



111 Wales: Frequently Asked Questions

What is 111 and why are you introducing it now?

The 111 service will join up two services that are currently provided by different parts of the NHS in Wales – namely NHS Direct Wales and the GP out-of-hours service when your own surgery is closed. The introduction of a simple, free, memorable three-digit number has been planned in NHS Wales for a number of years. We know people sometimes find it hard to know which service to contact and when, so introducing a free-to-call number will make it easier not just to access urgent care but also health information and advice if you are not sure about what to do. It will also help ensure our A&E departments and emergency ambulance service are used only for those patients who need them in a life-threatening emergency.

Why would I phone 111? What help can I get? Do I call this number instead of my GP or 999?

During the working week (8.00am-6.30pm, Monday to Friday), your own GP practice is available in the usual way and this will continue to be the main service that patients routinely use. There is no change in how and when you access your own GP during those hours. Some people don't realise that, outside of these hours and on Bank Holidays, there are always GPs and other health professionals available to respond to urgent issues for patients who can't wait until their GP practice re-opens. By linking NHS Direct Wales with GP out-of-hours, 111 Wales will be able to offer a range of health information, advice and *urgent* treatment when your condition or issue is urgent but not life-threatening. Remember, 999 should only ever be used when there is a life-threatening emergency. So if it is not an emergency, use 111.

Who will I speak to? Will they know what they are talking about or will they just rely on computer software?

If you call 111, you will initially speak to a trained call taker. All of our call takers undergo extensive training and education and they will ask you a series of short questions and take basic details (including your name, address, date of birth and so on) so that health care professionals such as doctors and nurses can focus on the clinical assessment. This will help us prioritise the urgency of calls so that the sickest people get treated first.

Will I get the help I need straight away or a call back/doctor's appointment/ambulance?

Depending on the urgency and severity of your call, you may speak to a health care professional, who could be a nurse, pharmacist or a doctor. Sometimes it may be necessary for you to speak to more than one person to get the right treatment but we will keep this to an absolute minimum so you get to speak with the right health care professional first time. If your need is urgent and requires you to see a GP out-of-hours, you will be asked to attend a primary care centre based at our hospital sites, as is the case currently. However, for the majority of conditions, our highly skilled nurses or pharmacists will be able to deal with many cases. Our call takers are trained to recognise when there is a threat to life; if you dial 111 but do need an ambulance, you will be put through to the emergency ambulance service.

What are the benefits to patients and what are the benefits to the NHS?

The main benefit to patients is that for the first time, you will have access to a range of services by dialling a single free-to-call number that will make it easier for you to get the right service. This supports the wider campaign encouraging patients to 'Choose Well' and helps to keep our emergency departments (EDs, or also known as A&E) and 999 service for those who really need them. The other benefit is that sometimes patients think EDs are the only place available, especially at night or weekends. Ringing 111 will help to signpost patients to the right service – for example, a GP, nurse, pharmacist or a Minor Injury Unit – where you will often be seen far more quickly than our major EDs, which focus on patients with major illnesses or injuries that can only be treated there.

Given the problems in England, why are you going ahead with this? Isn't this just going to create similar problems in Wales?

The service in Wales will be different to that in England in many ways. The key differences are:

- We are not replacing NHS Direct Wales or GP out-of-hours. We are integrating and enhancing them and building on the skills and expertise of health professionals who already provide excellent care despite the demands on these services
- We will have more clinical staff available within the service, and roughly double the number of health professionals to call takers
- We are building on local and national/international best practice – NHS24 Scotland is a good example of where this works well
- We are not using the same IT software that NHS England uses, which means our call takers will ask a smaller number of questions before they can route the call to the right professional or service

- We are joining together two currently separate services, which means we can share information to prevent patients from having to repeat their details or their symptoms to a number of services

The other key difference is that we are going to test the service thoroughly before we roll out across the rest of Wales to ensure we have designed it effectively. A significant part of this evaluation will involve speaking to patients and carers directly so we can evaluate their experience properly. Equally, staff already involved in the service will continue to help shape and design any future rollout plans.

If the Wales service is not the same as England's, why use 111? Couldn't you have used another number to emphasise the difference?

We have to use the 111 number as this is the only number that Ofcom (telecoms regulator) have made available to the NHS in the UK. Of course, it also means that if you are on holiday in the UK, you can still use the same number irrespective of whether you live in England, Scotland or Wales so there are advantages in having the same number operating in Wales, England and Scotland. There are similar discussions internationally about instigating a similar number for urgent healthcare so increasingly this will become the norm e.g. Europe, Australia, New Zealand, Canada.

When does it start, and will I still get an answer if I call either of the old numbers?

The service will start in early October and the exact date will depend on where you live in the Bridgend, Neath Port Talbot or Swansea area. Each area will roll out at a different time. If you use 0845 46 47 to contact NHS Direct Wales, you will still be able to get through to the service. Also we plan to migrate the current GP out-of-hours number (0330 123 9180) over to the new service in the autumn. However it will only be free if you ring 111 directly and we hope the public will quickly get used to the new number – as they have done in Scotland, where 111 was introduced about two years ago.

I have tried calling NHS Direct/GP out-of-hours in the past but gave up because I couldn't get through. What are you doing to avoid this happening?

We have recruited additional call takers and nurses and these additional staff members were in place from May 2016. There are a number of other improvements we are making to the service to improve call answering times. The busy times for both NHS Direct Wales and GP out-of-hours services are usually in the early evening period and on Saturday and Sunday mornings, so it is worthwhile considering whether your call is urgent, and if not, perhaps trying to access at a quieter period or visit

your local pharmacist for advice. This also applies if you are looking for information on health matters or the availability of services in your area.

Will I be able to talk to someone in Welsh if I want to?

Yes, the first message that you will hear when dialling 111 asks you to make a choice about whether you want to continue the call in English or in Welsh. We employ a number of Welsh speakers, so you will usually be able to conduct the initial discussion in Welsh. There may be occasions where this is not possible, but we will always endeavour to meet your preference and with additional staff coming into the service we hope these occasions will be very rare.

I live outside Bridgend/Neath Port Talbot/Swansea but my GP surgery is within the Abertawe Bro Morgannwg University Health Board (ABMU) area. How will I know who to call?

As the service is being rolled out geographically it is based on where you are registered, not where you live. So if your GP practice is within the ABMU Health Board area you will be able to access 111. However, if for any reason the telephony system does not direct you to 111, you will still be able to access it by using the NHS Direct Wales number 0845 46 47.

Why isn't this available in my area and what should I do if I need urgent help?

We reviewed the experience in England and considered that a geographical rollout was best for Wales to ensure that the system is working effectively before it is fully rolled out across Wales. We appreciate that this may be frustrating if you live outside of the pilot area. In the meantime, if you ring your usual GP practice during the out-of-hours period, the answerphone message will provide the number for your local out-of-hours service.

I live outside of Wales but I may need to contact the service on behalf of a relative who lives within ABMU?

If you ring 111 from outside of Wales, you will be routed to your local 111 service which will not be able to transfer your call. The 0845 46 47 number is no longer in operation in England and if you are ringing from outside of Wales it will not connect you to the service. In these circumstances please ring your relative's GP practice and the answerphone message will tell you what to do.

What happens if I don't speak English?

If you don't speak English, we will still be able to help you. We use a service called 'Language Line' and this enables us to have a three-way phone call with an interpreter so that we can still provide the help that you need.

What happens if I am deaf?

If you are deaf and use Type Talk, you will still be able to use the service in Wales. The number is 18011 111. In addition, we are currently working with the British Deaf Association (BDA) in Wales to review our system and consider what improvements can be made to improve services for deaf service users including thinking about how to maximise new technology. A further update will be available in the autumn.

Where is the money for this coming from?

The Welsh Government has provided funding for the pilot stage, which will enable us to test the new service in ABMU area.

Is there a website available?

The current [NHS Direct Wales](#) website is available. This provides information on local services, as well as comprehensive information on health issues. There are also 'symptom checkers' on a range of common health problems.