



Llywodraeth Cymru  
Welsh Government

STATISTICS, DOCUMENT

# Sickness absence in the NHS: January to March 2024

Data on sickness absence rates for directly employed NHS staff for January to March 2024.

**First published:** 17 July 2024

**Last updated:** 17 July 2024

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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 March 2024 and data for October to December 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 March 2024, the average sickness absence rate was 6.1%. This was 0.5 percentage points lower than the same 12-month period last year (12 months to 31 March 2023), but 0.6 percentage points higher than in the 12 months to 31 March 2015.
- 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 September 2021.

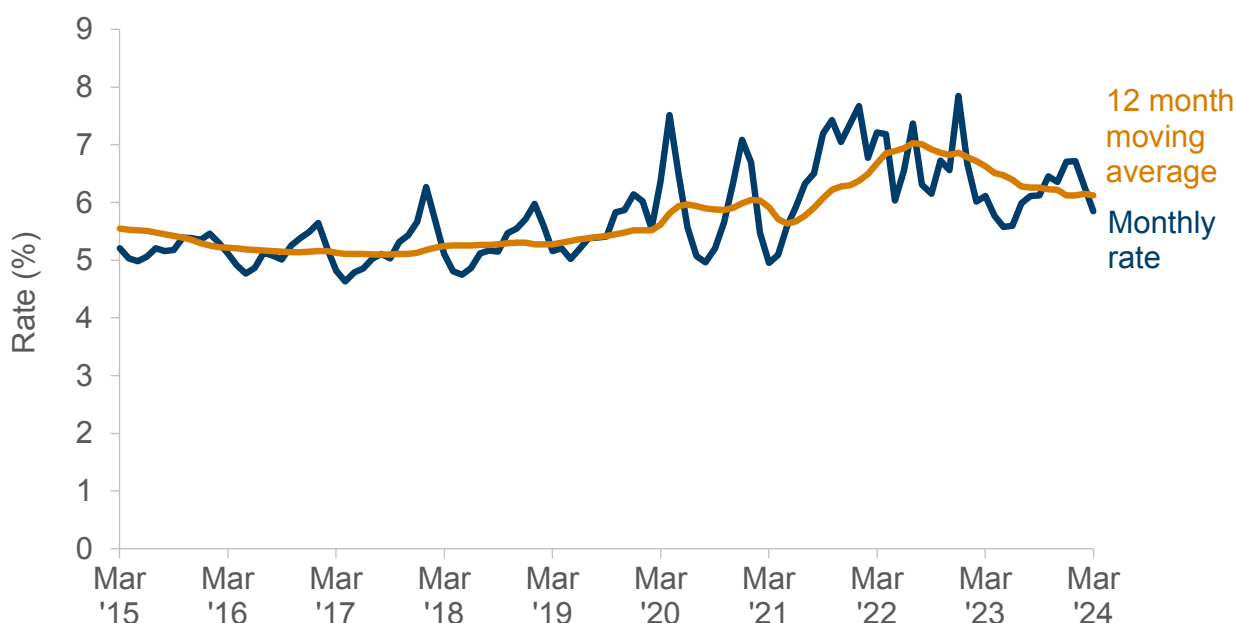
While monthly data is published there can be large variations from month-to-month, therefore more stable short-term trends are measured by using the sickness absence rate in each quarter. The latest quarterly data available is for

January to March 2024, and shows:

- the sickness absence rate was 6.3%, the same as the January to March quarter of last year (2023)
- the rate ranged from 8.4% in Welsh Ambulance Services NHS Trust to 2.7% in Health Education and Improvement Wales, when comparing NHS organisations
- the rate ranged from 9.5% for healthcare assistants and other support workers to 2.3% 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, March 2015 to 2024**



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)

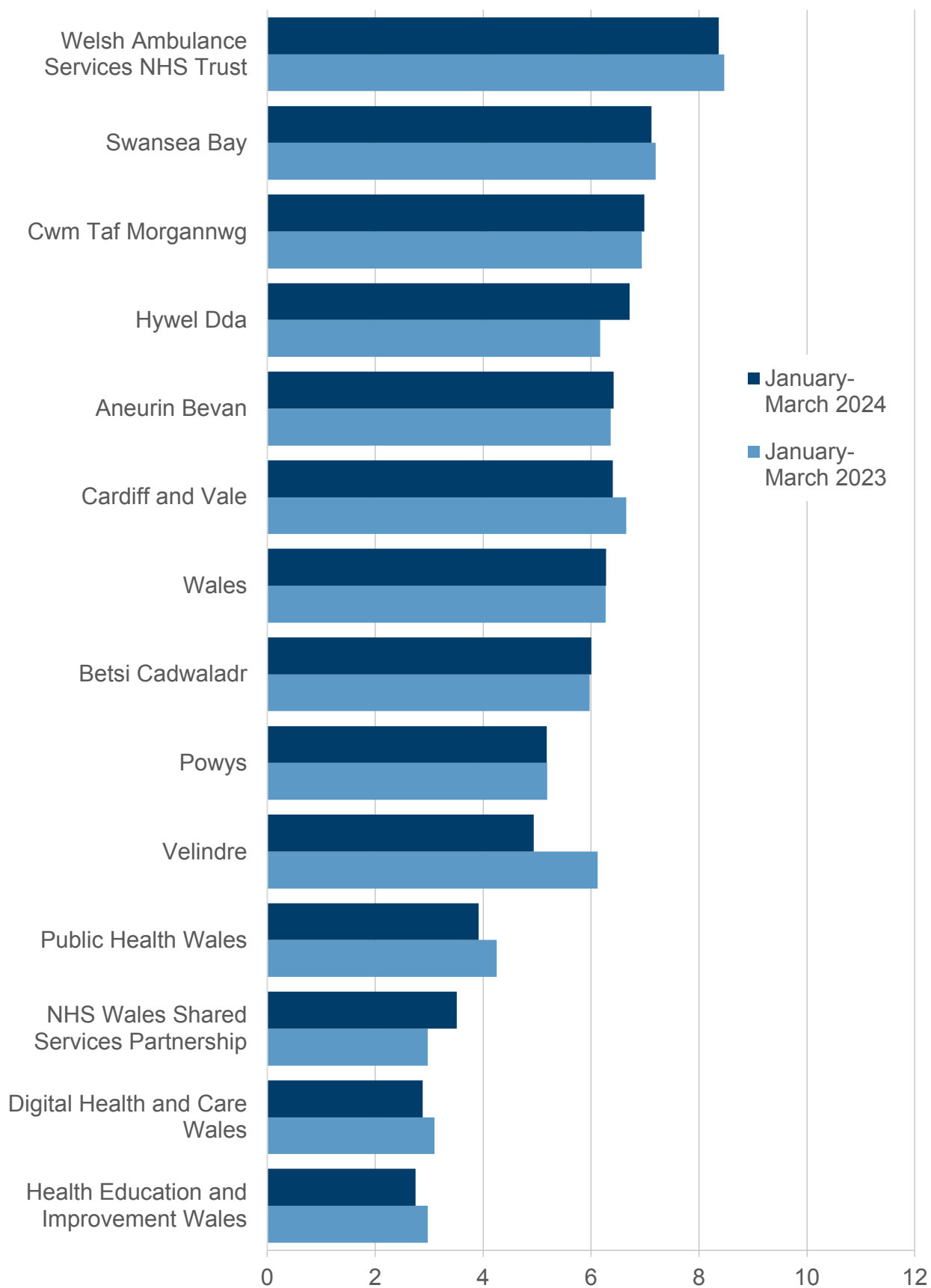
### **Percentage of NHS staff absent by organisation on StatsWales**

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 three 12-month periods.

# Sickness absence rate by NHS organisation

**Figure 2: Sickness absence rates by NHS Wales organisation, January to March 2024 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 March 2024, sickness absence rates decreased in seven of the 13 NHS organisations when compared to the same quarter in the previous year.

The rate remained the same in Cwm Taf Morgannwg, Betsi Cadwaladr and in Powys, but increased slightly in Hywel Dda, Aneurin Bevan and NHS Wales Shared Services Partnership.

Welsh Ambulance Services NHS Trust had the highest sickness absence rate (8.4%) of all NHS organisations, but the rate was 0.1 percentage points lower than the same quarter in the previous year.

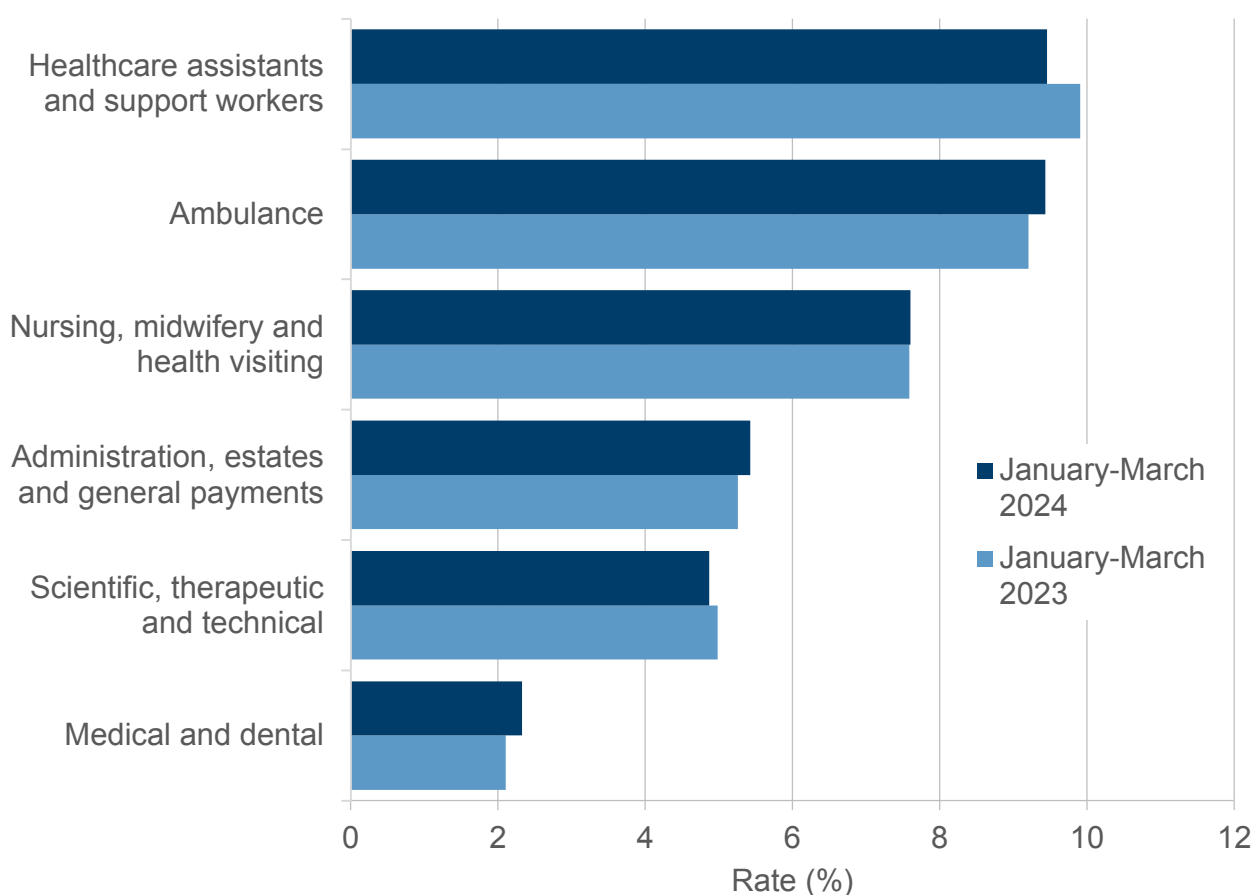
The lowest sickness absence rates were in Health Education and Improvement Wales (2.7%), Digital Health and Care Wales (2.9%) and NHS Wales Shared Services Partnership (3.5%). These three organisations also had the lowest sickness absence rates in the same period in the previous year.

The sickness absence rate increased by 0.5 percentage points from the same quarter in the previous year in both Hywel Dda and NHS Wales Shared Services Partnership, the largest annual change in sickness absence rate of all NHS organisations.

There was some variation between the local health boards, with the highest sickness absence rate in Swansea Bay (7.1%) and the lowest rate in Powys (5.2%).

## Sickness absence rate by staff group

**Figure 3: Sickness absence rates by NHS Wales staff group, January to March 2024 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 other support staff were over four 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 March 2024, sickness absence rates were lower or the same for three of the six staff groups when compared to the same quarter in the previous year. However, there was a marginal increase (0.2 percentage points) in the rate for ambulance staff, administration and estates staff, and medical and dental staff.

Healthcare assistants and other support workers had the highest sickness absence rate (9.5%), marginally above the rate for ambulance staff (9.4%).

Medical and dental staff had the lowest sickness absence rate (2.3%) and has since data was first collected in 2009.

The largest change in sickness absence rate change was in the healthcare assistants and other support workers staff group, which decreased by 0.4 percentage points compared to January to March 2023.

## 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.

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.

## Statement of compliance with the Code of Practice for Statistics

Our statistical practice is regulated by the Office for Statistics Regulation (OSR). OSR sets the standards of trustworthiness, quality and value in the Code of Practice for Statistics that all producers of official statistics should adhere to.

All of our statistics are produced and published in accordance with a number of statements and protocols to enhance trustworthiness, quality and value. These are set out in the Welsh Government's [Statement of Compliance](#).

These official statistics demonstrate the standards expected around trustworthiness, quality and public value in the following ways.

### Trustworthiness

A monthly extract is downloaded from the Electronic Staff Record (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 NHS staff in Wales on the ESR by staff group and organisation. Data is submitted from Health Education and Improvement Wales (HEIW) on Excel spreadsheets via Objective Connect, a web-based tool to securely share and receive files.

The published figures are compiled by professional analysts using the latest

available data and applying methods using their professional judgement and analytical skillset.

These statistics are pre-announced on the [Statistics and Research area of the Welsh Government website](#). Access to the data during processing is restricted to those involved in the production of the statistics, quality assurance and for operational purposes. Pre-release access is restricted to eligible recipients in line with the [Code of Practice \(OSR\)](#).

## Quality

Our statistics are produced to high professional standards and are produced free from any political interference.

Validation checks are performed by Welsh Government statisticians and queries referred to HEIW and other NHS organisations where necessary. 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](#).

The statistical release is approved by senior statisticians before publication. Data is published in line with [statement on confidentiality and data access](#) each quarter.

Each edition of the release presents data for the latest quarter and revised data for the previous quarter. As the ESR is a live system and data extracts are taken from it, data presented may be revised in future editions of the statistical release.

## Value

The purpose of the statistical release is to inform users about sickness absence levels in NHS Wales. This information is published alongside data on [staff directly employed by the NHS in Wales](#) and [vacancies in NHS Wales](#) to give

a more complete picture of the staff directly employed by the NHS workforce.

Statistics are published quarterly with a three-month lag between the reference period of the latest statistics and publication. The statistics are published with brief analysis and commentary, in addition to open data format tables which are published on [StatsWales: sickness absence](#)

You are welcome to contact us directly with any comments about how we meet these standards. Alternatively, you can contact OSR by emailing [regulation@statistics.gov.uk](mailto:regulation@statistics.gov.uk) or via the OSR website.

## 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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