

NHS Direct Wales: 1 January to 31 March 2020

8 July 2020
SFR 70/2020

NHS Direct Wales is a 24-hour telephone and internet health advice service staffed by experienced nurses, dental and health information advisors.

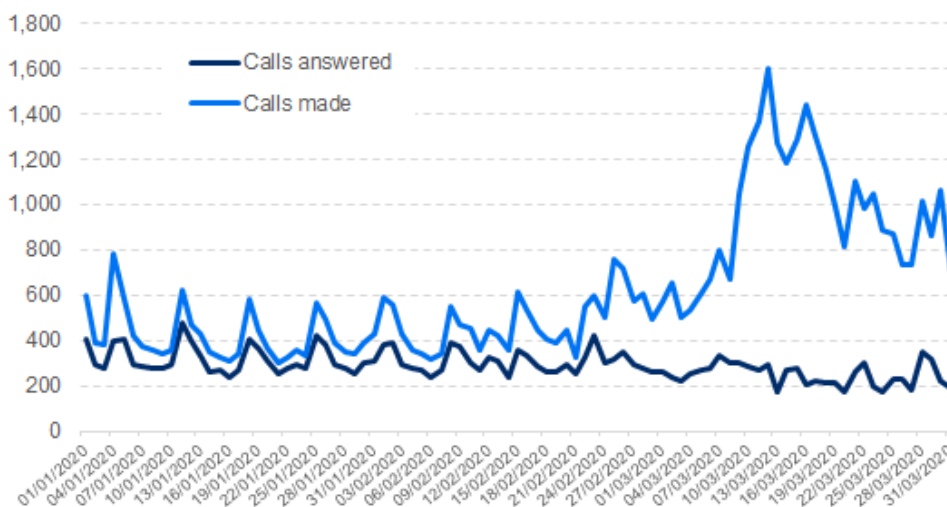
The operation of 111 Wales now covers more than 52% of the population; this affects the number of calls to NHS Direct Wales – see [notes](#).

As a result, this will be the last release in the NHS Direct Wales series; it is planned that monthly data will instead be published in the NHS activity and performance stats release from July/August 2020.

Key results during the quarter (1 January to 31 March 2020):

- Just over 56,000 calls were made to the main NHS Direct 0845 number, of which just over 26,000 (47%) were answered.
- Over 2.5 million visits were made to the NHS Direct Wales website.
- Just over 522,000 visits were made to the online symptom checker, and nearly three quarters of these (384,000) were for coronavirus symptoms.
- 991 online enquiries were made to the web-based enquiry service.
- Almost half (47%) of calls where a final outcome was recorded were directed towards primary care, nearly 24% to A&E, and an ambulance was called in just over 8% of calls. The remainder (just under 30%) were provided with information or self-care advice.

Chart 1: Daily calls to NHS Direct Wales 0845 46 47 - 1 January to 31 March 2020



Source: Welsh Ambulance Services NHS Trust

About this release

This statistical release presents the latest quarterly data on the total number of calls made to, and answered by, NHS Direct Wales, alongside data for previous quarters. Charts presenting data on daily calls, web visits, use of online symptom checkers and patient characteristics are also shown.

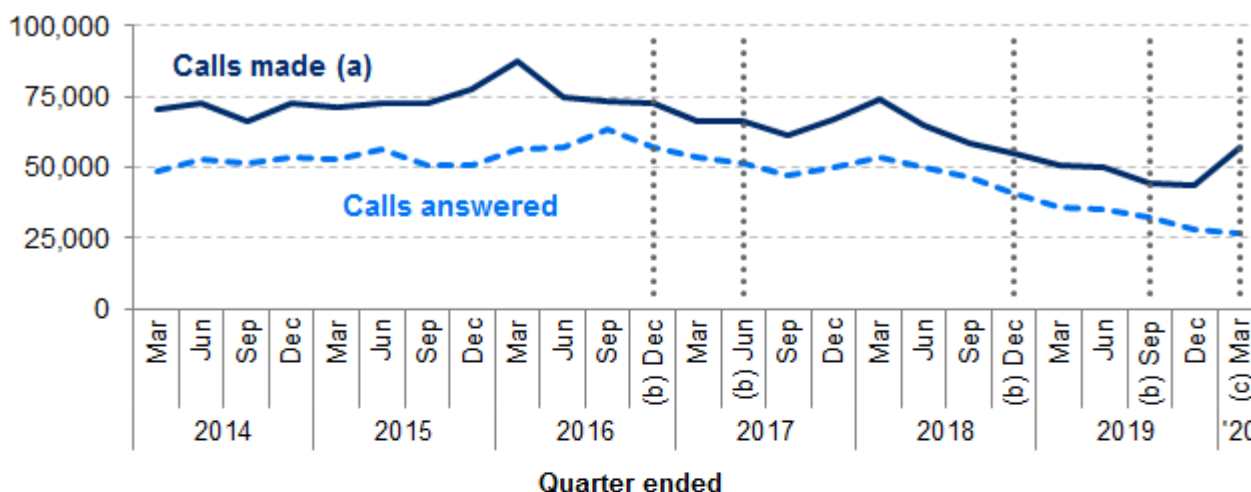
Further information about NHS Direct Wales can be found in the '[key quality information](#)' section of this report.

Data from the start of the service is available in tables on the [StatsWales](#) website.

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Chart 2: Calls to NHS Direct Wales 0845 46 47, quarter ended 31 March 2014 to date



Source: Welsh Ambulance Services NHS Trust

Notes:

(a) The number of calls where the caller has listened to all of the welcome messaging and stayed on the line to be answered.

(b) The introduction of a pilot of 111 Wales in Abertawe Bro Morgannwg during October 2016, and in Carmarthenshire (part of Hywel Dda) from May 2017, will have affected the number of calls to NHS Direct. 111 is now being rolled out across Wales, and went live in Powys on 3 October 2018, in Ceredigion and Pembrokeshire (to complete Hywel Dda) on 31 October 2018, and in Aneurin Bevan on 13 August 2019.

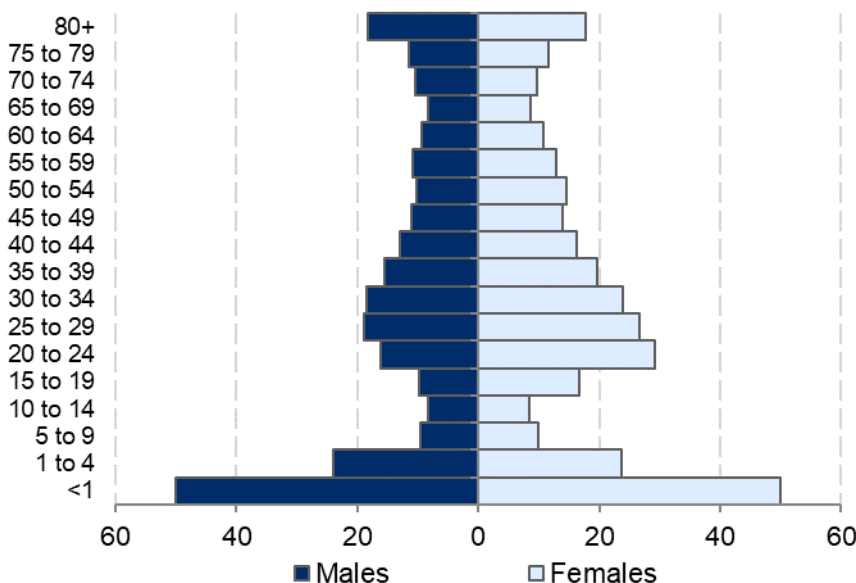
(c) The coronavirus pandemic in early 2020 resulted in a considerable increase in calls.

The data underlying this chart, and other calls to NHS Direct, is available by month on StatsWales.

This data does not include around 8,000 calls which are transferred each quarter from the Welsh Ambulance Services NHS Trust for clinical triage.

- 56,845 calls were made to the NHS Direct Wales 0845 number in the January to March quarter of 2020, of which, 26,492 (47%) were answered.

Chart 3: Number of calls per 1,000 resident population by age and gender, 1 January to 31 March 2020



NOTE: This information relates only to those calls which were triaged and recorded on the assessment system.

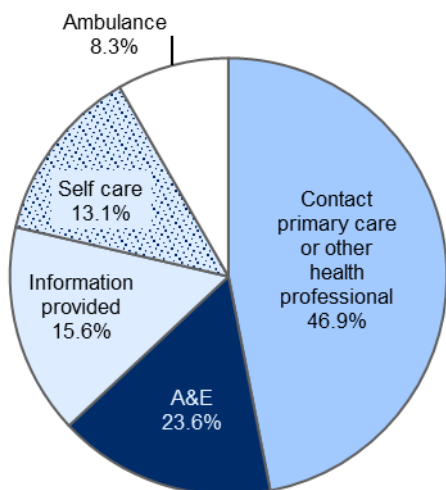
Age and/or gender are not recorded for a small proportion of the calls.

Based on the 2018 mid year estimates of population (Office for National Statistics).

Source: Welsh Ambulance Services NHS Trust

- Children aged under one are the subject to a higher proportion of calls than any other age group. More females are the subject of calls than males.

Chart 4: Outcomes for calls to NHS Direct, 1 January to 31 March 2020



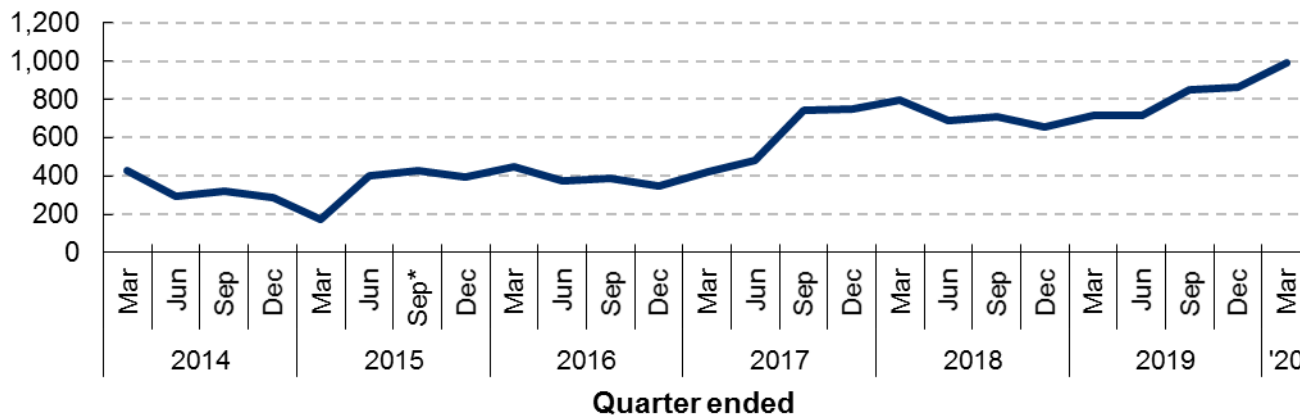
- Almost half of all the calls (46.9%) where a final outcome was recorded during the quarter ending 31 March 2020 were directed towards primary care (for example, a GP or dentist), other healthcare professionals or to minor injury units.
- Just under a quarter (23.6%) were directed towards A&E departments, and an ambulance was called in just over 8% of calls.
- Information was provided for 15.6% of calls, and self-care was advised for a further 13.1%

Note: Only calls where a final outcome was recorded for the patient are included; calls where the patient chose not to proceed, for example, are omitted.

Source: Welsh Ambulance Services NHS Trust

[Online enquiries](#) submitted to the NHS Direct Wales website are confidential and a reply is sent back within a maximum of three working days. People may use the symptom checkers and self-assessments developed by NHS Direct rather than submit an online enquiry.

Chart 5: Online enquiries, quarter ending 31 March 2014 to date



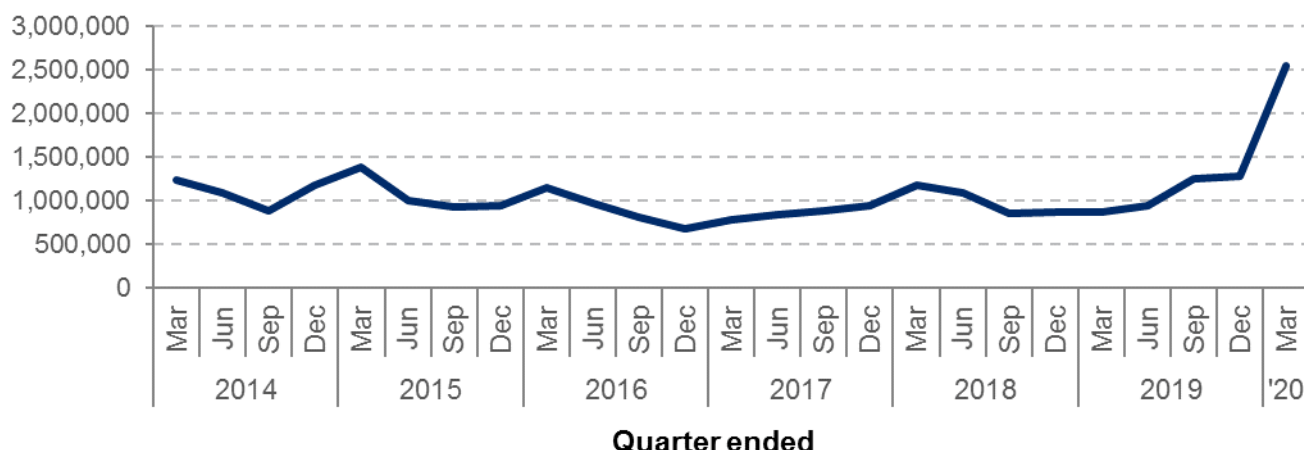
Notes: The data underlying this chart is available on StatsWales; * Updated in January 2016

Source: Welsh Ambulance Services NHS Trust

- During the quarter ending 31 March 2020, 991 online enquiries were submitted, up 15.1% (from 861) from the previous quarter (ending 31 December 2019) and up more than 130% (from 430) since the quarter ending 31 March 2014.

Chart 6: Web hits, quarter ending 31 March 2014 to date

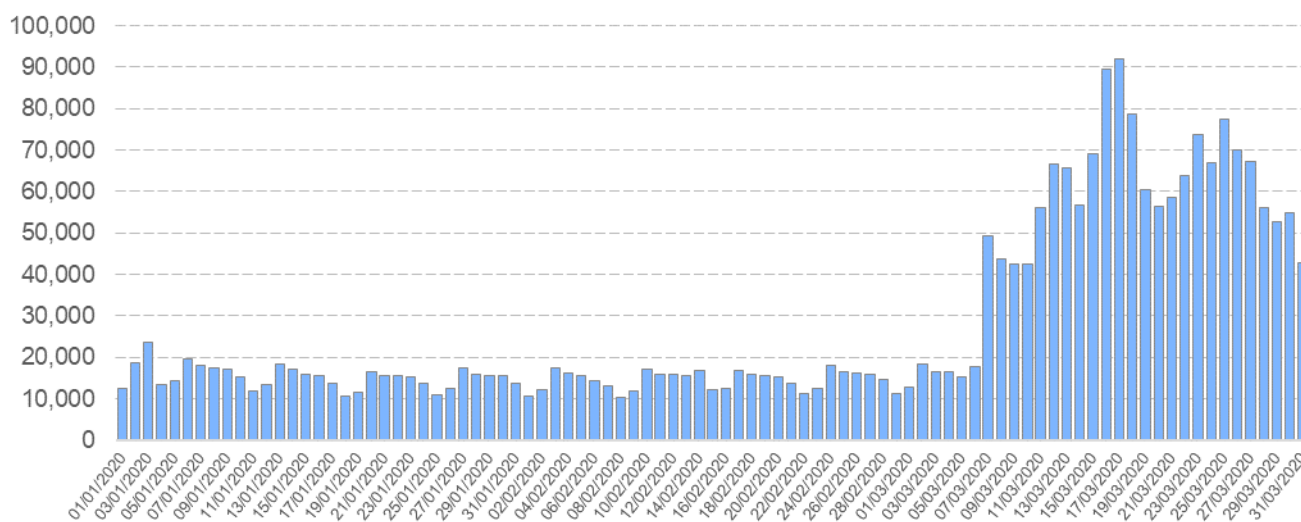
[Web hits](#) are a series of actions that begin when a visitor views their first page from the server, and ends when the visitor leaves the site or remains idle beyond the idle-time limit (currently 30 minutes).



Source: Welsh Ambulance Services NHS Trust

- There were 2,551,320 visits to the NHS Direct Wales website during the quarter ended 31 March 2020, an increase of 99% since the previous quarter (ending 31 December 2019) and 105% since the quarter ending 31 March 2014 (the earliest comparable quarter).
- Note that Google introduced a new search algorithm on 1 August 2018 which may have affected the website's Google search ranking and the number of web hits. The Google changes may have also affected the symptom checker in Chart 8.

Chart 7: Daily web hits, 1 January to 31 March 2020

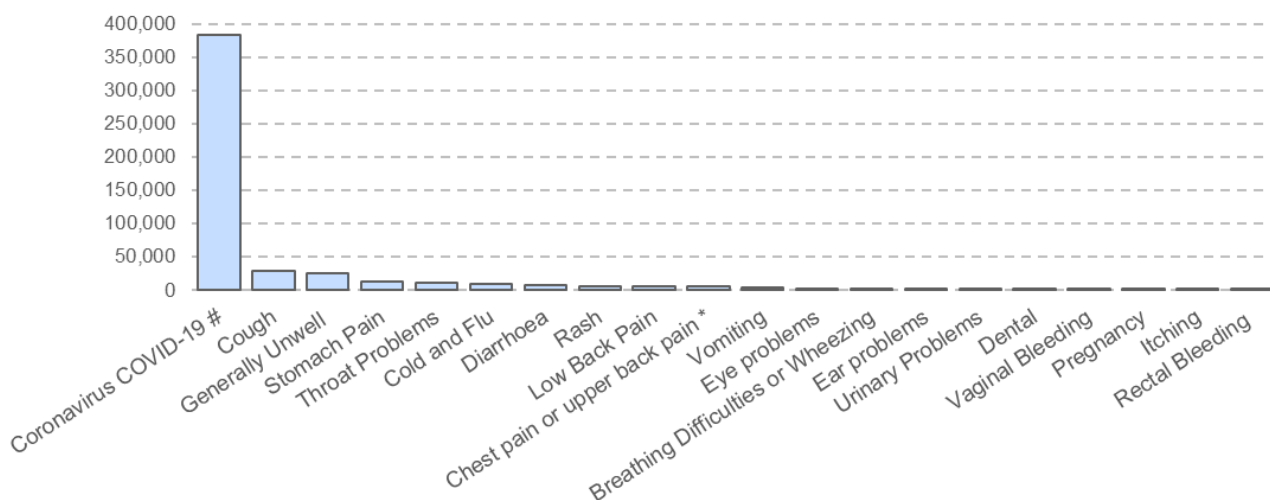


Source: Welsh Ambulance Services NHS Trust

- March 2020 saw a huge increase in the use of the NHS Direct Wales website, mainly due to the coronavirus pandemic, with more than 92,000 visits to the website on 17 March alone.

Online [symptoms checkers](#) are an interactive source developed by NHS Direct Wales following requests by users.

Chart 8: Visits to the ‘top 20’ online symptoms checker, 1 January to 31 March 2020



Note: completed symptom checks made (where a person has gone through to the final step, i.e. the ‘recommended outcome’).

Introduced in March 2020

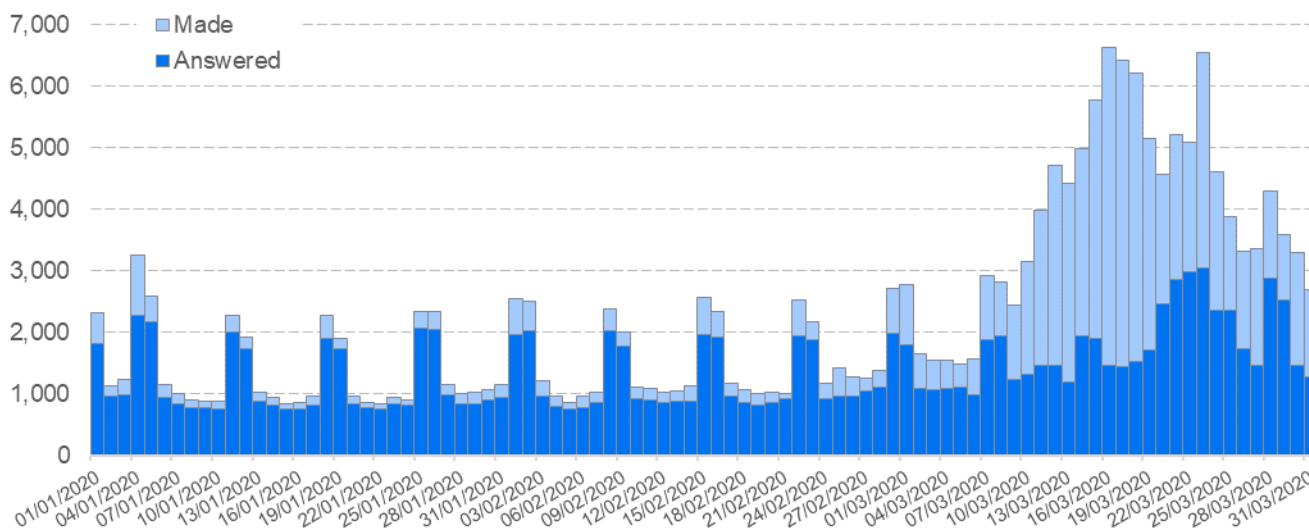
* Introduced in December 2019

Source: Welsh Ambulance Services NHS Trust

- ‘Coronavirus / COVID-19’ was the most common symptom checker used during the quarter, accounting for almost three quarters (73.6%) of all the symptom checkers used, followed by ‘cough’ (5.6%).
- Over the quarter, visits to the online symptom checker increased from 45,596 to 522,110 mainly due to the introduction of the coronavirus checker in March 2020 (details on StatsWales).

111 Wales is now operational in more than 52% of Wales; chart 9 shows the number of calls made to the service in the first 2 months of the year, and the increase caused by the coronavirus pandemic.

Chart 9: Calls made to 111, and answered, 1 January to 31 March 2020



Source: Welsh Ambulance Services NHS Trust

Key Quality Information

Source

The data is provided by the Health Informatics Department of the Welsh Ambulance Services NHS Trust.

Description

NHS Direct Wales answers calls in English, Welsh and over 120 other languages via a language line. In addition to the main telephone helpline (0845 46 47), they handle triage calls transferred from A&E departments and the Welsh Ambulance Services NHS Trust (WAST), and provide a dental information line.

NHS Direct Wales also provides ad hoc information lines to support public health campaigns. The number of calls will be affected by ad-hoc services provided at points in time. The table below gives details of services, other than the main 0845 health helpline. Some of these have not been operational in the period covered by the release. Calls to other services include all recorded messaging services.

This table provides information on the various ad-hoc public health information lines that have been run by NHS Direct Wales. These lines are set up to support national and local public health campaigns, and remain in use for as long as necessary. Callers to closed lines will receive a message directing them to an appropriate alternative service; for a limited period after the closure of a line there will still be calls recorded as 'made' although these calls will not be answered.

Details of Non-0845 services and operation dates

Service	Operation dates
GP out-of-hours	24 April 2001 to 3 July 2011
A&E (including Minor Injuries Units)	15 November 2001 to date
Dental information line	8 November 2003 to 20 January 2012, re-opened 20 April 2012 until 30 January 2013, and re-opened during the quarter ended 30 September 2016
Other:	
Health Information Wales	May 2001
Category C (Ambulance triage calls)	January 2004 – February 2005 Re-opened 2 September 2009
Health Challenge Wales	31 January 2005 – 30 June 2005
Cryptosporidium Helpline	24 November 2005 – 10 February 2006
HPV Helpline - automated message facility only	11 August 2008 to date
HPV Helpline	15 September 2008 to date
Public Health Wales - childhood height & weight campaign	5 January 2009 – December 2009
Smoking Line	1 April 2009 to date
H1N1 (Swine Flu)	30 April 2009 to date
Cold & Flu Line	26 February 2010 (seasonal). Dedicated line closed 20 January 2012. From December quarter 2012, cold and flu information available as an option from the main 0845 helpline number but still shown here separately for information
Air Alert	30 January 2013 to date
Patient Pathway	30 January 2013 to date
NHSDW Control (test calls)	April - June quarter 2013 only
Gwent out-of-hours (Aneurin Bevan) - caller can choose option to speak to NHS Direct Wales	24 March 2014 onwards

To improve patient experience and ensure that emergency 999 calls receive an appropriate level of assessment and response, WAST has implemented a system to pass a significant number of its non immediately life-threatening calls to NHS Direct Wales nurse advisors for clinical triage. The triage model

was established as a pilot in South East operational region on 2nd September 2009, and phased into the other two operational regions (North and Central & West) in October 2010. These calls are not included in any of the tables and charts in this release as they are no longer part of the NHS Direct Wales telephony system. An indication of the number of these calls is provided in footnotes.

NHS Direct Wales was not responsible for any GP out-of-hours services in Wales from 3 July 2011.

111 Wales

111 Wales is a new, free way to contact the NHS from landlines and mobiles. The 111 service is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week, and can be used both for health information and advice and to access urgent care. It is an amalgamation of NHS Direct Wales and the GP out-of-hours (OOHs) service.

Initially operating as a pilot scheme, the 111 Wales service went live in part of the Abertawe Bro Morgannwg University Health Board (ABMU) area on 4 October 2016 and was extended to cover the whole of the ABMU area by 28 October 2016. The pilot was further extended on 2 May 2017 to include the Carmarthenshire area of Hywel Dda LHB, resulting in between 50,000 and 60,000 calls to the service each quarter.

On 5 April 2018, the Cabinet Secretary for Health & Social Services [announced](#) that the 111 service will be rolled out to the rest of Wales over the next 2-3 years.

On 3 October 2018 the service was extended to Powys, and on 31 October to Ceredigion and Pembrokeshire (to complete Hywel Dda); as a result, calls increased to more than 80,000 in the October to December 2018 quarter, and to more than 87,000 in the quarter to March 2019.

On 13 August 2019 the service was extended to Aneurin Bevan; calls increased to 104,788 in the July to September 2019 quarter, and to 144,043 in the October to December 2019 quarter.

111 now covers 52.4% of the population of Wales; call volumes from before and after October 2016 are therefore not comparable.

Definitions

To provide an accurate picture of calls activity at NHS Direct Wales, the data used represents the number of calls 'made' to NHS Direct Wales and the number of 'answered' calls.

Calls 'made' are those where the caller has listened to all of the welcome messaging and stayed on the line to be answered. **'Answered'** calls are those in which the caller speaks to an NHS Direct operative or receives information from an automated service. The difference between the number of 'calls made' and the number of calls 'answered' is abandoned calls.

[NHS Direct Wales](#) also provides information to the public via its website. The main features of the website include a bilingual health encyclopaedia, an online enquiry service and the facility to search for other NHS services, such as dentists.

Web visits are a series of actions that begin when a visitor views their first page from the server, and ends when the visitor leaves the site or remains idle beyond the idle-time limit (currently 30 minutes).

Visitor numbers exclude all known spiders: a spider is a program that trawls the internet looking for web pages, and adding them to a database in order for search engines to be able to find the page.

A **web-based enquiry service** accessed via the NHS Direct Wales website enables visitors to send their health enquiries via email to the health information team at NHS Direct Wales. A response is sent back within a maximum of 3 working days. All online enquiries are confidential.

A 'Cold and Flu' [symptoms checker](#) was first introduced on the NHS Direct Wales website in September 2010. A symptoms checker 'family' was introduced at the end of November 2013 following which the Cold & Flu symptoms checker was refined & re-launched on 9 December 2013. Visits to the web pages are defined as 'completed symptoms checks made' i.e. where a person has gone through to the final step, i.e. known as the 'recommended outcome'.

Age and gender of patients: the analysis is based on calls which have been answered and assessed and where the patient is recorded as resident in Wales. These are a similar but not identical number as that derived from the telephony software which is the source of the 'calls answered' data. A small proportion of the records do not have age and/or sex recorded. It is not known if some of these calls related to patients resident in Wales. The data is presented as rates per 1,000 Welsh resident population using Office for National Statistics (ONS) mid-year estimates of population.

Outcomes of calls: The analysis is of all calls to NHS Direct where a final outcome was recorded for the patient. Calls where the patient chose not to proceed, for example, are omitted.

Users and uses

The aim of these statistics is to present data which is available from a routine administrative source in an accessible format providing a summary of NHS Direct Wales call statistics over time. Some of the key potential users are:

- Ministers and the Members Research Service in the Welsh Parliament
- other areas of the Welsh Government
- other government departments
- National Health Service and Public Health Wales
- students, academics and universities
- Royal College of Nursing and other professional organisations
- individual citizens and private companies.

The statistics are used in a variety of ways. Some examples of the uses include:

- advice to Ministers
- to inform debate in the Welsh Parliament and beyond
- to monitor and evaluate performance and activity in the NHS.

Related statistics

Ambulance quality indicators

More detailed, contextual information about the Welsh Ambulance Service has been published quarterly (since January 2016) by the Emergency Ambulance Services Committee (EASC). EASC has developed a Quality and Delivery Framework for Emergency Ambulance Services and a five-step ambulance patient care pathway. A number of the [Ambulance Quality Indicators](#) (AQIs) which have been developed relate to NHS Direct Wales, specifically to web hits and the reasons why people get in touch with the service. These are now also available on [StatsWales](#).

Other statistical releases relating to unscheduled care:

[Ambulance services in Wales](#) is an annual release, and data is included in the monthly summary release on [NHS activity and performance](#).

[Flu statistics](#) are published on the Public Health Wales website.

[Welsh Health Survey](#)

Well-being of Future Generations Act (WFG)

The Well-being of Future Generations Act 2015 is about improving the social, economic, environmental and cultural well-being of Wales. The Act puts in place seven well-being 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 the Welsh Government. The 46 national indicators were laid in March 2016.

Information on the indicators, along with narratives for each of the well-being 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 well-being assessments and local well-being plans.

Further details

The document is available at: <https://gov.wales/nhs-direct-wales>

Next update

This is the final release in the series. It is planned for monthly NHS Direct and 111 data to be published in the monthly NHS activity and performance statistical release. A new annual statistical release providing more in-depth analysis of NHS Direct Wales and 111 data may be developed in future months.

We want your feedback

We welcome any feedback on any aspect of these statistics which can be provided by email to stats.healthinfo@gov.wales

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