

Industrial Action - Stakeholder Information Pack

This pack is for:

- Patient groups and health charities representing audiences potentially impacted by industrial action.

This information pack contains:

- Key messages to the public on the continuity of care during strike days
- Information for the public on industrial action and practical guidance for accessing care on strike days
- Statements from the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, outlining the Government's position on pay and industrial action

The purpose of the information in this pack is:

- To enable you to communicate with your audiences about the possible impact of industrial action on services and provide clear guidance to patients on accessing services on days where strikes are taking place.
- To ensure you have the most up to date information and lines on the government's position on pay, industrial action, and the operational impact on services in one place.

QUICK LINKS

Please note, some of the information in this document will change subject to ongoing developments. Therefore, please ensure you check the following links where information is updated regularly:

- [NHSE information for the public on industrial action](#)
- [Department for Health and care media factsheet on industrial action](#)

WHAT IS YOUR ADVICE TO THE PUBLIC?

The advice in this section is from NHS England's website which is updated regularly:
[NHS England » Information for the public on industrial action](#).

- The NHS is already facing record demand on urgent and emergency care services – October and November were the busiest on record for A&E attendances and the most serious ambulance callouts. Industrial action means these services will be under increased pressure so it is vital that people use the services available appropriately.
- Regardless of any strike action taking place, it is really important that patients who need urgent medical care continue to come forward, especially in emergency and life-threatening cases – when someone is seriously ill or injured, or their life is at risk.
- If we have not contacted you, please attend your appointment as planned. The NHS will contact you if your appointment needs to be rescheduled due to strike action.
- GP services are not impacted by this strike action. Please continue to attend your GP appointments, unless you are contacted and told otherwise.
- The NHS is asking patients to use services wisely during industrial action and take simple steps to help ensure care is available to patients who need it most. This includes using 111 online as the first port of call for health needs and continuing to only use 999 if it is a life-threatening emergency.

- Patients should only call 999 if it is a medical or mental health emergency (when someone is seriously ill or injured and their life is at risk).
- Ambulances will still be able to respond in these situations, but this may only be where there is an immediate risk to life.
- Patients should take advice from 111/999 call-handlers on whether there are circumstances where it is suitable for them to make their own way to hospital.
- There will be fewer ambulances on the roads during industrial action, with the NHS prioritising those with life-threatening needs. As a result patients whose conditions are not life-threatening may not get an ambulance on strike days.
- During strike days, there is an expectation 999 services will be exempt; however, it is likely 999 call handlers will be very busy. NHS 111 call centres will have fewer staff, with longer call response times expected across the system. As a result, we are urging anyone with non-urgent care needs to first seek help from NHS 111 online.
- The NHS is also asking the public to play their part by taking simple steps during industrial action to look after themselves, loved ones and checking in on vulnerable family members and neighbours.

For more information on [when to call 999](#) and [when to go to A&E](#), you can visit the NHS UK website.

What do strikes mean for NHS services in my area?

Not every hospital and ambulance service will be affected by strike action. You can check which trusts are affected on each trade union's website:

- [Royal College of Nursing](#) (18 and 19 January; and 6 and 7 February)
- [Unite](#) and [UNISON](#) (ambulance staff) (23 January)
- [Chartered Society of Physiotherapists](#) (26 January; and 9 February)
- [GMB](#)

How long will services be impacted?

The nurses' strikes on 18 and 19 January and 6 and 7 February 2023 will last for 12 hours and the ambulance strikes on 23 January 2023 will last for up to 24 hours. However, patients should be aware that it may take slightly longer for services to return to normal.

Scheduled appointments/ procedures

What if I have an appointment on a strike day?

Everyone who has an appointment should attend as planned, unless your local NHS provider has contacted you to reschedule. If we have not contacted you, please attend your appointment even if your Trust is affected by strikes.

When will I find out if my appointment is rescheduled?

The NHS will contact you if your appointment needs to be rescheduled due to strike action. This is likely to be a text, phone call or a letter, and you should be offered an alternative date for your appointment. If we have not contacted you, please attend your appointment as planned.

If my appointment is rescheduled, will I be put back to the bottom of the waiting list?

Any appointments that need to be rescheduled will be done so as a priority.

Should I cancel my appointment on the day of strikes?

No, if the NHS has not contacted you, please attend your appointment as planned.

Is there anything I should do now?

No, the NHS will contact you if your appointment needs to be rescheduled due to strike action.

Will GP services be affected on strike days?

GP services will be running as normal on strike days. Please continue to attend scheduled GP appointments.

I have a loved one who will be a hospital inpatient on strike day – how will their care be affected?

All hospital inpatients will be informed of how their care will be impacted on a ward-by-ward basis by the staff involved in delivering their care.

Emergency Care**What should I do if I need an ambulance?**

On strike days, patients should only call 999 if seriously ill or injured, and there is risk to life. Ambulances will be dispatched where clinically appropriate.

For all other health care needs support will be available through [NHS 111 online](#), via the NHS 111 helpline or at your local GP or pharmacy.

The NHS.UK website has more information on [when to call 999](#) and [when to go to A&E](#).

What if I need urgent or emergency care?

Anyone who needs urgent care should use NHS111 online or call NHS 111 to be assessed and directed to the right care for them. When someone is seriously ill or injured and their life is at risk, you should seek emergency care in the normal way, by calling 999 or attending A&E.

Will emergency care be affected on strike days?

Emergency care will continue to be available across all parts of the country. It is really important that in emergency and life-threatening cases - when someone is seriously ill or their life is at risk patients continue to come forward as normal.

What is considered an emergency?

Patients should only call 999 if seriously ill or injured, or there is risk to life. Ambulances will be dispatched where clinically appropriate.

QUOTES AND STATEMENTS

Last updated: 17.01.2023

Quote ahead of RCN strike days (17.01.2023):

Health and Social Care Secretary Steve Barclay said:

“Patients will understandably be worried by the prospect of further strike action by nurses - the previous two days of nurse strikes saw around 30,000 elective procedures and outpatient appointments cancelled. It is inevitable industrial action will have an impact on patients.

“I have had constructive talks with the Royal College of Nursing and other unions about the 2023/24 pay process and look forward to continuing that dialogue.”

Quote on strike days announcement by Chartered Society of Physiotherapists (11.01.2023):

A Department of Health and Social Care spokesperson said:

“We hugely value all NHS staff, including physiotherapists, and it is regrettable some will be taking industrial action at a time when the NHS is already under huge pressure from Covid and flu.

“The Health and Social Care Secretary has been clear he wants to have an honest conversation with unions about what is affordable for the 2023/24 pay settlement in the current economic context.

“He met with the Chartered Society of Physiotherapists this week and will continue to talk to unions to ensure the government's evidence submitted to the independent pay body is as fair as possible.”

Quote from the Health and Social Care Secretary on the Wednesday 11 January 2023 strike action by ambulance staff:

Health and Social Care Secretary Steve Barclay said:

“Today's ambulance strike is an unwelcome return to *unnecessary* disruption and comes at a time when the NHS is already under huge pressure from Covid and flu.

“While we have contingency plans in place, including support from the military, community first responders and extra call handlers, to mitigate risks to patient safety, there will inevitably be some disruption for patients with fewer ambulances on the road.

“Patients should continue to call 999 for life-saving care and use NHS 111 online services for urgent health advice.”

Background:

- DHSC has published a fact sheet on NHS industrial action here: [NHS industrial action - media fact sheet - Department of Health and Social Care Media Centre \(blog.gov.uk\)](#)
- NHSE has published advice to the public on strikes days here: [NHS England » Information for the public on industrial action](#)

BACKGROUND - INDUSTRIAL ACTION

For the latest information on the Department of Health and Social Care position on industrial action see - [NHS industrial action - media fact sheet - Department of Health and Social Care Media Centre \(blog.gov.uk\)](#)

What is happening?

- Agenda for Change is the system which governs pay across all non-medical NHS staff - including nurses, midwives, ambulance workers, porters and cleaners. It aligns pay scales and career progression across all groups, meaning pay rises apply to everyone under this contract.
- Trade unions representing NHS staff are in dispute with the Government over the 2022/23 pay award. A number of the unions have balloted their NHS members to take part in industrial action:
 - As a result, members of the Royal College of Nursing (RCN) are striking on 18 and 19 January 2023 and on 6 and 7 February;
 - members of Unite and UNISON (ambulance staff) are striking on 23 January 2023;
 - members of the Chartered Society of Physiotherapy are striking on 26 January and 9 February.

Will patient care be affected?

- Our priority is to keep patients safe. NHS England will work with providers, professional bodies and trade unions to agree the safe level of cover.
- Hospitals will do everything they can to go ahead with planned procedures during industrial action, especially for patients in greatest clinical need. Realistically, a small proportion of lower priority procedures might be postponed in order to ensure patient safety.

What are your contingency plans to protect patient safety and mitigate disruption?

- The government has been working closely with the NHS to put in place contingency plans.
- The Health and Social Care Secretary has met with ambulance union representatives from Unison, Unite, GMB, and the Association of Ambulance Chief Executives to discuss which services should be exempt from strike action, including life-threatening emergency calls.

Mitigation measures for ambulance strikes

- NHS England and NHS trusts have been working with trade unions and professional bodies to agree the safe level of cover during industrial action at a local level. The NHS has tried and tested plans in place to mitigate risks to patient safety and manage disruption.
- Around 500 military personnel will be drafted in to drive ambulances on strike days, with an additional 150 personnel providing logistical support.
- The NHS is also working with Community First Responders, who are volunteers trained to provide treatment until ambulances arrive.

- NHS England wrote to the healthcare system on 1 and 22 November stressing the need to plan to ensure minimal disruption to patient care and the requirement of emergency services to continue to operate.
- An additional letter was issued on 16 December outlining contingency plans to ensure minimal disruption to patient care and protect patients on ambulance strike days. This includes:
 - Ensuring measures are in place to enable all ambulances to handover patients no later than 15 minutes after arrival.
 - Free up maximum bed capacity by safely discharging patients, working closely with system partners, in advance of industrial action.
 - Take steps to allow immediate moving of patients who have completed their emergency medical care and are awaiting an inpatient bed out of the emergency department to create space for new patients. This may involve the creation of observation areas and additional beds elsewhere in the hospital.
- NHS trusts will also scale up [winter resilience plans](#), including:
- Ensuring **System Control Centres** can make genuine real-time decisions which spread risk in order to improve patient safety.
- Establishing 8am-8pm **falls response services** to support people in the community and prevent avoidable admissions.
- Continuing to progress **urgent community response** services to ensure patients are seen in a timely way, with the right support.
- Maximising the use of existing **virtual wards**, and continuing to roll out new virtual ward capacity
- Creating and strengthening **Acute Respiratory Infection hubs** to improve 'one stop' same day assessment of respiratory conditions.

Mitigation measures for nurse strikes

- Operations, appointments and other electives, including cancer treatments, should continue unless there is a clear patient safety reason to reschedule and all reasonable alternatives have been explored.
- Hospitals will do everything they can to continue planned procedures during periods of industrial action, especially for patients with the greatest clinical need.
- The Royal College of Nursing announced chemotherapy, dialysis, critical care units such as 'intensive care' and 'high dependency', neonatal, paediatric intensive care and paediatric A&E would be exempt from strike action on 15 and 20 December.
- Realistically, some procedures and appointments will need to be postponed. This is why we're asking unions to carefully consider the impact on patients. Tackling the Covid backlogs is our absolute priority and the NHS is making strong progress by slashing waits of 18 months by over half in a year and virtually eliminating waits of more than two years.

What are you doing to improve access to emergency care?

- No-one should have to wait longer than necessary to access urgent and emergency care, which is why we are working with the NHS to take action to ease pressures across the system and prepare more extensively for winter than ever before.
- We are making up to £14.1 billion available for health and social care over the next two years on top of record funding and we're giving an extra £500 million to speed up

hospital discharge and free up beds, ensuring people are only in hospital for as long as they need to be.

- The NHS is also creating the equivalent of 7,000 more beds this winter – enabling hospitals to treat patients sooner, including by using remote monitoring to provide care at home or in the community.
- We will publish a recovery plan for emergency care this year.
- For more information, see the [urgent and emergency care](#) factsheet.
- For more information on how NHS England is preparing for industrial action this winter to ensure that patients are kept as safe as possible and that services are maintained as effectively as possible see [NHS briefing: Industrial action winter 2022](#).