Sickness absence in the NHS in Wales, quarter ended 31 December 2019
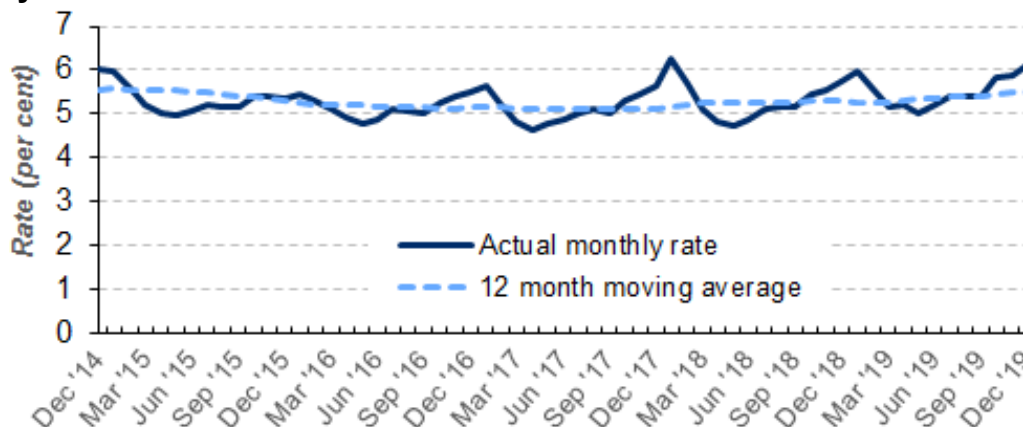
In this release, new information is shown for the quarter ended 31 December 2019. Data for July to September 2019 has been revised.

Main points

- Sickness absence was 5.9%, up 0.4 percentage points from the December quarter of 2018.

- After a gradual fall during 2015 to 2017, the average is slowly rising, and was 5.5% over the last year.

- The Welsh Ambulance Services NHS Trust had the highest sickness absence, 7.5%.

- Health Education and Improvement Wales, the Special Health Authority formed on 1 October 2018, had the lowest sickness absence, 3.1%.

- The highest staff group sickness absence was in the Healthcare Assistants and other Support Workers group, 8.6%.

- The lowest staff group sickness absence was in the Medical and Dental staff group, 2.1%.

Sickness absence
5.9%
in Dec quarter 2019
Average
5.5%
during the last year

Highest organisation
7.5%
WAST
Lowest organisation
3.1%
Health Education and Improvement Wales

Highest staff group
8.6%
Healthcare assistants and other support workers
Lowest staff group
2.1%
Medical and Dental

About this release

This is the latest in a quarterly series presenting information about sickness absence of NHS staff in Wales by NHS organisation and staff group.

Sickness absence rates are the total number of sickness absence days divided by the total number of available days for each group.

For more information, see the Key Quality Information section at the end of the release. Detailed tables are available on StatsWales.

In this release

Chart 1: Trends in the sickness absence rate in the NHS in Wales, by month: December 2014 – December 2019

Source: HEIW

In response to the current COVID-19 pandemic, Welsh Government is collecting additional and more timely data on sickness absence. This has not been included here as this release only covers the period up to the quarter ending 31 December 2019. This additional data is NHS Wales management information; it is not collected on the same basis as that published in this quarterly release and is not currently considered robust enough for publication. Information on coronavirus and NHS activity and capacity is published in a weekly update.

Trends in the sickness absence rate

Sickness absence was 5.9% in the quarter ended 31 December 2019, up 0.4 percentage points from the December quarter of 2018.

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 gone up in recent months but is at a similar level to four years ago.

Sickness absence rate by NHS organisation

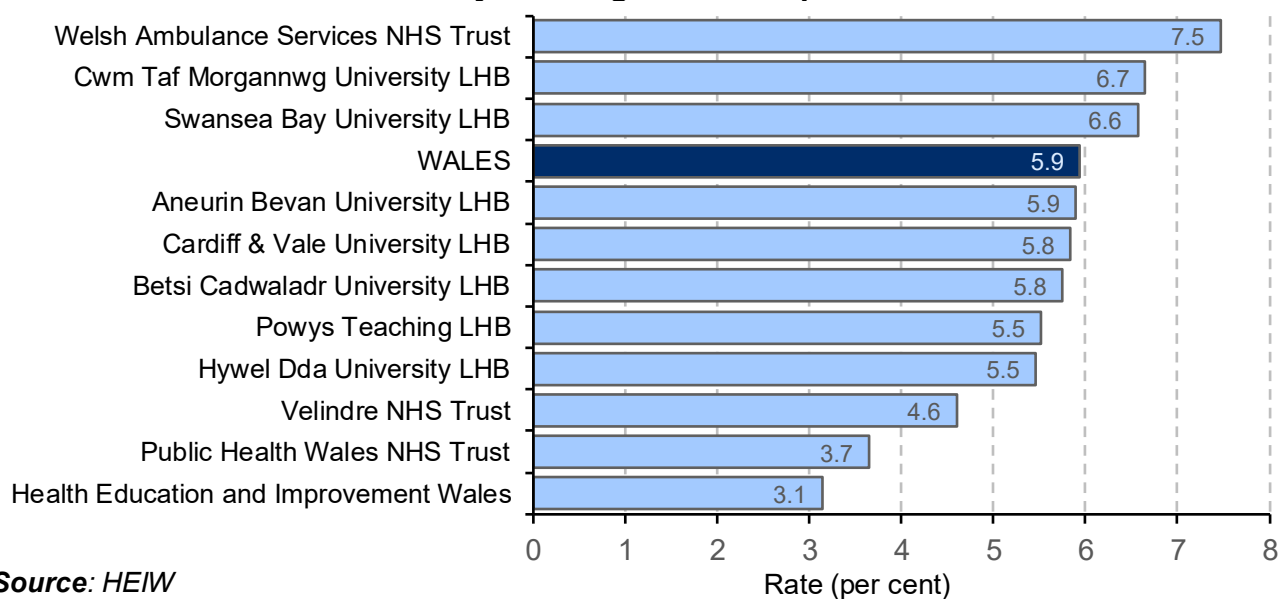**Chart 2: Sickness absence rate by NHS organisation: quarter ended 31 December 2019**

Organisation	Rate (per cent)
Welsh Ambulance Services NHS Trust	7.5
Cwm Taf Morgannwg University LHB	6.7
Swansea Bay University LHB	6.6
WALES	5.9
Aneurin Bevan University LHB	5.9
Cardiff & Vale University LHB	5.8
Betsi Cadwaladr University LHB	5.8
Powys Teaching LHB	5.5
Hywel Dda University LHB	5.5
Velindre NHS Trust	4.6
Public Health Wales NHS Trust	3.7
Health Education and Improvement Wales	3.1

Source: HEIW

Table 1: Sickness absence rate by NHS organisation, last five quarters

Organisation:	2018 Oct to Dec	2019 Jan to Mar	Apr to Jun	Jul to Sep	Oct to Dec	% change from Oct to Dec 2018
Betsi Cadwaladr University LHB	5.4	5.3	4.9	5.2	5.8	0.3
Powys Teaching LHB	4.5	4.7	4.2	4.4	5.5	1.0
Hywel Dda University LHB	5.0	5.2	5.0	4.8	5.5	0.5
Abertawe Bro Morgannwg University LHB [1]	6.1	6.0	.	.	.	.
Swansea Bay University LHB [1]	.	.	5.8	5.9	6.6	.
Cwm Taf University LHB [1]	6.1	6.3	.	.	.	.
Cwm Taf Morgannwg University LHB [1]	.	.	5.7	5.9	6.7	.
Aneurin Bevan University LHB	5.8	5.7	5.2	5.6	5.9	0.1
Cardiff & Vale University LHB	5.4	5.5	4.9	5.3	5.8	0.4
Public Health Wales NHS Trust	3.9	3.8	3.6	4.0	3.7	-0.2
Velindre NHS Trust	4.1	4.3	4.0	3.9	4.6	0.5
Welsh Ambulance Services NHS Trust	7.5	7.5	6.6	7.3	7.5	-0.1
Health Education and Improvement Wales	1.7	2.9	2.6	1.8	3.1	1.5
WALES	5.6	5.6	5.1	5.4	5.9	0.4

Notes: % change figures are rounded; **.** = not applicable   *Source: HEIW*
[1] See the Notes for details on the LHB changes
Monthly rates for sickness absence by organisation are available on StatsWales from July 2009 onwards.

The Welsh Ambulance Services NHS Trust had the highest sickness absence (7.5%) of all NHS organisations this quarter and has done so since data started to be collected in 2008.

Health Education and Improvement Wales, the Special Health Authority formed on 1 October 2018, had the lowest sickness absence (3.1%) this quarter, up from 1.8% in the previous quarter. Until then, apart from the two quarters from January to March and April to June 2015, where Powys Teaching Local Health Board (LHB) had the lowest sickness absence rate, either Public Health Wales NHS Trust or Velindre NHS Trust has had the lowest sickness absence of all NHS organisations since data started to be collected in 2008.

Cwm Taf Morgannwg University LHB had the highest sickness absence (6.7%) of all LHBs for the quarter ended 31 December 2019. Apart from one quarter, either the former Abertawe Bro Morgannwg or Cwm Taf LHBs has had the highest sickness absence of all the LHBs since the June quarter of 2011.

Of all the LHBs, Powys Teaching LHB and Hywel Dda University LHB had the lowest sickness absence (5.5%) for the quarter ended 31 December 2019. Apart from three previous quarters, Powys has recorded the lowest sickness absence among the LHBs since the January to March quarter of 2014.

Bearing in mind the changes to the LHBs - which makes full comparability not possible – Health Education and Improvement Wales had the largest increase in sickness absence rate compared with the quarter ended 31 December 2018 (an increase of 1.5 percentage points).

Only Public Health Wales NHS Trust and the Welsh Ambulance Services NHS Trust showed a decrease in sickness absence rate compared with the quarter ended 31 December 2018.

Sickness absence rate by staff group

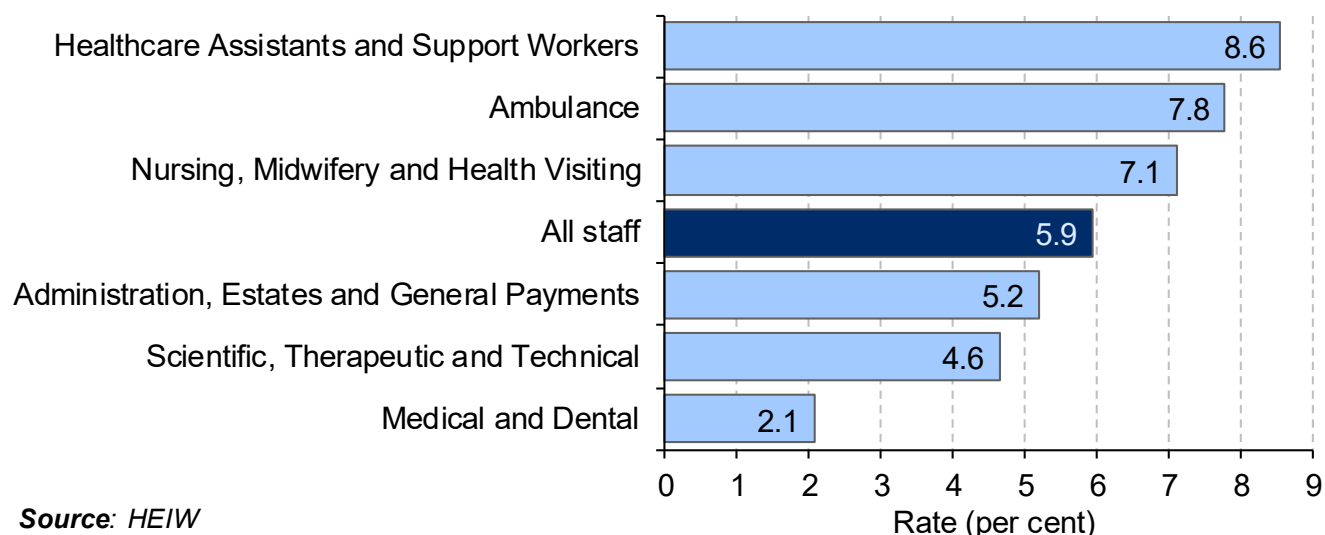**Chart 3: Sickness absence rate by staff group: quarter ended 31 December 2019**

Source: HEIW

Table 2: Sickness absence rate by staff group, last five quarters

Staff group	2018 Oct to Dec	2019 Jan to Mar	Apr to Jun	Jul to Sep	Oct to Dec	% change from Oct - Dec 2018
Medical and Dental	1.8	1.9	1.9	1.8	2.1	0.3
Nursing, Midwifery and Health Visiting	6.7	6.6	6.3	6.5	7.1	0.4
Scientific, Therapeutic and Technical	4.3	4.3	3.8	4.1	4.6	0.3
Administration, Estates and General Payments	4.8	4.8	4.3	4.5	5.2	0.4
Healthcare Assistants and Support Workers	7.8	8.0	7.2	8.0	8.6	0.8
Ambulance	7.9	7.8	7.2	7.8	7.8	-0.1
All staff (a)	**5.6**	**5.6**	**5.1**	**5.4**	**5.9**	**0.4**

(a) A small number of employees with missing occupation codes are included in the 'All staff' total

NOTE: % change figures are rounded

Source: HEIW

Monthly rates for sickness absence by staff group are available on StatsWales from July 2009 onwards.

Of the six staff groups, the Healthcare Assistants and Support Workers group had the highest sickness absence rate this quarter (8.6%).

Either the Ambulance staff group or Healthcare Assistants and Support Workers staff group has had the highest sickness absence of all staff groups since data for staff groups started to be collected in 2009.

The Medical and Dental staff group had the lowest sickness absence rate for this quarter (2.1%) and has done so since data started to be collected in 2009.

The Healthcare Assistants and Support Workers staff group had the largest increase in sickness absence rate compared with the quarter ended 31 December 2018 (an increase of 0.8 percentage points).

Only the Ambulance staff group reported a decrease in the sickness absence rate compared with the quarter ended 31 December 2018.

Sickness absence rates by staff group and LHB, quarter ended 31 December 2019

Chart 4: Medical and Dental staff sickness absence rates, by LHB
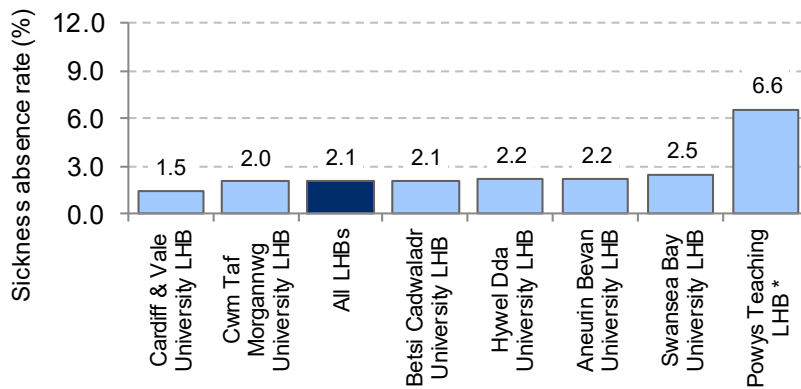
Across the LHBs in Wales, the sickness absence rate for Medical and Dental staff during October to December 2019 was 2.1%. However, this varied from 1.5% in Cardiff & Vale to 6.6% in Powys.

'* Powys had a number of long-term sickness absences in this group affecting the total.

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## Chart 5: Nursing, Midwifery and Health Visiting staff sickness absence rates, by LHB
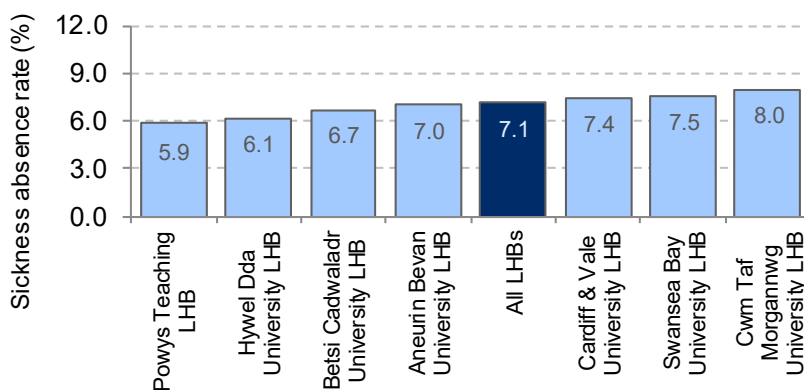
The sickness absence rate for Nursing, Midwifery and Health Visiting staff was 7.1% across the LHBs in Wales during October to December 2019. Powys had the lowest rate (5.9%). Cwm Taf Morgannwg was the highest (8.0%).

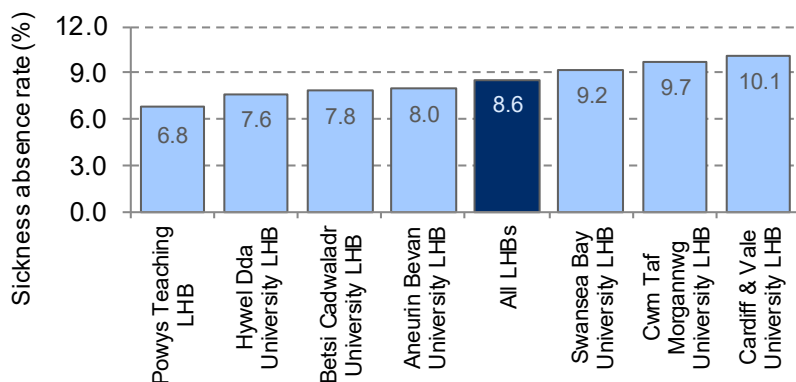## Chart 6: Scientific, Therapeutic and Technical staff, by LHB
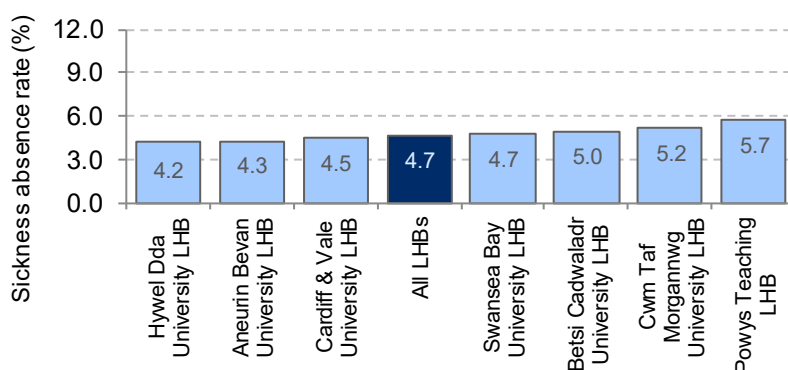
The sickness absence rate for Scientific, Therapeutic and Technical staff was fairly consistent across the LHBs during October to December 2019, ranging from 4.2% in Hywel Dda to 5.7% in Powys.

Chart 7: Administration, Estates and General Payments staff, by LHB
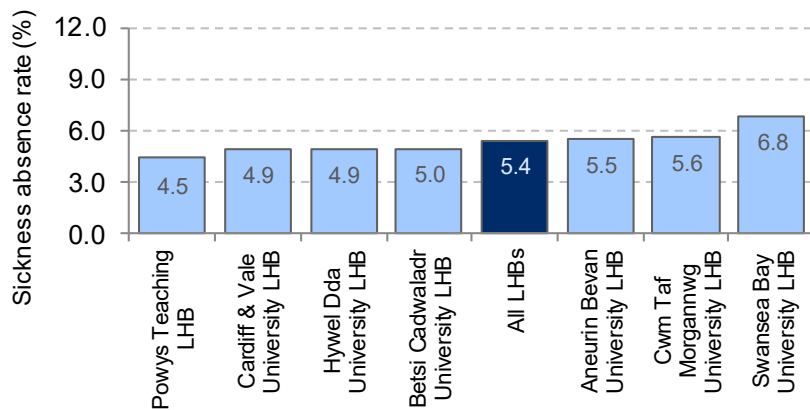
The sickness absence rate for Administration, Estates and General Payments staff varied across the LHBs in Wales, from 4.5% in Powys to 6.8% in Swansea Bay during October to December 2019.

Powys Teaching LHB	Cardiff & Vale University LHB	Hywel Dda University LHB	Betsi Cadwaladr University LHB	All LHBs	Aneurin Bevan University LHB	Cwm Taf Morgannwg University LHB	Swansea Bay University LHB
4.5	4.9	4.9	5.0	5.4	5.5	5.6	6.8

Chart 8: Healthcare Assistants and Other Support Workers, by LHB

The sickness absence rate for Healthcare Assistants and other Support Workers varied more than the other staff groups during October to December 2019. While the all LHBs rate was 8.6%, the rate in Powys was 6.8%, compared with 10.1% in Cardiff & Vale.

Powys Teaching LHB	Hywel Dda University LHB	Betsi Cadwaladr University LHB	Aneurin Bevan University LHB	All LHBs	Swansea Bay University LHB	Cwm Taf Morgannwg University LHB	Cardiff & Vale University LHB
6.8	7.6	7.8	8.0	8.6	9.2	9.7	10.1

Key quality information

Our statistics are produced to high professional standards set out in the [Code of Practice for Statistics](). They undergo regular quality assurance reviews to ensure that they meet customer needs. They are produced free from any political interference.

Methodology

The [Electronic Staff Record (ESR)]() is a payroll and human resources system for NHS employees in Wales and England. A monthly extract is downloaded from the ESR Data Warehouse detailing the number of Full Time Equivalent (FTE) calendar days available and the number of FTE calendar days of sickness absence for each member of NHS staff in Wales on the ESR. Sickness absence rates are then calculated for the whole Welsh NHS, staff groups and individual organisations. This rate is derived by dividing the FTE number of days sick by the FTE number of days available.

Sickness absence rates are calculated using FTE calendar days and include non-working days, which is 365 days of the year (366 days for a leap year). This may result in a slight under count of Sickness Absence rates calculated in this way when compared to Sickness Absence rates calculated using FTE worked days only, as non-working days such as weekends are included in both the numerator (if they are included in a period of reported sickness) and denominator. Typically not all non-working days lost to sickness will have been reported by an employee and therefore captured on the ESR.

The use of the term FTE in this context means, for example, that if a full time member of staff is off sick for 5 days (including any non-working days) then the numerator for the rate=5, and the denominator=365; however if a half time member of staff is off sick for 5 days (including any non-working days) then the numerator=5 and the denominator=182.5.

This methodology is consistent throughout this publication series so that different NHS organisations and staff groups can be compared accurately over a time series. However, care should be taken when comparing these rates to those using different methodologies.

While lower sickness absence rates, in general, indicate lower levels of sickness absence it should be noted that lower rates can also indicate under reporting of sickness absence. It should also be noted that sickness absence is subject to marked seasonal variation. All figures are shown to one decimal place.

Relevance

In 2009, the Wales Audit Office conducted a review of sickness absence in NHS Wales. This report made a number of key recommendations, including the recommendation that sickness absence trends should be published and also the trends for organisation and staff group.

We encourage users of the statistics to contact us to let us know how they use the data; please see the [Feedback]() section of this publication for the contact details.

Users and uses of these statistics

We believe the key users of statistics on sickness absence in the NHS are:

- Ministers, Assembly Members and the Members Research Service in the Welsh Parliament

- Other areas of the Welsh Government

- Other government departments

- National Health Service organisations

- Students, academics and universities

- 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 staffing levels in the NHS.

Accuracy

As the Electronic Staff Record is a live system and data extracts are taken from it, data presented here may be revised in future editions of the statistical release. In particular, revisions may occur in data by staff group, as work is ongoing to improve occupational coding of staff in NHS Wales.

Data for July to September 2019 has been revised for this edition of the release and StatsWales tables.

From the publication of the release for the quarter ended 31 March 2016, the process behind producing the sickness absence release and StatsWales tables was revised. The methodology remains the same for calculating the rates. However as a result of the change in process the data available on StatsWales was revised slightly and further subsets of the data became available i.e. sickness absence rate by organisation and staff group.

Data by staff group is based on mapping occupational codes for individual staff. Information on staff groups is available from the NHS Occupation Code Manual.

All our outputs include information on coverage, timing and geography.

In the unlikely event of incorrect data being published, revisions would be made and users informed in conjunction with our Revisions, errors and postponements arrangements.

Timeliness and punctuality

All outputs adhere to the Code of Practice by pre-announcing the date of publication through the Upcoming Calendar. Furthermore, should the need arise to postpone an output this would follow our Revisions, errors and postponements arrangements.

Accessibility and clarity

The statistics will be published in an accessible, orderly, pre-announced manner on the Welsh Government website at 9.30am on the day of publication. We also publicise the outputs on Twitter. All outputs are available to download for free.

More detailed data is available at the same time on the StatsWales website and this can be manipulated online or downloaded into spreadsheets for use offline.

We aim to use Plain English in our outputs and they adhere to the Welsh Government's accessibility policy. Furthermore, all our headlines are published in Welsh and English. Further information regarding the statistics can be obtained by emailing stats.healthinfo@gov.wales

Comparability and coherence

Health Education and Improvement Wales (HEIW) was established on 1 October 2018 as the only Special Health Authority within NHS Wales. This release is the fourth to include sickness absence rates for this organisation. This inclusion may impact on the breakdown of sickness absence rates by staff group.

Changes over time to the NHS occupation codes and the resultant re-codes of staff may have impacted on the tables and charts by staff group, but the overall rates are not affected.

These statistics can be used for monitoring of sickness absence levels by NHS organisation in Wales, and comparisons with other public sector and non-public sector organisations although care should be taken to ensure methodologies are comparable.

NHS Digital publishes sickness absence rates in the English NHS. The English rates are calculated using the same methodology as the Welsh figures in this release.

Further information on the Electronic Staff Record (ESR).

Bridgend local authority moving health board

Health service provision for residents of Bridgend local authority moved from Abertawe Bro Morgannwg to Cwm Taf on 1 April 2019. This joint statement provides further detail. The health board names were confirmed in this statement with Cwm Taf University Health Board becoming Cwm Taf Morgannwg University Health Board and Abertawe Bro Morgannwg University Health Board becoming Swansea Bay University Health Board.

Both the old and new LHBs will appear in this release, and on StatsWales, as appropriate for the periods covered.

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 National Assembly. 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/sickness-absence-nhs

Next update

12 August 2020

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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