

Home | Israel-Gaza war | Cost of Living | War in Ukraine | Climate | UK | World | More

Business | Politics | Culture

Scotland | Scotland Politics | Scotland Business | Edinburgh, Fife & East | Glasgow & West |

Highlands & Islands | NE, Orkney & Shetland | South | Tayside & Central | Alba | Local News

Covid in Scotland: NHS needs 1,000 more hospital beds say A&E doctors

🕒 21 September 2021 · Comments

Coronavirus



GETTY IMAGES

A thousand extra hospital beds are needed to help relieve the "unrelenting pressure" facing Scotland's emergency departments, doctors have claimed.

The Royal College of Emergency Medicine said many A&E units were struggling because there are too few beds available elsewhere in hospitals.

Figures for the week to 12 September show almost 30% of people attending A&E having to wait more than four hours.

Scottish ministers will later update Holyrood on plans to bolster the NHS.

Health Secretary Humza Yousaf said £12m of extra funds had already been announced for non-Covid emergency care.

- What is being done to ease the ambulance 'crisis'?
- Military to be called in to help Scottish ambulance crews
- 'There are so many calls and not enough ambulances'
- Demand for GPs 'double' pre-pandemic levels

According to the latest figures from Public Health Scotland, there were 27,354 attendances at A&E services in Scotland in the week ending 12 September.

Of these, 71.5% were seen and either admitted, discharged or transferred elsewhere within four hours - the lowest total for a number of years, and well below the target level of 95%.

A total of 1,895 patients spent more than eight hours in an A&E department, while 551 of them were there for more than 12 hours.

In a BBC interview, John Thomson, vice-president for the Royal College of Emergency Medicine in Scotland, and a consultant in emergency medicine, said there was currently an "unrelenting pressure on our emergency departments" but that Covid was only one part of the problem.

He said: "We have patients who are waiting in emergency departments who should be receiving the next stage of their care elsewhere in the system.

"The college estimates that we're approximately 1,000 beds short nationally and that would certainly help alleviate some of the issues relating to what we call exit block, which are patients waiting to move from the emergency department when they no longer require care within the department.

"Emergency departments can be very busy and function very smoothly when we have no exit block. Conversely when we've seen significant exit block, and long wait for patients to move to beds, then we can have relatively few patients in A&E and struggle to provide the right level of care that we would want to."



John Thomson, vice-president for the Royal College of Emergency Medicine in Scotland, said it was "too simplistic" to say Covid was entirely to blame for the pressures facing the NHS

The Scottish government has asked the MoD for military assistance for the under-pressure ambulance service and the health secretary is expected to give more details of the plan at Holyrood later.

Unite convener Jamie McNamee questioned the value of army personnel driving vehicles "without the ability to emergency respond" or having the necessary clinical skills.

Asked how much help they would be, he told BBC Radio's **Good Morning Scotland** programme: "Whilst we welcome them on board they will be little or no help to the Scottish Ambulance Service in their emergency care provision."

Mr McNamee expects that the military will instead work in the non-emergency sector to free up capacity by, for example, providing non-emergency hospital transport.

The convener also said he fears for the winter as the current situation is the worst he has known in his 35-year career.

'No space'

Meanwhile, Mr Thomson said increasing the number of beds would go "a long way" to alleviating the problems facing the NHS.

He added: "The sole reason ambulances have to await to offload is there is no space in the emergency departments for that patient to go."

Before the Covid pandemic, the average daily number of beds which were staffed and available for patients for acute specialties in Scotland was about 13,000.

According to Public Health Scotland, **the number has been going down for many years** in line with evolving models of healthcare provision which aims to reduce the frequency and duration of hospital admissions.



| There have been reports of some people facing severe waits for an ambulance to arrive

Mr Yousaf said: "We announced £12m in additional funding to boards to support non-Covid emergency care and put measures in place to reduce waiting times for urgent or emergency treatment, with a focus on boosting available beds and supported by record NHS staffing levels.

"The Covid pandemic has inevitably affected A&E attendance and the pressure is being felt across the UK. Scotland's core A&E departments have outperformed those in the rest of the UK for more than six years.

"Weekly performance is impacted due to a range of challenges including high attendances, staffing pressures due to isolation and annual leave and the continued requirement for infection control precautions that is affecting the time people need to spend in A&E. This is combined with increased levels of people attending A&E who are much sicker and require higher levels of care."

Mr Yousaf will face questions from MSPs at Holyrood later, with the Scottish Conservatives calling the latest waiting times figures "shocking and reprehensible".

Public health spokeswoman Sue Webber said: "Thousands of patients are waiting hours on end in A&E departments, despite the best efforts of our

heroic frontline staff.

"The SNP's health secretary needs to accept the reality and admit there is a crisis in our NHS, for the sake of patients and - equally as important - staff wellbeing."

More about coronavirus



- RULES: What are the restrictions in your area?
- EASING: What rules are changing, and when?
- CASES: Where are the latest cases in Scotland?
- WHO? The people who have died with Covid-19

Related Topics

Scottish government

NHS Scotland

Coronavirus

Humza Yousaf

More on this story



What is being done to ease the ambulance 'crisis'?

21 September 2021



'There are so many calls and not enough ambulances'

14 September 2021



Military to be called in to help ambulance crews

16 September 2021

[View comments](#)

Top Stories

Four teenagers drowned after crash, inquest hears

3 hours ago

LIVE Israeli forces raid Jenin in West Bank as truce efforts continue

LIVE Raab denies Johnson was 'puppet' of Cummings during pandemic

Features



Scobie book: How did the royal naming mistake happen?



'My first memory is sexual abuse from my dad'



Timothée Chalamet on how his Wonka is different



'Every Greek felt offended' - how Athens sees the Elgin Marbles row



The story behind this heartwarming father-son kiss



Rescued India workers recall yoga and phone games in tunnel



'I was sold into marriage for £7 at the



The mystery over a baby found in a



How much could you be paid to use less

age of 12'

recycling tip

energy?

Elsewhere on the BBC



What happened to the children taken by Russian forces?

Panorama and journalists in Ukraine uncover a trail of evidence leading to the Russian Parliament

iPlayer



Can you tackle a Victorian exam paper?

Shake off the cobwebs and give your brain a workout with this 19th century test

Bitesize



How much money do you need to be happy?

A panel of experts discuss the finances of happiness

Sounds



How do cold and flu medicines help when you're ill?

As cold and flu season nears, find out what the remedies in your cabinet can do to help

Sounds

Most Read

1 BBC's Newsnight cut back as part of savings plan

2 Cristiano Ronaldo faces \$1bn crypto ad lawsuit

3 Four teenagers drowned after crash, inquest hears

4 Coldest November night in 13 years for parts of UK

5 Boy, 13, killed foster mother with her own car

6 City council declares itself 'bankrupt'

7 Over 17,000 asylum seekers missing - Home Office

8 Teenager tried to give Brianna overdose, jury told

9 Scobie book: How did the royal naming mistake happen?

10 Shoppers hit by escalating prices of branded goods

BBC News Services

 On your mobile

 On smart speakers

 Get news alerts

 Contact BBC News

Best of the BBC



A new lead in Cheryl Grimmer's case

 BBC Sounds



When Louis met Dame Joan Collins

 BBC iPlayer



Take That live at the BBC Radio Theatre

Keeping secrets buried

 BBC Sounds

 BBC iPlayer

Home

Weather

CBBC

Bitesize

Local

News

iPlayer

CBeebies

Arts

Three

Sport

Sounds

Food

Taster

[Terms of Use](#)

[About the BBC](#)

[Privacy Policy](#)

[Cookies](#)

[Accessibility Help](#)

[Parental Guidance](#)

[Contact the BBC](#)

[Make an editorial complaint](#)

[Get Personalised Newsletters](#)

Why you can trust the BBC

© 2023 BBC. The BBC is not responsible for the content of external sites. **Read about our approach to external linking.**