for patients in the first quarter of this year – we have shown what we can do in the run up to and during Christmas.

"Rising emergency admissions continue to be the most significant concern. This Christmas they were higher than last Christmas, in line with the emerging trend which has seen a 31 per cent rise in the number of people needing emergency admission to hospital over the last ten years.

"Other performance indicators remain broadly stable. The number of ambulance handover delays were down significantly compared to the same period last year. We have been keeping a close eye on delayed transfers of care, which were up only slightly over the two weeks. The number of cancelled operations rose and fell broadly as expected.

"As we all start to get back to normal after the holidays, I would remind people that if they are feeling unwell, please do get early help or advice. The local pharmacy and NHS 111 both offer expert advice and if your symptoms don't go away, visit your GP or A&E if it's an emergency."

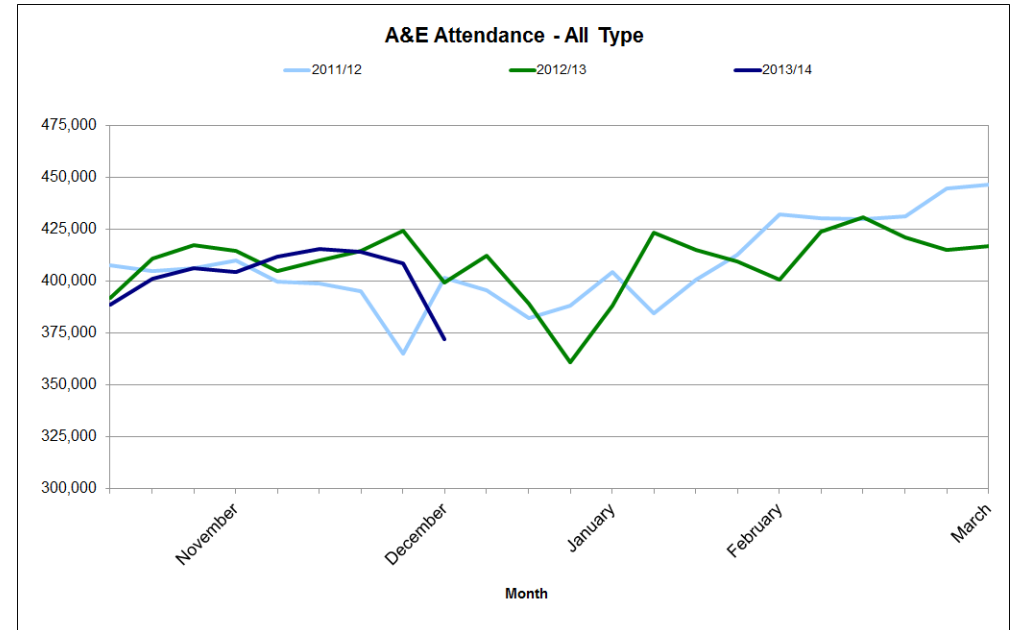
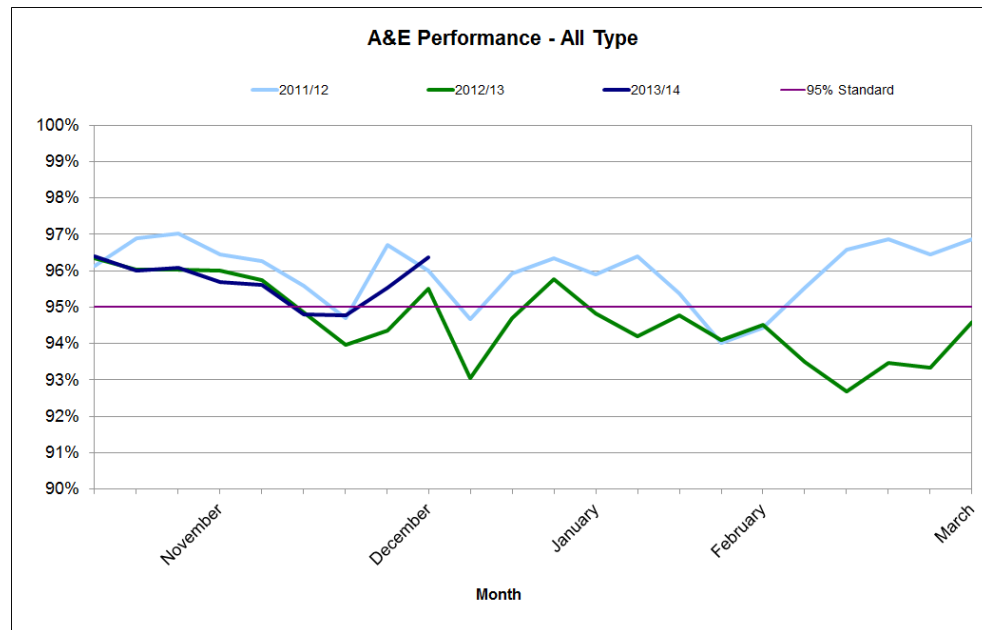
Weekly A&E standard

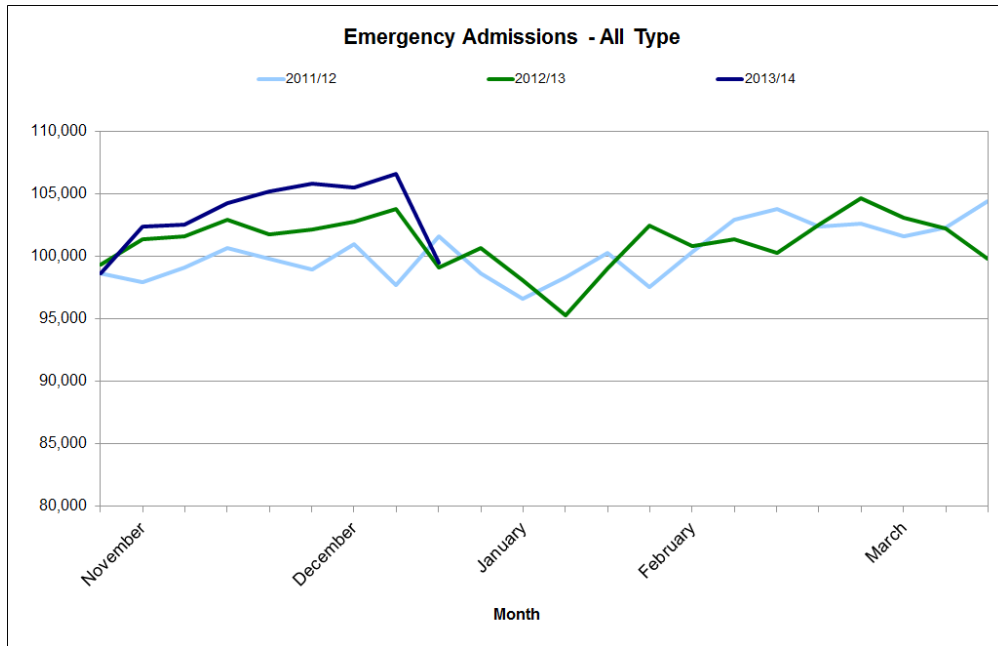
Summary

The percentage of patients spending under 4 hours in A&E has shown an improvement over the Christmas period in line with previous years. Performance was 95.5% in week ending 22nd December and 96.4% in week ending 29th December, both weeks higher than last year. Attendances at A&E have fallen, particularly in week ending 29th December, where attendances were lower than would be expected. Emergency admissions remained high in week ending 22nd December, but fell back significantly in the following week, in line with the fall in attendances.

Indicator	w/e 29 Dec 2013	w/e 22 Dec 2013	w/e 30 Dec 2012	w/e 23 Dec 2012
Total A&E attendance	372,139	408,458	399,014	424,281
A&E 4 hour standard	96.4%	95.5%	95.5%	94.3%
Emergency admissions	99,514	106,581	99,093	103,736
Number of 12 hour waits for admission	2	1	0	5
Number of 4 hour waits for admission	2,077	3,496	2,840	3,981

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 pressures 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.

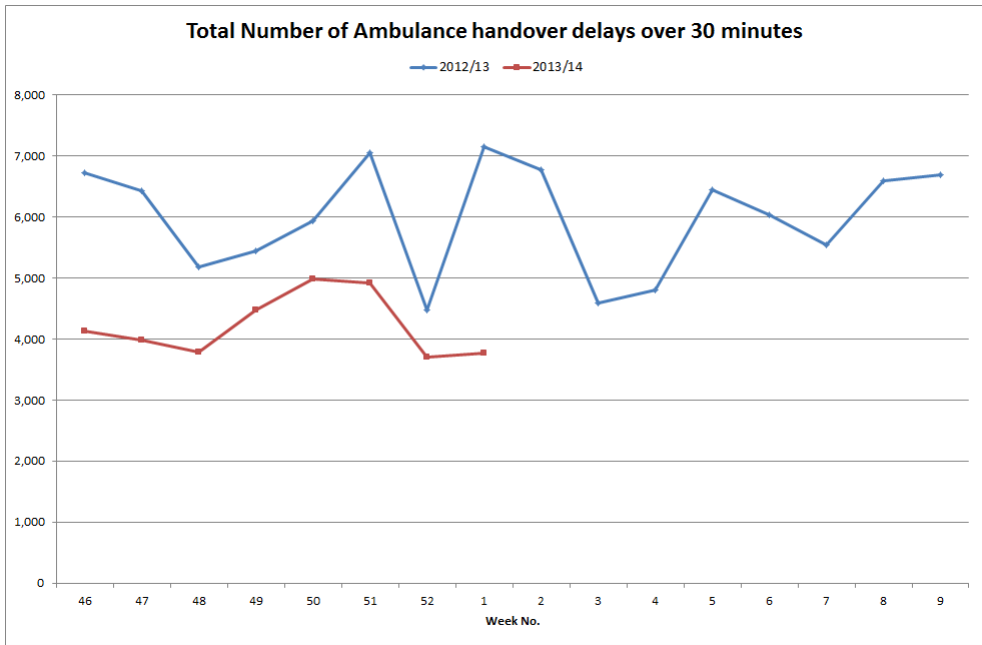
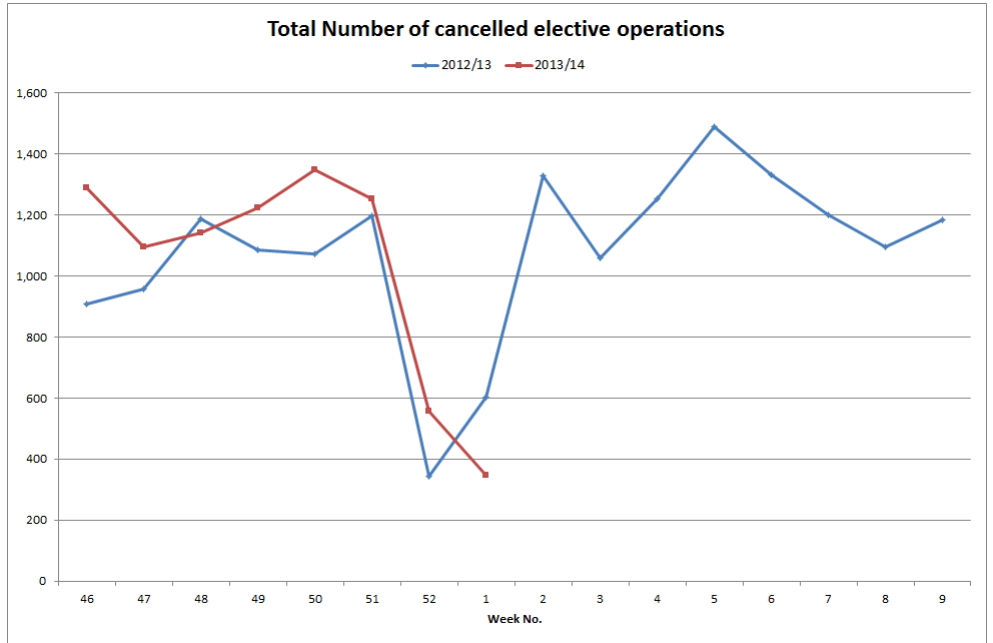
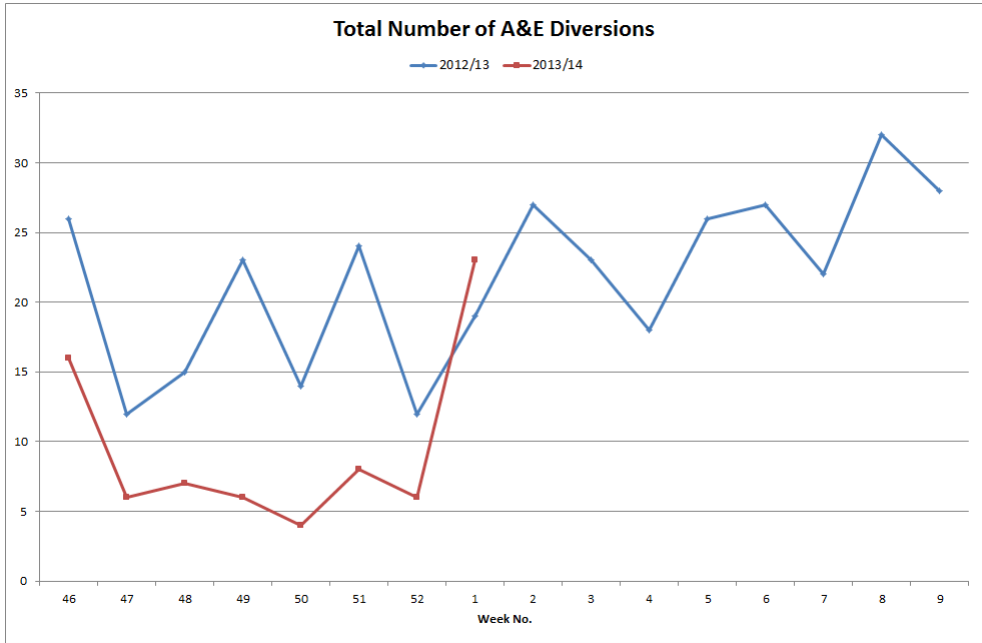
Summary

The figures for the two weeks around Christmas suggest that winter pressures remain broadly comparable with the same period last year and that there are no major problems, although the latest week has seen a larger number of A&E diverts. Ambulance handover delays were lower over the two weeks, and down on the same period last year, with cancelled operations at around the same level as last year when comparing the two weeks as a whole. The number of beds closed due to Norovirus like symptoms remains stable, and beds unavailable due to delayed transfers remain higher than last year, although have fallen over Christmas in line with usual seasonal patterns.

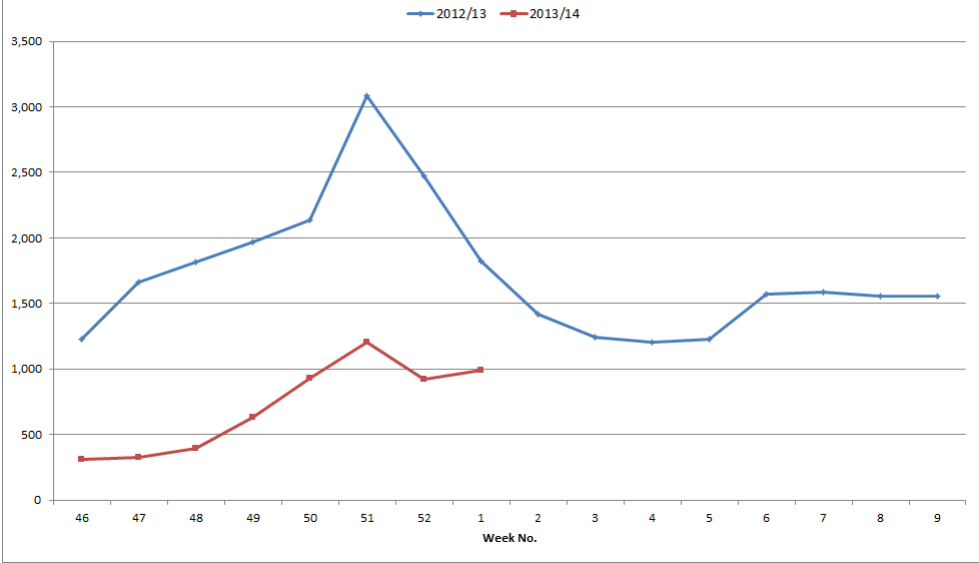
Indicator	Measure	Week 52, 2013 (8 days to 8am 27 Dec)	Week 52, 2012 (7 days to 8am 27 Dec)	Cumulative since week 45 (4 Nov)
A&E diverts	Total number of diversions during the week	6	12	62
Ambulance handover delays of over 30 minutes	Total number of delays during the week	3,711	4,469	31,778
Cancelled operations	Number of elective operations cancelled at last minute during the week	556	342	8,645
Number of beds closed due to diarrhoea and vomiting or norovirus-like symptoms	Average number of beds closed per day	921	2,476	
Number of beds unavailable due to delayed transfers of care from hospital	Average number of beds unavailable per day	2,677	2,335 ¹	
General and acute beds occupancy rate	Percentage of beds occupied	88.7%	90.4%	
A full breakdown of the data can be found at here				

Indicator	Measure	Week 1, 2014 (6 days to 8am 2 Jan)	Week 1, 2013 (7 days to 8am 3 Jan)	Cumulative since week 45 (4 Nov)
A&E diverts	Total number of diversions during the week	23	19	85
Ambulance handover delays of over 30 minutes	Total number of delays during the week	3,776	7,146	35,554
Cancelled operations	Number of elective operations cancelled at last minute during the week	348	602	8,993
Number of beds closed due to diarrhoea and vomiting or norovirus-like symptoms	Average number of beds closed per day	992	1,822	
Number of beds unavailable due to delayed transfers of care from hospital	Average number of beds unavailable per day	2,594	2,293 ¹	
General and acute beds occupancy rate	Percentage of beds occupied	91.3%	92.8%	
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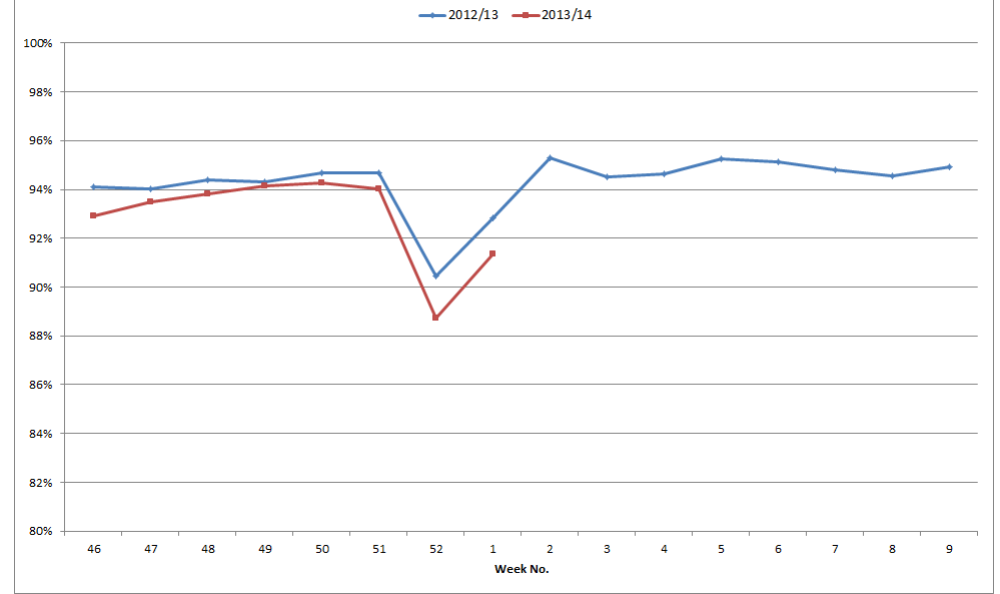
¹ Data quality issues remain with 2012 figures from daily return



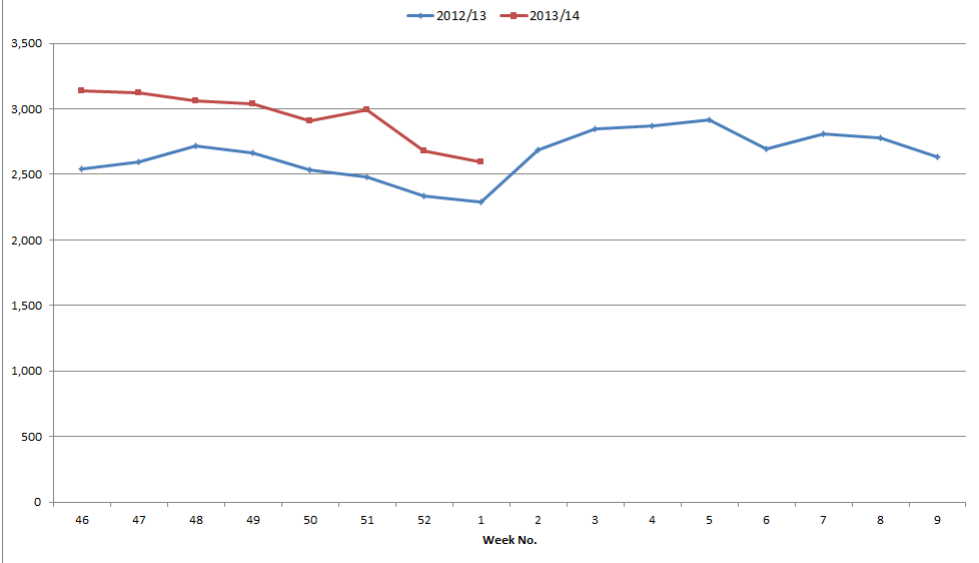
Average number of beds closed due to diarrhoea and vomiting or norovirus-like symptoms



Percentage of general & acute beds occupied



Average number of beds unavailable due to delayed transfers of care from hospital



NHS 111

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 273,934 calls to NHS 111, compared to the 234,730 calls received last week. The number of callers satisfied with the service remains high at 89 per cent.

Indicator	Week Ending: 25/12/2013	Week Ending: 1/1/2014	Cumulative since 4 Nov
Per cent of calls answered in 60 seconds	94.41%	94.72%	95.29%
Per cent of calls abandoned	0.94%	1.06%	0.90%
Per cent of answered calls transferred to clinical advisor	21.06%	21.65%	22.03%
Per cent of calls triaged	84.41%	87.62%	85.21%
Per cent of calls offered a call back	7.46%	6.81%	7.15%
Per cent of calls offered a call back where call back was within 10 minutes	57.03%	61.19%	55.11%
Per cent of calls triaged where an ambulance was called	10.49%	10.41%	10.98%
Per cent of calls triaged recommended to A&E	6.08%	5.89%	6.76%
Per cent of calls triaged recommended to primary care	64.85%	66.12%	63.56%

Per cent of calls triaged recommended to another service	4.60%	4.57%	4.61%
Per cent of calls triaged not recommended to another service	13.94%	12.82%	14.29%

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.