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Welsh Government

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# Sickness absence in the NHS: October to December 2023

Data on sickness absence rates for directly employed NHS staff for October to December 2023.

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# Introduction

This release presents official statistics on sickness absence rates of staff directly employed by the NHS in Wales. New information is shown for the quarter that ended on 31 December 2023 and data for July to September 2023 has been revised.

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

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

## Main points

Longer-term sickness absence rates are measured by taking the average sickness rate for the 12 months prior to the last day of each reference month.

- In the 12 months that ended on 31 December 2023, the average sickness absence rate was 6.1%. This was 0.7 percentage points lower than the same 12-month period last year (12 months to 31 December 2022), but 0.6 percentage points higher than in same 12-month period ten years ago (12 months to 31 December 2014).
- The 12-month average sickness absence rate increased during the COVID-19 pandemic and peaked in the 12-month periods that ended in July and August 2022. Since then, the 12-month rate has been on a clear downward trend and is at its lowest since the 12-months that ended in October 2021.

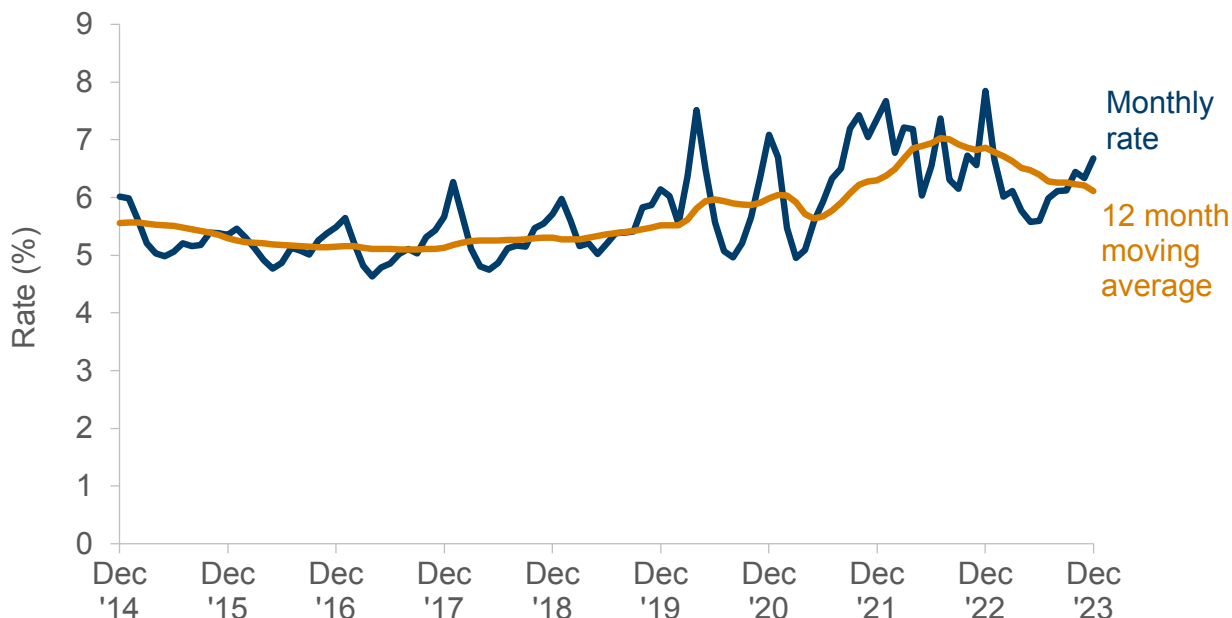
While monthly data is published there can be large variations from month-to-month, therefore more stable short-term trends are measured by using the

sickness absence rate in each quarter. The latest quarterly data available is for September to December 2023, and shows:

- the sickness absence rate was 6.5%, a decrease of 0.6 percentage points compared to the same quarter last year
- the rate ranged from 9.1% in Welsh Ambulance Services NHS Trust to 3.0% in Health Education and Improvement Wales, when comparing NHS organisations
- the rate ranged from 9.9% for ambulance staff to 2.2% for medical and dental staff, when comparing staff groups

## Trends in the sickness absence rate

**Figure 1: Trends in sickness absence rates in NHS Wales by month, December 2014 to December 2023**



Description of Figure 1: Line chart showing that the sickness absence rate has

been on a downward trend since mid-2022, following a broadly upward trend in the previous five years.

Source: Electronic Staff Record, Health Education and Improvement Wales (HEIW)

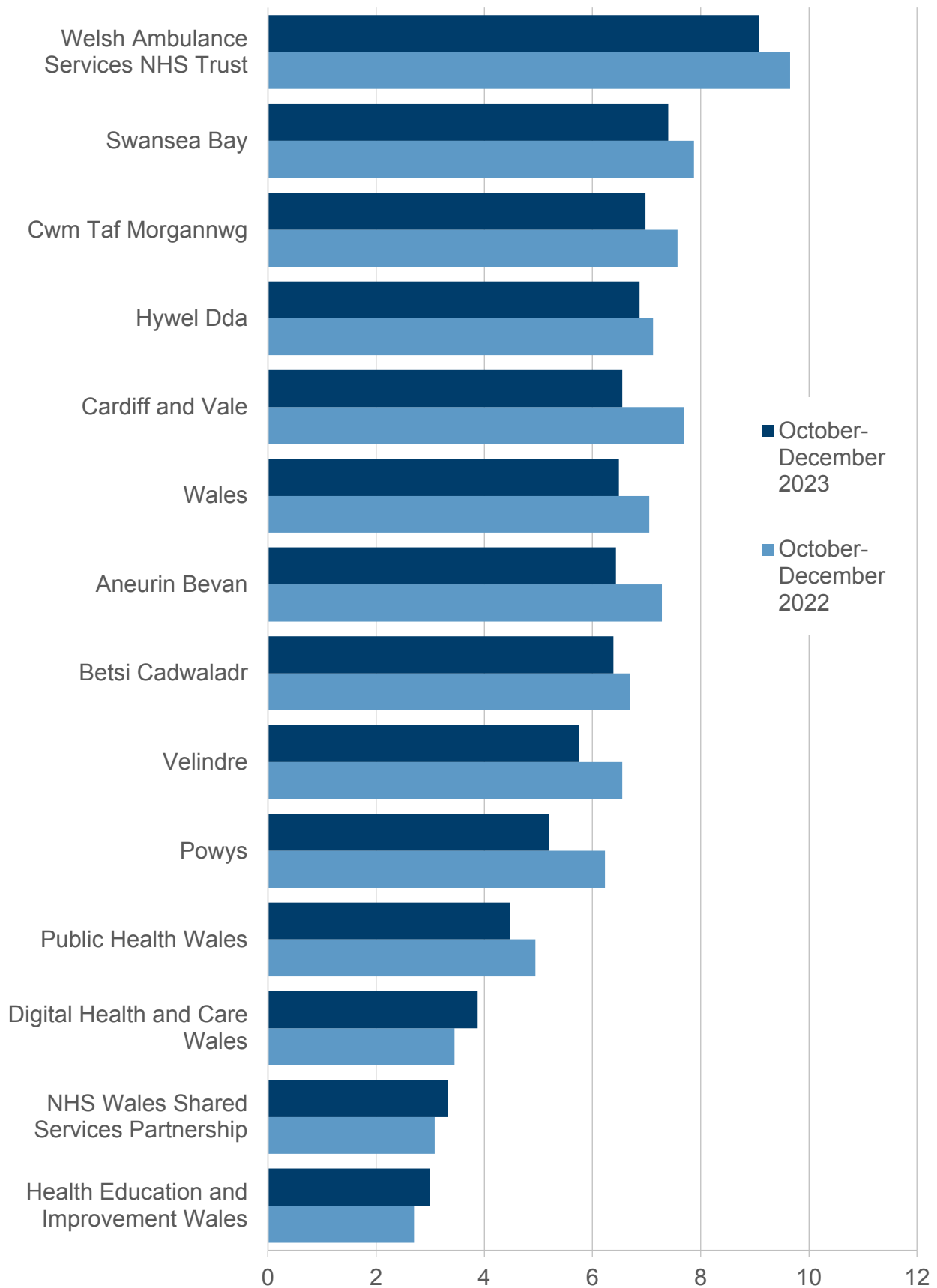
### **Percentage of NHS staff absent by organisation on StatsWales**

Sickness absence shows seasonal variation throughout the year typically with lower rates in summer and higher rates in winter. To provide more stable analysis of longer-term changes, a 12-month moving average is shown in Figure 1.

The 12-month moving average has increased over the longer term. The rate was close to 5.2% for all 12-month periods that ended between December 2015 and March 2019, but increased to the highest rates on record (7.0%) for the 12-month periods that ended on 31 July and 31 August 2022. Since then, the rate has fallen in all but one 12-month period.

# Sickness absence rate by NHS organisation

## **Figure 2: Sickness absence rates by NHS Wales organisation, October to December 2023 compared to the same quarter in the previous year**





Description of Figure 2: Bar chart showing that sickness absence rates vary widely by NHS organisation and are generally higher among the Welsh Ambulance Services NHS Trust and health boards.

Source: Electronic Staff Record, Health Education and Improvement Wales (HEIW)

### **Percentage of NHS staff absent by organisation on StatsWales**

In the quarter that ended on 31 December 2023, sickness absence rates decreased in 10 of the 13 NHS organisations when compared to the same quarter in the previous year.

The rate increased slightly in Digital Health and Care Wales (3.9%), NHS Wales Shared Services Partnership (3.3%) and Health Education and Improvement Wales (3.0%); however, these organisations had the lowest rates for the quarter that ended on 31 December 2023. These three organisations also had the lowest sickness absence rates in the same time period in the previous year.

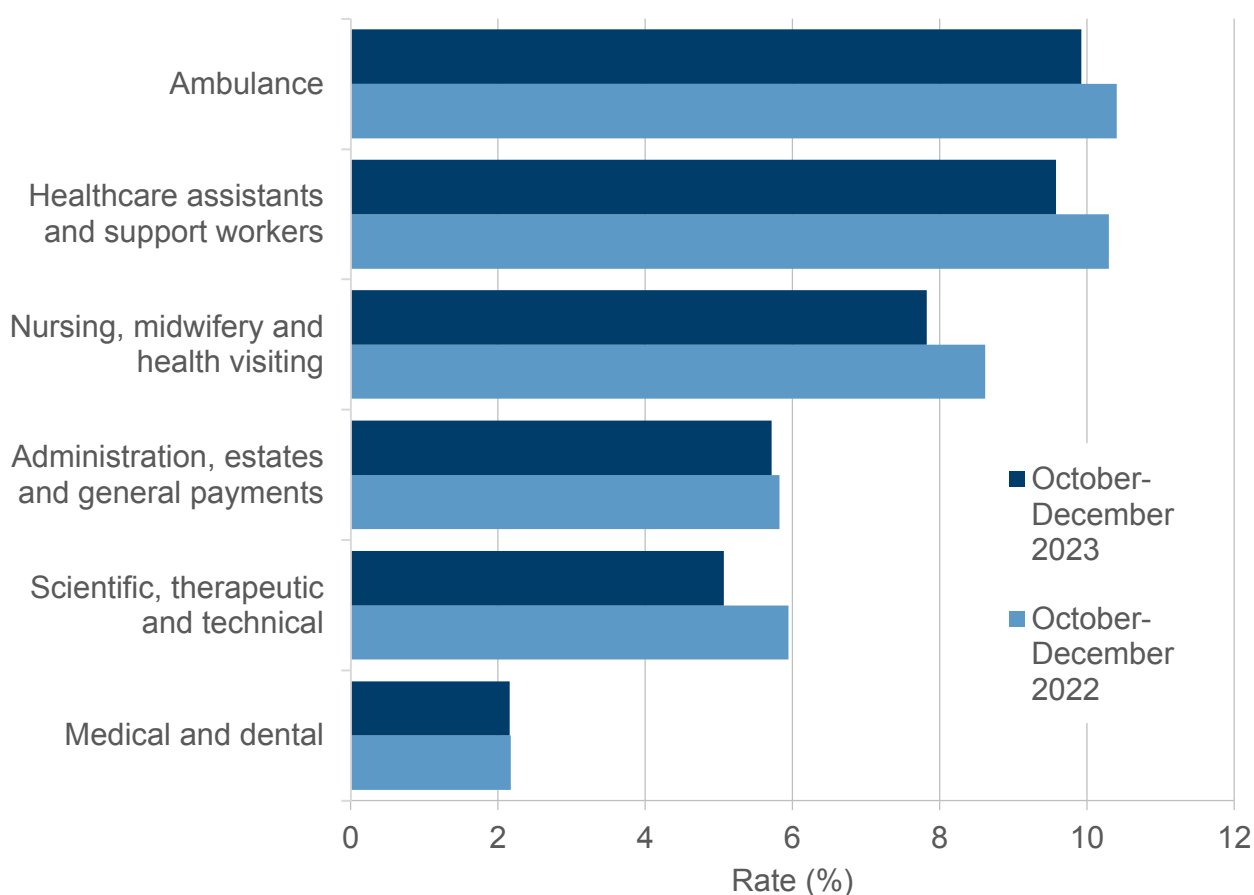
Welsh Ambulance Services NHS Trust had the highest sickness absence rate (9.1%) of all NHS organisations, but the rate was 0.6 percentage points lower than the same quarter in the previous year.

The largest change in sickness absence rate was in Cardiff and Vale which decreased by 1.1 percentage points from the same quarter in the previous year.

There was some variation between the local health boards, with the highest sickness absence rate in Swansea Bay (7.4%) and the lowest rate in Powys (5.2%).

## Sickness absence rate by staff group

**Figure 3: Sickness absence rates by NHS Wales staff group, October to December 2023 compared to the same quarter in the previous year**



Description of Figure 3: Bar chart showing that sickness absence rates varied widely between different staff groups; the rates for ambulance staff, and healthcare assistants and support staff were almost five times greater than for medical and dental staff.

Source: Electronic Staff Record, Health Education and Improvement Wales

(HEIW)

## Percentage of NHS staff absent by staff group on StatsWales

In the quarter that ended on 31 December 2023, sickness absence rates were lower for all staff groups when compared to the same quarter in the previous year.

Ambulance staff had the highest sickness absence rate (9.9%), marginally above the rate for healthcare assistants and support workers (9.6%).

Medical and dental staff had the lowest sickness absence rate (2.2%) and has since data was first collected in 2009.

The largest change in sickness absence rate change was in the scientific, therapeutic and technical group, which decreased by 0.9 percentage points compared to October to December 2022.

## 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](#).

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

Data on the number of [Staff directly employed by the NHS Wales](#) (also known as the NHS staff census data) is published on a quarterly basis. Note that there are minor differences in how staff groups are defined between the two releases. These are detailed in the [quality report](#). Complementary statistics on the number of [vacancies in NHS Wales](#) is also published.

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NHS staff who are self-isolating, including shielding staff (shielding advice was paused from 1 April 2021), are not counted as being on sick absence and are therefore not included in these sickness absence rates.

## **Well-being of Future Generations Act (WFG)**

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 wellbeing goals, and (b) lay a copy of the national indicators before Senedd Cymru. Under section 10(8) of the Well-being of Future Generations Act, where the Welsh Ministers revise the national indicators, they must as soon as reasonably practicable (a) publish the indicators as revised and (b) lay a copy of them before the Senedd. These national indicators were laid before the Senedd in 2021. The indicators laid on 14 December 2021 replace the set laid on 16 March 2016.

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

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