

Coronavirus (COVID-19): Discharges from hospitals to care home settings, 1 March 2020 to 31 May 2020

Background

During the first wave of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, there was considerable interest in the discharge from hospital of care home residents, with some media stories suggesting that discharges of patients from hospitals to care homes was a major factor of COVID-19 outbreaks in care homes.

In this paper we analyse 1,729 discharges to care home settings, which took place between 1 March 2020 and 31 May 2020; looking at how many were tested prior to discharge, and how many patients had subsequently died and were included in the Office for National Statistics (ONS) mortality dataset (by the point of data extraction on 30 June 2020). All sections, except for the final section relating to deaths of patients, refer to discharges rather than patients as an individual could have multiple admissions to and discharges from hospital within the time period considered. The section relating to deaths uses individual patients, and therefore only the most recent discharge prior to death is considered. The data has been provided by Digital Health and Care Wales (DHCW).

Summary of findings

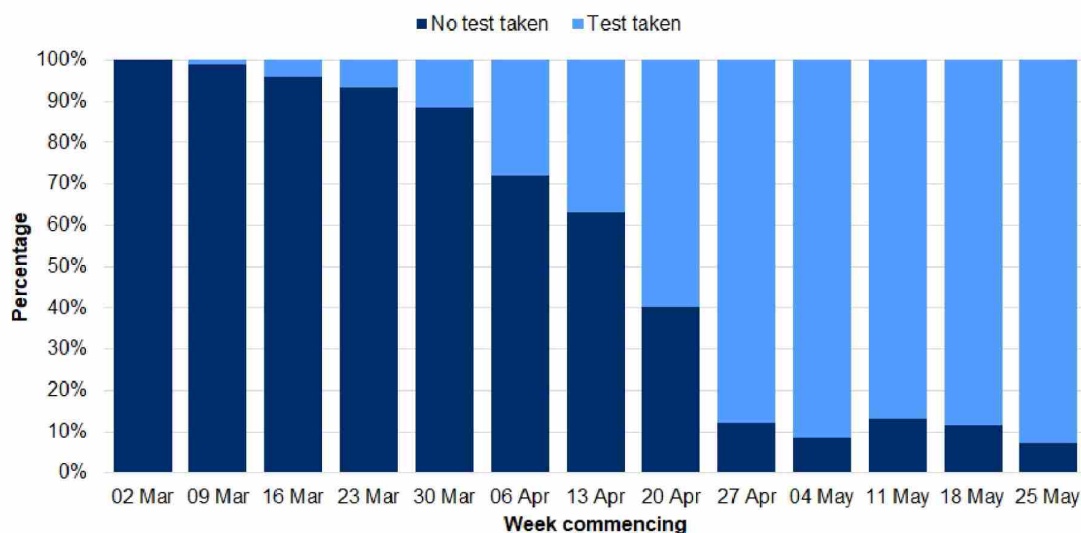
The number of discharges to care homes roughly halved over the period 1 March 2020 to 31 May 2020, from 822 in March 2020 to 406 in May 2020. This is likely to reflect that during March 2020 discharges were unusually high as hospitals were preparing for the early impact of COVID-19 and trying to increase capacity.

The number of patients discharged with a test prior to discharge increased markedly over the period. The largest increase occurred in the week commencing 27 April 2020, this coincides with the **updated policy guidance** on discharging, published on 29 April 2020. The updated policy required all patients to test negative before discharge to care home settings.

Of the 81 discharged patients who by the point of data extraction on 30 June 2020 had died of COVID-19 related causes, 62 did not receive a test in hospital prior to discharge. 19 patients received a test in hospital at some point prior to discharge and of these, 5 patients had a positive result as their most recent result prior to discharge. The majority of those who did not receive a test were discharged in March 2020. From the week commencing 27 April 2020 all patients discharged who later died of COVID-19 causes had received a test prior to discharge.

During this timeframe, testing in the community in Wales was also increasing. For example, **data published by Public Health Wales** shows that in March 2020, 9,137 tests were carried out whereas in May 2020 65,909 were carried out. This may partly explain why more patients were tested prior to discharge during May 2020, as over time, more people in hospital may have had tests prior to going into hospital.

Chart 3: The proportion of discharges to care home settings where a test was taken in hospital prior to discharge, by week, 2 March 2020 to 31 May 2020



Source: DHCW - PEDW & Laboratory Information Management System (LIMS).

Notes

- Only complete weeks have been included in this analysis, therefore data for 1 March 2020 has been excluded.

Across all health boards, the proportion of discharges without a test fell from over 92% in March 2020 to below 30% in May 2020. In May, in Aneurin Bevan, Cardiff and Vale, and Hywel Dda more than 10% of their discharges hadn't been tested prior to discharge. Hywel Dda had the highest percentage (29%) of discharges without a test in hospital. Aneurin Bevan had the largest number of discharges with no test (26 out of 151), followed by Hywel Dda (9 out of 31), and Cardiff and Vale (3 out of 26). Due to the low number of total discharges for each health board, users should be careful when making inferences from percentage figures.

Table 3: Discharges without a test in hospital prior to discharge to care home settings, by health board, 1 March 2020 to 31 May 2020

Health boards	March		April (pre-guidance update)		April (post-guidance update) *		May	
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
Aneurin Bevan	232	93%	65	51%	3	23%	26	17%
Betsi Cadwaladr	200	100%	87	73%	0	.	2	2%
Cardiff and Vale	95	97%	29	58%	0	.	3	12%
Cwm Taf Morgannwg	59	98%	36	86%	0	.	1	3%
Hywel Dda	88	95%	36	63%	1	50%	9	29%
Powys	51	98%	11	73%	0	.	0	.
Swansea Bay	66	97%	32	68%	0	.	2	4%
Velindre	1	100%	0	.	0	.	0	.
Total	792	96%	296	65%	4	9%	43	11%

Source: DHCW - PEDW & LIMS.

Notes

- The number of discharges without a test is shown in the number column. The percentage is calculated by dividing the number without a test by total discharges.
- ‘*’ Only two days of data are available after the scientific guidance changed from the 29 April 2020.
- ‘.’ No discharges.

Of the discharges without a test taken, 9% (97 out of 1,135) tested positive at any point after discharge up until the point of the data extraction (30 June 2020). Of these, 9% (9 out of 97) tested positive within 14 days of discharge.