

Update on COVID-19 Nosocomial Transmission, the WG Nosocomial Transmission Group and current priorities.

1. Introduction

Minimising nosocomial transmission of COVID-19 is presenting an ongoing challenge for the NHS and care homes in Wales. The high level of community prevalence and the emergence of new more transmissible variants makes it increasingly difficult to minimise spread in hospital and care home settings.

This paper provides an update on current nosocomial data, the WG Nosocomial Transmission Group (NTG) and priority work areas.

2. Current data

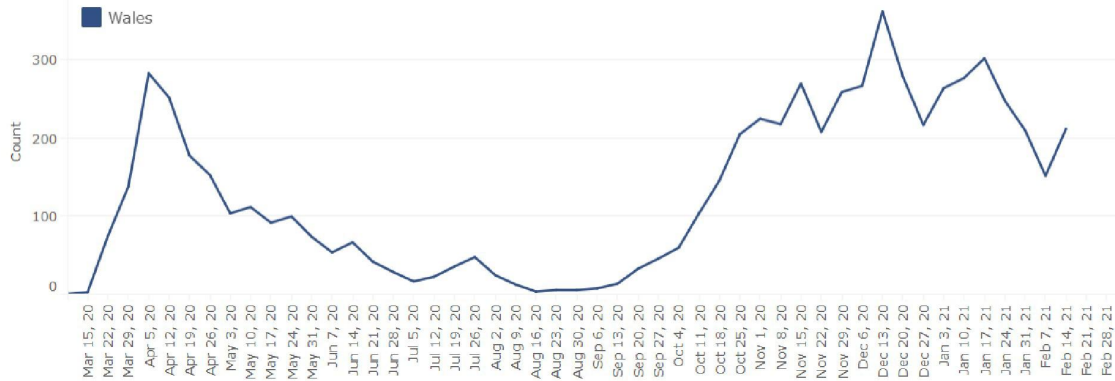
Hospital onset cases

Nosocomial transmission of COVID-19 is unfortunately widespread in health boards/ Velindre Trust across Wales. Hospital transmission of COVID-19 has been a major safety and quality concern for all NHS organisations since the start of the pandemic. Actions to address this need to take account of the multiple factors that influence hospital transmission and the particular nature of the virus itself. In the week ending 14/2/21, a Wales total of 211 hospital onset cases (definite or probable)¹ were reported. This represents 8% of all confirmed COVID-19 cases and 53% of total COVID cases within Welsh hospitals.

The following chart (source: PHW) shows the highest number of hospital onset cases (definite or probable) since the start of the pandemic was reported in the week ending 13 December 2020: 360 cases, representing 2% of total confirmed COVID-19 cases. This peak was followed by a steady decrease to week ending 27/12/20, before another rise to week ending 17/1/21. The following three week period to week ending 07/02/21 shows a consistent fall in hospital onset cases. However, the past week (week ending 7/2/21 to week ending 14 Feb) has seen a rise in hospital onset cases.

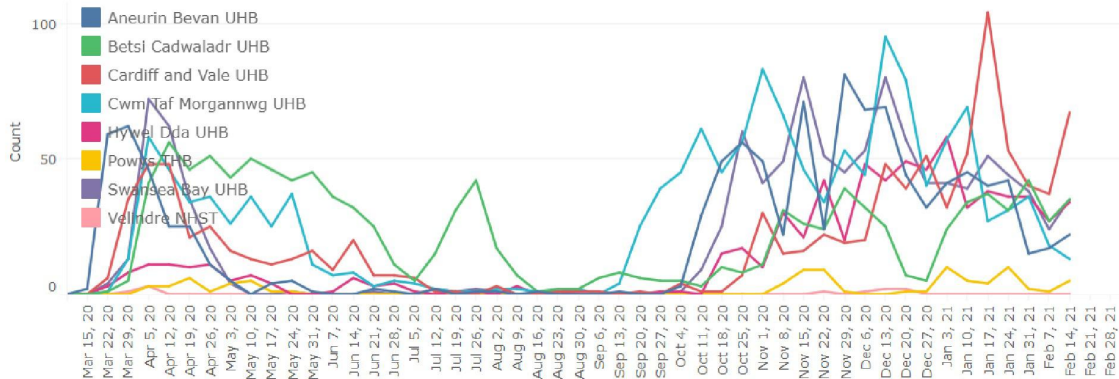
¹ Probable hospital onset: positive COVID test taken more than 7 days and less than 15 days from hospital admission. Definite hospital onset: positive COVID test taken more than 14 days from hospital admission.

Weekly counts of probable and definite nosocomial COVID-19 in Wales



From an individual HB perspective, from the week ending 7/2/21 to the week ending 14/2/21 there is a fall within CTM. ABU, BCU HD, Powys and SBU are stable or with minor increases over the same week. C&V has seen the largest increase in hospital onset cases in the same period and accounts for half of the All-Wales increase for that week. As can be seen from the chart below there remains a high level of variability and caution should be exercised when interpreting this data.

Weekly counts of probable and definite nosocomial COVID-19 by HB



PHW tableau data from 11/01/21 show that 1860 patients were in Welsh hospitals with a positive COVID-19 test result during the preceding 28 days, and 720 (39%) were classified as probable or definite hospital onset. More recent PHW data from 14/2/21 shows that 1002 patients were in Welsh hospitals with a positive COVID-19 test, and 529 of these (53%) were classified as hospital onset. Since 11/1/21 there has been a fall in absolute numbers of both total hospital cases and hospital onset cases. However, the number of hospital onset cases as a proportion of total and inpatient cases has risen. This rise in proportion is potentially reflective of reduced community prevalence and reduction in admissions to hospitals.

This table shows an improving picture with the number of the care homes in Wales notifying CIW of a confirmed case in the last 20 days reducing from 332 (31.6%) on 15 January to 247 (23.5%) on 9 February.

From an individual HB perspective, there are reductions in the number of care homes notifying CIW of confirmed cases in the last 20 days in all areas apart from Betsi Cadwaladr which has shown an increase.

3. WG Nosocomial Transmission Group (NTG)

The NTG was established in May 2020, jointly chaired by the Deputy Chief Medical Officer and the Chief Nursing Officer. The purpose of the group is to advise, support and provide direction on the actions needed to minimise nosocomial transmission and enable the safe resumption of services.

The NTG has worked collaboratively with colleagues from PHW, health boards and the social care sector to develop and issue an extensive range of material to support the reduction of nosocomial transmission. This includes the issuing of guidance on personal protective equipment (PPE), patient testing, implementing infection prevention and control guidance and environmental controls.

A complete list of material issued in association with the NTG is at Appendix A.

The NTG has also provided oversight of COVID-19 outbreak management in health boards.

4. Current priorities

The following areas of work outline some of the immediate priorities as we continue to support the NHS and social care sector in reducing nosocomial transmission:

- **Develop a patient testing framework.**

A guidance framework is being developed to accompany the revised Testing Strategy. The framework identifies opportunities for testing patients with the overall aim of preventing COVID-19 entering and spreading within hospitals. The purposes of the framework are as follows:

- to prevent COVID-19 in elective pathways, including those with previous COVID-19 infection;
- to identify COVID-19 in emergency care pathways;
- to reduce the risks of patients at higher risk of contracting COVID-19 of doing so; and
- to show non-infectivity prior to transfer or discharge of patients with a history of COVID-19.

The framework has been considered by the Testing Clinical Advisory and Prioritising Group and discussed with PHW. We are also consulting with Medical Directors and testing leads in health boards ahead of the TTP Testing Strategy Sub-group considering the operationalisation of the framework at its next meeting on 25 February. The framework will be considered by the TTP Programme Board on 1 March, prior to Ministerial submission for approval.

- **Continue to provide robust advice on Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) in the context of new variants of COVID-19.**

There have been recent calls for increased personal protective equipment for health care workers (HCW). HCWs have expressed concern about the adequacy of PPE following the discovery of the new more transmissible variants of COVID-19.

The NTG will continue to address concerns raised by HCW and engage with colleagues from the UK IP&C COVID-19 Guidance Cell to ensure the provision of robust, evidence-based advice.

- **Work with PHW and HEIW to develop training materials for the IPC curriculum.**

A sub group of the NTG has developed a strategy and set of standards for IPC training and education which is applicable to the whole health and social care workforce. Work is now underway to develop a suite of training materials at all academic levels that will comprehensively address the IPC curriculum. This work is being taken forward in collaboration with a number of higher education institutions.

- **Working with the Delivery Unit, continue to share learning associated with in-hospital transmission of CoVID-19.**

A system for the rapid sharing of early learning has been developed. A mechanism is now in place for NHS organisations to share their learning at an early stage, i.e. without waiting for formal reviews or investigations to be completed. This learning can come from near misses or good practice in addition to incidents or outbreaks. This important work will continue as we encourage health boards and trusts to learn as much as possible from one another in a timely manner.

- **Ensure synergy in investigating and consistency in reporting incidents caused by nosocomial transmission.**

All harm caused by nosocomial transmission will need to be reported and investigated locally. Local investigations will include mortality review tools, medical examiner scrutiny and tool kits for nosocomial investigations generally. The NTG will oversee work that health boards are undertaking to ensure investigations ascertain the level and cause of any harm. The NTG will seek to ensure consistency of approach across Wales.

- **Finalise Care Home Cleaning Standards.**

Following the issue of revised cleaning standards for the NHS, the NTG asked that a set of standards be developed for care homes in Wales in order to increase IPC standards. A document is now being developed that will set out a series of recommended standards and principles for care homes to consider and to assist staff involved in environmental cleaning and