

NHS Wales responds to extreme weather and severe winter pressures

Health Secretary Vaughan Gething said:

“Despite experiencing one of the busiest winters on record, in the vast majority of cases, NHS Wales has delivered timely, professional care to patients.

“It has been the second busiest January to March for attendance at emergency departments on record, including very high levels of flu and elderly admissions. The extreme weather in early March also made it extremely difficult for our NHS to operate, which has clearly had an effect on waiting times in emergency departments across Wales.

“Once again I would like to thank health and social services staff for their outstanding commitment in delivering care during a very challenging period. We have invested an additional £20m over the winter to help health boards and social care cope with the extra pressure. Despite continued unscheduled care pressures, health boards were still able to make progress with scheduled care during this busy time.

“There were improvements in waiting times for treatment in February compared to the previous month. Those waiting less than 26 weeks improved by 1.7% over the month, and the number waiting over 36 weeks decreased by 17%.

“The number of people waiting more than 14 weeks for specified therapy services fell by 44% over the month and to the lowest since August 2011. The number of people waiting more than 14 weeks for diagnostics decreased by around a third and is the lowest since Nov 2010.

“February also saw improvements in cancer treatment and child and adolescent mental health services waiting times.

“Our continued investment in social services is clearly having an effect, and the numbers for delayed transfers of care in March remain historically low, the eighth lowest monthly figure since 2004, despite all the system pressures.

“The Ambulance service again met their target for red calls for the 30th consecutive month since the new model was introduced despite continuing increasing demand and busiest March on record. The average daily number of red calls in March was higher than in February, and the fourth consecutive month that the daily average has been over 70.

"I am pleased NHS Wales has continued to deliver professional emergency and scheduled health care throughout this extremely busy period. Resilience planning put in place by health boards and local authorities has helped deliver this and we are working with them year round to improve that planning for the future.

"However, we recognise some patients have been waiting longer than is acceptable and we have been clear with health boards about our expectations around performance, and will work with them to evaluate measures taken this winter."