



Llywodraeth Cymru  
Welsh Government

STATISTICS

# Sickness absence in the NHS: January to March 2021

Data on sickness absence rates for directly employed NHS staff for January to March 2021.

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This statistical release presents information about sickness absence of staff in the NHS in Wales. New information is shown for the quarter ended 31 March 2021. Data for October to December 2020 has been revised.

In response to the current coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, additional and timelier management information is collected on sickness absence. It is not collected on the same basis as that published in this quarterly release, and therefore the figures will differ.

The management information suggests that a daily average of just over 2,100 (2.1%) staff were self-isolating over the quarter ended 31 March 2021, with the number decreasing each month from an average of around 2,500 in January to an average of just under 2,000 during March. Information on [coronavirus and NHS activity and capacity](#) is published in a weekly update.

A number of factors related to COVID-19 have impacted on the data this quarter:

- shielding advice to the clinically extremely vulnerable was in place throughout the quarter

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- vaccinations were made available to healthcare workers (and others) from December 2020
- the second peak in terms of confirmed cases was in early January 2021

Clinically extremely vulnerable staff on the shielding list, and therefore not in work due to that, are included in the self-isolating count. In these official statistics, NHS staff who are self-isolating or shielding are not counted as being off sick, and are therefore not included in these quarterly sickness absence statistics. The official statistics should continue to be considered the authoritative source of data on sickness absence in the NHS in Wales.

The data is sourced from the NHS Electronic Staff Record provided by Health Education and Improvement Wales (HEIW).

Data included in this release is published on [StatsWales](#).

## Main points

The sickness absence 12 month moving average was 5.9% over the last year. The average has been rising slowly since 2018 but increased more significantly from April 2020 during the COVID-19 pandemic.

## Quarter ending 31 March 2021

- Sickness absence rate was 5.7%, down 0.3 percentage points compared to the quarter ending 31 March 2020.
- The Welsh Ambulance Services NHS Trust had the highest sickness absence rate, 8.4%.
- Health Education and Improvement Wales had the lowest sickness absence rate, 1.8%.
- The staff group with the highest sickness absence rate was the Ambulance group, 9.6%.
- The staff group with the lowest sickness absence rate was Medical and Dental staff, 1.7%.

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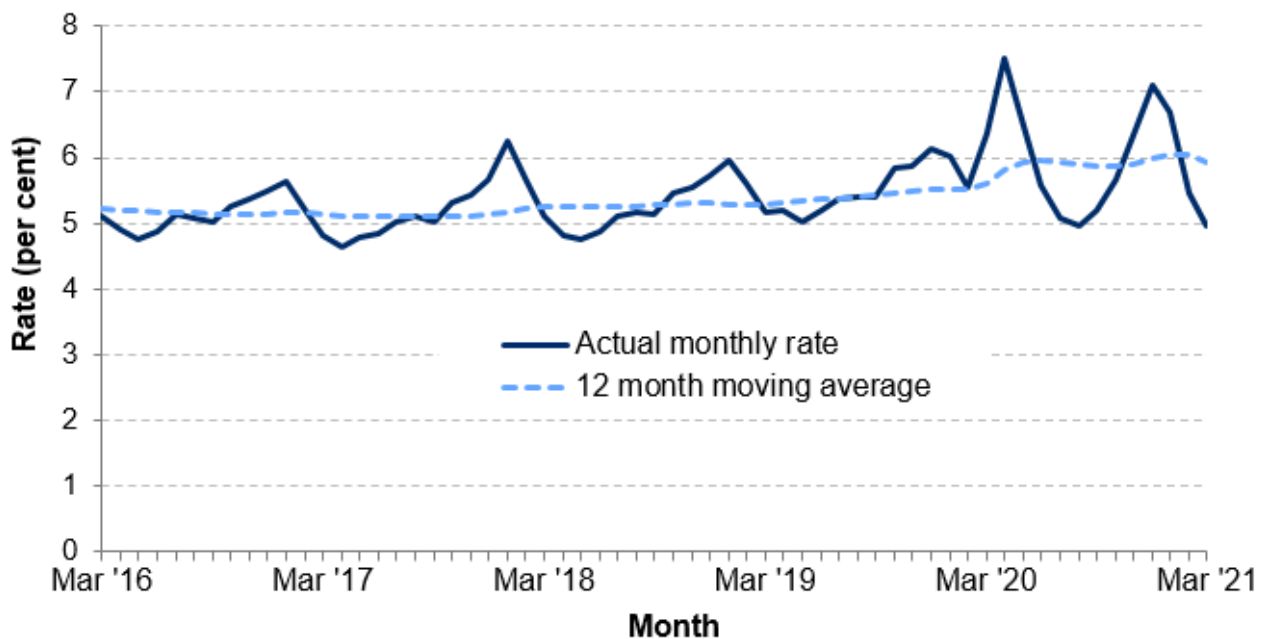
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The numbers in this release are rounded to the nearest 0.1; percentage point changes are calculated based on the unrounded numbers.

## Trends in the sickness absence rate

**Chart 1: Trends in the sickness absence rate in the NHS in Wales by month, March 2016 to March 2021**



Source: Health Education and Improvement Wales

### Sickness absence on StatsWales

Sickness absence shows wide seasonal variation throughout the year with the rate lower in summer and higher in winter. To provide clearer information on long term changes to the rate of sickness absence a 12 month moving average is shown in Chart 1. The chart shows the 12 month moving average has remained at around 6.0% over the last year, despite the increases between March and April 2020 and again between September and December 2020.

The chart also shows that the sickness absence rate for April 2020 is the highest

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recorded monthly rate (7.5%) followed by December 2020 (7.1%) – given the timing this is more than likely attributed to COVID-19. Those NHS staff self-isolating, which includes shielding staff, are not counted as being off sick and are therefore not included in these sickness absence rates. Monthly sickness absence rates by **NHS organisation** and **staff group** can be found on **StatsWales**.

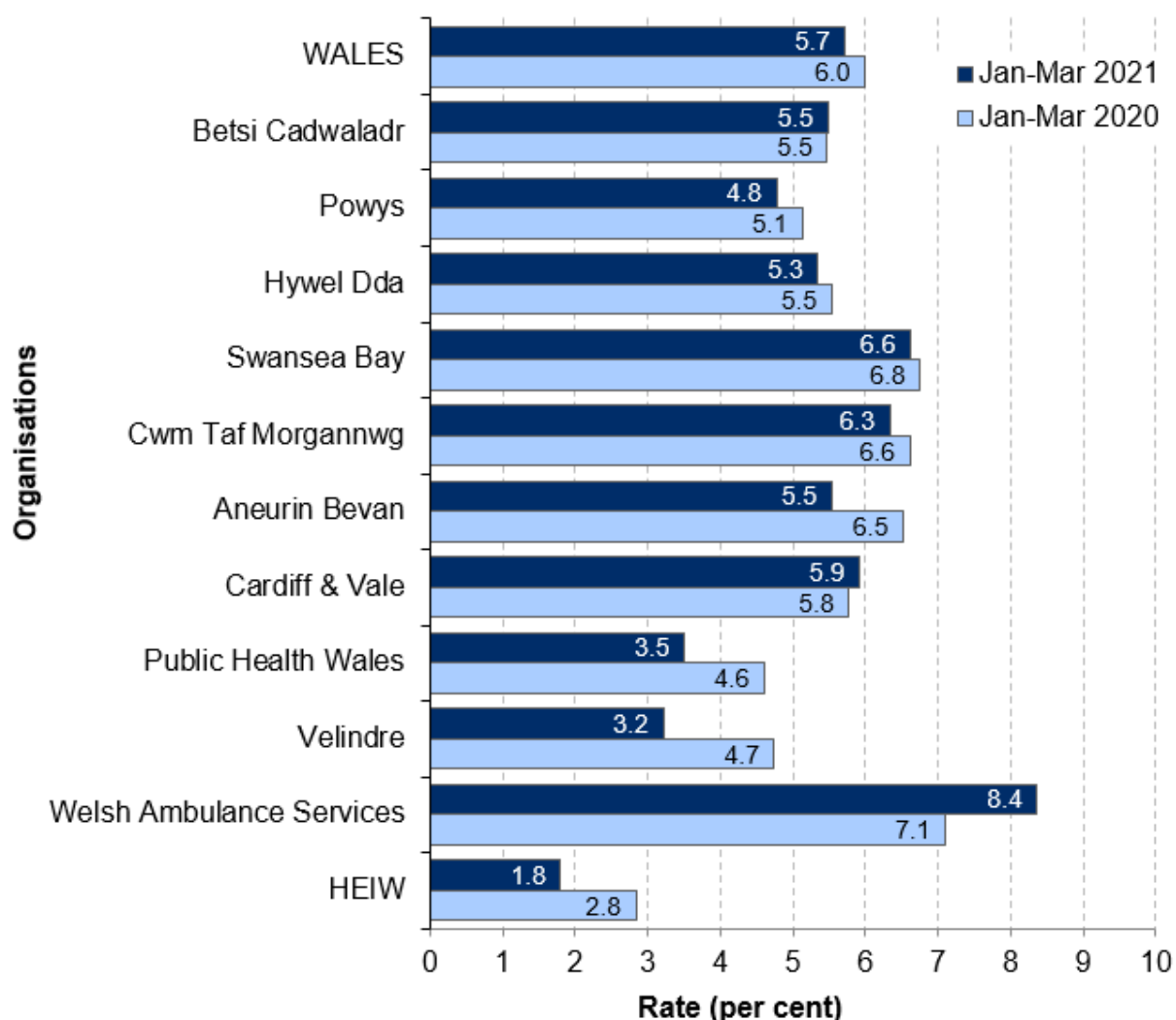
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# Sickness absence rate by NHS organisation

**Chart 2: Sickness absence rate in the NHS by organisation, quarter ended 31 March 2021 compared with the previous year**



Source: Health Education and Improvement Wales

## Percentage absent by organisation and date on StatsWales

The Welsh Ambulance Services NHS Trust had the highest sickness absence rate (8.4%) of all NHS organisations this quarter, with the lowest rate being in Health Education and Improvement Wales (1.8%).

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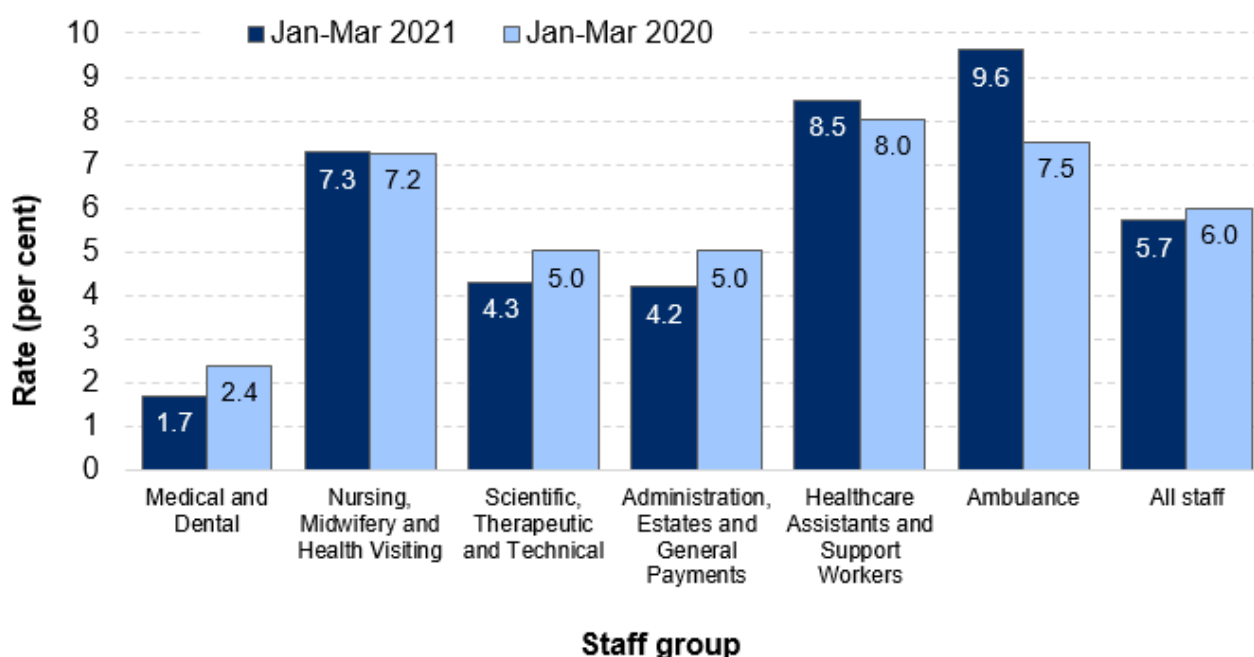
Swansea Bay had the highest sickness absence (6.6%) of all local health boards (LHBs) for the quarter ended 31 March 2021, with the lowest rate being in Powys (4.8%).

Compared with the same quarter in 2020, the staff sickness absence rate was higher in Cardiff & Vale LHB and in the Welsh Ambulance Services NHS Trust. The rate remained the same in Betsi Cadwaladr LHB, but was lower in all other organisations.

Data for all organisations is available on [StatsWales](#).

## Sickness absence rate by staff group

**Chart 3: Sickness absence rate in the NHS by staff group, quarter ended 31 March 2021 compared to the previous year**



Source: Health Education and Improvement Wales

[Percentage absent by staff group and date on StatsWales](#)

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Of the six staff groups, the Ambulance group had the highest sickness absence rate this quarter (9.6%).

Medical and Dental staff had the lowest sickness absence rate for this quarter (1.7%) and has done so since data started to be collected in 2009.

In the quarter ended 31 March 2021, the staff sickness absence rate was higher compared with the previous year in the Nursing, midwifery and health visiting staff group, the Healthcare assistants and support workers group and among Ambulance staff; the rate fell in Medical and dental, the Scientific, therapeutic and technical group and the Administration, estates and general payments group.

Data for all staff groups is available on [StatsWales](#).

## Quality and methodology information

The data is sourced from the NHS Electronic Staff Record provided by Health Education and Improvement Wales. Further information is available in the [quality report](#).

## Well-being of Future Generations Act

The Well-being of Future Generations Act 2015 is about improving the social, economic, environmental and cultural wellbeing of Wales. The Act puts in place seven wellbeing goals for Wales. These are for a more equal, prosperous, resilient, healthier and globally responsible Wales, with cohesive communities and a vibrant culture and thriving Welsh language. Under section (10)(1) of the Act, the Welsh Ministers must (a) publish indicators (“national indicators”) that must be applied for the purpose of measuring progress towards the achievement of the Well-being goals, and (b) lay a copy of the national indicators before Senedd Cymru. The 46 national indicators were laid in March 2016.

Information on the indicators, along with narratives for each of the wellbeing

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goals and associated technical information is available in the [Well-being of Wales report](#).

Further information on the [Well-being of Future Generations \(Wales\) Act 2015](#).

The statistics included in this release could also provide supporting narrative to the national indicators and be used by public services boards in relation to their local wellbeing assessments and local wellbeing plans.

## Next update

17 November 2021

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## About this document

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