

Presenter: Accident and Emergency Departments in England are struggling⁽¹⁾ to cope with⁽²⁾ winter illnesses and people are being warned not to call 999 unless it is a genuine⁽³⁾ emergency. The director for ambulance services in England Peter Bradley says the service's just had its busiest week ever. To blame is the particularly cold start winter causing sharp⁽⁴⁾ rise in flu and the winter vomiting bug⁽⁵⁾ as well as injuries from falls. The Scottish ambulance service reports it's seen a 43% rise in demand than the same time last year, and the Welsh service has also seen a higher than normal spike⁽⁶⁾ in demand. Here is Keme Nzerem.

Keme Nzerem: The demand is unprecedented. Accident rooms in England and Scotland are stretched⁽⁷⁾ to breaking point. In some places 999 calls are up by nearly 50% and there's still a week to go before we hit the annual Christmas and New Year spike.

So just how bad is the problem?

Well, the head of England's national ambulance service, no less, has urged⁽⁸⁾ people to avoid calling 999 unless it really is an emergency because it's the worst condition he's seen in the last 10 years. A combination of colder than average temperatures, an increase in the number of flu cases, and an outbreak⁽⁹⁾ of the winter vomiting bug means, he says, that the system is struggling to cope.

Harry Diamond (St John Ambulance): 999 calls are meant for emergencies and we would ask people to restrict it to emergencies. They can always use the walk-in centres⁽¹⁰⁾, or visit their GPs, or ring NHS direct.

Nzerem: And it's no wonder⁽¹¹⁾ the authorities are concerned. While the London ambulance service has seen a 7% increase in 999 calls from last year, in the West Midlands, 8,000 emergency calls were made just last weekend, that's up 30%. The Scottish ambulance service has seen a 43% increase on the same weekend last year, and there's also been a big jump in Wales. The 50% rise in flu infection in the last week, is partly to blame.

GPs report more people are presenting not just with flu but also bronchitis and the common cold.

Pr Steve Field: This is unusual, it's much earlier than we would normally expect. It's going up, the rate is going up rapidly and there is pressure on the system. On top of norovirus which is causing diarrhoea and vomiting.

Nzerem: And the impact?

One hospital in Crewe saw such a jump in admissions this week, they had to temporarily close their doors.

Phil Morley (CE of Mid Cheshire hospitals): We've never done it before, this is the first time, we closed for a very short period of time just to make it safe. It's not a decision you ever take lightly, you don't want patients to have to travel outside of their normal hospital.

Nzerem: The Department of Health says it's monitoring the situation and accepts circumstances are difficult, but because of better planning, they argue they'll cope with the increased pressure.

Keme Nzerem Channelfour.

Lexical helpline:

1. **struggle (v):** try very hard to deal with a problem
2. **cope with (v):** face, deal with
3. **genuine (adj):** authentic, real
4. **sharp (adj):** sudden and significant
5. **winter vomiting bug:** norovirus
6. **a spike:** a sharp rise followed by a sharp fall
7. **stretched (adj):** pushed to the limit
8. **urge (v):** advise strongly
9. **an outbreak:** sudden occurrence
10. **a walk-in centre:** a medical centre that gives fast access to health care
11. **no wonder:** not surprisingly

Translation:

1. Seules les véritables urgences sont acceptées. Nous ne pouvons pas faire face à l'augmentation des appels.
2. L'augmentation des cas de gastro-entérite est sans précédent.
3. Les urgences et le SAMU sont au bord de la rupture et il est vivement conseillé aux malades d'appeler leur généraliste.
4. Le déclenchement de l'épidémie de grippe a des conséquences très graves sur le fonctionnement des hôpitaux britanniques.

1. Only the genuine emergencies are accepted. We can't cope with the rise in calls.
2. The increase of winter vomiting bug cases is unprecedented.
3. The A&E departments and the ambulance services are stretched to breaking point, and patients are urged to call their GPs.
4. The outbreak of the flu epidemic has very serious consequences on the way British hospitals are run.