

Health and work update for clients as at 03 April 2023

PROMOTING, PROTECTING AND SUPPORTING HEALTH IN WORK

1. NHS waiting lists

Over half of all workers (51%) have been impacted by delays in accessing the NHS, with one in ten (11%)¹ severely impacted by an operation cancellation, with subsequent impact on attendance and performance.

The Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS), a leading independent economics research institute, have published a report² examining NHS performance against the backlog recovery plan, published by NHS England in February 2022. Key components of the plan include challenging targets:

- Reducing long waits of more than a year
- Increasing elective activity to 30% above pre-pandemic levels
- Diagnostic tests, cancer referrals, and outpatient appointments

The IFS report found that waits of more than two years have almost been eliminated, but waits of more than a year have increased, with more on the way. The remaining targets entail much larger numbers. There were 24,000 2+ year waits at its peak. There are presently 48,000 1.5-2 year waits and 358,000 1-1.5 year waits.

So far, there has been little progress in increasing elective treatment volumes, which is likely due in part to wider pressures on the NHS. It is also possible that growth was always intended to be 'back loaded,' as it takes time to increase capacity.

Another unknown is the number of new patients joining the list. Fears that millions of 'missing' patients would return led to previous very high estimates for waiting lists, but there has been no evidence of a surge in demand.

The report concludes that the NHS has done well in eliminating waits of 2+ years, and subsequent ambitions for long waits remain achievable. However, there has been little progress in increasing elective treatment volumes. Employers may wish to consider the impact of waiting lists when capacity planning and recruiting. According to the IFS report,

¹ UK Survey Report Health at Work: What your people want and need to stay healthy
https://mcusercontent.com/c5f24ec4df7f8cbf49517337b/files/20ad50f6-e01c-836c-3c63-b85a87995f9e/Health_at_Work_Report.01.pdf

² One year on from the backlog recovery plan: what next for NHS waiting lists?
<https://ifs.org.uk/publications/one-year-backlog-recovery-plan-what-next-nhs-waiting-lists>

waiting lists are likely to more or less flatline for the next year, then begin to fall steadily from mid-2024. However, there is a lot of uncertainty - waiting lists could fall this year if the NHS increases treatment volumes even faster. In addition, recovery and rehabilitation from elective procedures can contribute to further short-term impact on attendance and performance, but are likely to improve and stabilise in the long-term.

2. Protect your employees from violence and aggression at work

The HSE has updated its [recommendations on workplace violence](#) to assist employers in protecting their employees. Workplace violence and aggression can have severe consequences for your employees' physical and mental health. There were 688,000 reported instances of workplace violence in 2019-2020³.

The guidance defines workplace violence and aggression and explains how to prevent it and safeguard workers from it. The HSE's definition of violence encompasses aggression, such as verbal abuse or threats, which can occur in person, online, or over the phone.

The following topics are covered:

- relevant legislation
- risk assessment
- putting in place appropriate safeguards to protect employees
- reporting and learning from incidents

There are also clear instructions on [how to help workers after an act of violence](#). This includes any help with stress and mental health problems that come as a result.

There are also [case-studies](#) drawn from typical scenarios. These are examples of straightforward actions to prevent violence at work. Each one talks about a violent scenario and what changes employers have made to prevent similar ones.

They cover a variety of sectors, including:

- retail
- education
- social care
- transport
- healthcare
- waste and recycling

They also have separate advice for workers, which explains how they can help employers preventing workplace violence.

³ HSE Statistics Violence at work, 2019/20 <https://www.hse.gov.uk/statistics/causinj/violence/index.htm>

3. 'Asbestos and You'

The HSE has launched a new campaign to inform those who deal with asbestos about risk management. Builders, carpenters, electricians, joiners, plasterers, plumbers, and roofers are among the trades that are being told to take the risks of asbestos seriously.

Despite a 1999 ban, 5,000 people die each year from asbestos-related illness due to the decades-long lag between exposure and the development of symptoms.

When asbestos was banned in the UK, it did not simply disappear; millions of houses and buildings still contain asbestos.

Asbestos exposure is still the top cause of work-related deaths in Great Britain, and those who perform repairs or renovations are more likely to disturb asbestos, especially when working on domestic properties.

An initiative called "[Asbestos and You](https://workright.campaign.gov.uk/campaigns/asbestos/)" will target all tradespeople, but it will focus on younger workers who just started working in trades. HSE wants to reach out to people who started working after the use of asbestos was stopped in 2000, so they know the risk is still there. The website contains a number of guides, advice, and links to guidance to ensure workers are informed of the dangers of asbestos.

Asbestos and You <https://workright.campaign.gov.uk/campaigns/asbestos/>

Dr Finola Ryan
BMBS MRCP
April 2023