

What does the Nurse Staffing Level (Wales) Act 2016 mean to me as a parent/carer? Frequently Asked Questions

What is the Nurse Staffing Level (Wales) Act 2016?

The Nurse Staffing Level (Wales) Act 2016 became law in March 2016. The Act means that health boards/trust have:

- A legal duty to ensure appropriate level of nurse staffing in all settings;
- A legal duty to calculate and maintain the appropriate nurse staffing level in adult medical and surgical wards and from the 1st October 2021, Paediatric inpatient wards; and
- A legal duty to report on compliance with staffing requirements and take action if nurse staffing levels are not maintained.

What does nurse staffing level mean?

The nurse staffing level is the number of staff required by a ward to enable the team to provide care to the patients in a way that takes into account all of the patients' nursing needs.

How is the nurse staffing level for a ward decided?

In Wales we use a number of tools to assess what the nurse staffing level should be for different wards.

The nurse staffing level varies from ward to ward, depending on the number of patients and the kind of nursing that those patients need. Intensive care, for example, has a higher nurse to patient ratio than a medical or surgical ward.

On some wards the nurse staffing level may vary from day to day depending on how the ward works, for example, some surgical wards have more patients on the ward having surgery between Monday and Friday compared to Saturday and Sunday so there are more staff on duty during the week compared to the weekend.

We take information from different sources and this information helps us to decide what the nurse staffing level should be. In Wales the information we use includes:

- Using a tool called the "Paediatric Welsh Levels of Care" tool; we look at how sick or dependant the patients are on that particular ward and the level of care they need.
- Looking at the information we already have on the safety and quality of each service, and people's reported experience.
- Applying the professional judgement of the senior nurses who know the wards and the patients' level of need. We monitor not just the number of registered nurses on duty on each ward but also the level of nursing skill required, as well as other trained staff who provide care for patients, for example, physiotherapists and occupational therapists.

How often will the nurse staffing level be reviewed?

Each health board/trust will look at the nurse staffing level for each ward:

- Every six months;

- if something changes on the ward, for example, if there is a change in the group of patients that are cared for on the ward or the number of beds being used on the ward; or
- If the nursing team thinks that a review needs to take place for any reason.

The nurse staffing level for each ward is presented to the Board every year.

Who is responsible for deciding what the nurse staffing level for each ward should be?

The decision on what the nurse staffing level is for each ward is ultimately made by the Executive Director of Nursing on behalf of the health board, but the decision is made following discussions with the nursing team responsible for the ward, including the nurses on the ward and the ward sister/charge nurse/manager.

How do health boards/trust ensure that the nurse staffing level for a ward is maintained?

The ward sister/charge nurse/manager will ensure that the number of staff on duty reflects what the nurse staffing level should be for each day for that ward and they will inform the senior nurse when there are gaps.

Information about the number of nurses and care staff who should be working on each shift is displayed on each ward.

The nursing team reviews and records the times that the number of nurses actually on duty varied from the nurse staffing level and what actions we took in response to this. The nursing team will also consider if not maintaining the nurse staffing level has had any impact on the care provided to the patients on the ward at the time.

What happens on the ward when there is a gap in staffing?

There are occasions when the nurse staffing level on a ward may be lower than what we planned because of unexpected staff sickness or other reasons outside of our control.

When this happens the nurse in charge will try to cover this shift by asking staff to change their shift, where possible. If there is still a gap, the nurse in charge will escalate this to the senior nurse on duty who will consider offering staff additional hours or overtime to fill the gap and will consider the possibility of moving staff around between wards and departments. There is a senior nurse on duty 24 hours a day, 7 days a week on each hospital site whose role includes managing nurse staffing and ensuring that the nurse staffing levels are maintained. The senior nurse will also consider whether we need to use staff from our hospital nurse bank or from a nursing agency. If the gap in staffing is still unresolved, the senior nurse will escalate this to the senior nurse manager and discuss what further actions need to be considered.

In the short term, nurses on the ward may have to work in a different way and focus on essential care to maintain patient safety.

What does it mean if there are more staff than the nurse staffing level requires on duty on a shift?

The ward sister/charge nurse/manager and senior nurse continuously assess the needs of the patients on the ward, and more staff on duty on the ward may be due to an increase in patient care needs, for example, where a patient may need one to one nursing care or where a patient has become more acutely unwell. On these occasions, and where

required, staff may be requested to work additional hours or overtime to fill the gap, or alternatively temporary staff may be requested.

For more information about staffing levels in our hospitals or if you have any concerns or questions about the nurse staffing level or the care that you are receiving on the ward then please speak to the ward manager

Easy Read



About nurse staffing levels

What does the Nurse Staffing Levels (Wales) Act 2016 mean to me?



This is an easy read version of NHS Wales' **'What does the Nurse Staffing Levels (Wales) Act 2016 mean to me as a**

patient on a paediatric inpatient ward? – Frequently Answered Questions'

January 2019

How to use this document



This is an easy read version. The words and their meaning are easy to read and understand.



You may need support to read and understand this document. Ask someone you know to help you.



Where the document says **we**, this means **NHS Wales**. For more information contact:



This document was made into easy read by **Easy Read Wales** using **Photosymbols**.

What does nurse staffing levels mean?



Nurse staffing levels means the number of nurses needed to care for patients properly and safely.



You might also see other healthcare staff working in the wards. For example physiotherapists who help people to move about.

What is the Nurse Staffing Levels (Wales) Act 2016?



The **Nurse Staffing Levels Act** became a law in Wales in March 2016.



It means health boards **must** make sure there are enough nurses in paediatric inpatient wards to care for patients safely.

How is the nurse staffing levels for each ward decided?



The nurse staffing levels for each ward may be different. It depends on the number of patients in the ward.



It also depends on the needs of the patients. For example, what type of nursing care they need.

To help us decide how many nurses are needed for each ward we look at 3 things:



- what the nurses think
- how poorly the patients are and how much care they need
- the quality and safety of care in each ward.

Who decides the nurse staffing levels for each ward?



The **Executive Director of Nursing** is in charge of deciding the nurse staffing levels for each ward.



They talk to the nursing team for each ward before making their decision.

How often will the nurse staffing levels be checked?

The nurse staffing levels for each paediatric inpatient wards should be checked:



- every **6 months**.
- when something changes on the ward. For example if the number of beds being used in the ward changes.
- if the nursing team thinks that it needs to be checked again for some reason.



How will wards make sure they have the right nurse staffing levels?



The **nurse in charge** will do a staff plan based on the number of nursing staff that need to be on the ward.



If there are not enough nurses, the nurse in charge will speak to the **senior nurse**. They might have to pay extra nurses to work in the ward to make sure there are enough.



Sometimes the staff plan might be changed because the needs of the patients have changed. The nursing team would decide if this should happen.

How do I find out more?

If you have any questions about the nurse staffing levels on this ward, please speak to:



- Ward Manager
- Ward Sister or
- Charge Nurse.