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Covid: Ambulance boss says sorry to patients over waiting times

🕒 10 September 2021



| Pauline Howie has urged the public to support ambulance staff

The head of the Scottish Ambulance Service has apologised to patients over increased waiting times.

Pauline Howie said staff were working under "unprecedented pressure" in response to a "huge increase" in Covid and non-Covid cases.

She said everything was being done to get people to hospital as quickly as possible, including hiring new staff.

And she urged the public to continue to support her colleagues "who have been working tirelessly for 18 months".

At First Minister's Questions on Thursday Nicola Sturgeon said the average wait last week for immediately life-threatening incidents was nine minutes and 30 seconds, a figure she described as "not good enough".

Opposition politicians have cited incidents where patients have faced far longer delays, with Scottish Conservative leader Douglas Ross describing how a stroke patient in Dumfries waited 14 hours for the arrival of paramedics.

The first minister told MSPs: "We know the pressure the ambulance service is under right now because of many of the other pressures in our national health service that have been caused, and indeed exacerbated in some respects, by the pandemic."

- Rise in ambulance waiting times for serious cases
- Health boards 'under pressure' due to Covid cases

Pauline Howie, who has been chief executive of the Scottish Ambulance Service since 2009, said there had never been a period of such sustained pressure on the health and care systems.

She said: "We are really at full capacity at the moment and our hospitals are operating at, or near, capacity too.

"That in turn means it takes longer for us to hand patients over when we get to the emergency departments.

"The impact of that is that we are not able to get to patients who are waiting on an ambulance response as quickly as we would like to.

"I want to apologise to anyone who has experienced a delay."