

Special Measures: Q&A for patients

What are special measures?

Special measures refer to a range of actions which can be taken to improve health boards or trusts and specific NHS services in exceptional circumstances.

This is the highest level of escalation and happens when a health board or trust is not making the improvements expected and there are concerns that the leadership and management require external support to respond to the serious concerns identified.

Who decides when a health board or trust or NHS service is placed in special measures?

The NHS Wales Escalation and Intervention Arrangements were introduced in April 2014 after being developed in response to recommendations from the National Assembly's Public Accounts Committee.

The escalation framework is available here:

<http://gov.wales/topics/health/publications/health/guidance/escalation/?lang=en>

The Welsh Government, Healthcare Inspectorate Wales (HIW) and Wales Audit Office work together to identify and respond to serious issues affecting NHS services, quality and safety of care and organisational effectiveness.

There are four levels of escalation, which reflect increasing levels of concern:

- Routine arrangements – this reflects normal business
- Enhanced monitoring
- Targeted intervention
- Special measures

They will advise the Cabinet Secretary for Health if a health board, trust or service should be placed in special measures. If a health board/ trust or service is placed in special measures formal notification of special measures status will be given by the chief executive of NHS Wales.

When is the level of escalation reviewed?

The Welsh Government, HIW and Wales Audit Office meet on a six-monthly basis to review NHS organisations in Wales. However, a special request can be made for an extraordinary meeting outside the normal process if a serious concern has arisen.

What do special measures mean?

Special measures refer to a range of actions which can be taken to improve health boards, trusts or specific NHS services in exceptional circumstances.

Actions can involve placing key individuals to provide support and setting out actions and milestones in an improvement framework for the health board or trust to meet to demonstrate progress. Health boards or trusts will be required to regularly update on the detail of the progress made under the phases set out in the framework.

Intervention actions by the Welsh Ministers can also include suspending or removing powers and duties from individual members or all members of the health board's board or direct a health board to ensure that any of its functions are performed by a person specified in such a way to achieve specified objectives. These formal powers are seen as a last resort and will normally only be used if other intervention is unlikely to succeed.

Who runs the health board/ trust or service while it is in special measures?

Usually a local health board or trust will continue to be responsible for the management of health services and for ensuring progress is made against the milestones set out. However, as noted above Welsh Ministers do have formal powers to remove an individual or all members of the Board but these would only be used as a last resort if other measures were not resulting in improvement in the areas identified.

If a health board or trust is in special measures, what does this mean for health services?

People will be able to use their local health services as normal. Day-to-day activities will not be affected by special measures status. Regulators will continue to monitor the services and care provided.

Are hospital appointments affected?

No, people should attend their appointments as arranged. A health board in special measures will continue to operate health services to its population while it receives additional support to make the improvements required.

Do special measures happen anywhere else?

Special measures is a form of intervention used across the NHS in the UK as a means of targeting failing organisations and individual hospitals.