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Gwasanaethau Ambiwylans Cymru  
Welsh Ambulance Services  
University NHS Trust

# AMBULANCE PERFORMANCE FRAMEWORK

## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS



The way that Welsh Government measures ambulance performance against life-threatening emergencies is changing. From 1 July 2025, the Welsh Ambulance Service will no longer be primarily measured by the time it takes to reach 999 calls in the existing Red category. Instead, the focus will be on patient outcomes, including how many people survive a life-or-death emergency or how their condition improves because of our interventions. This FAQ explains the rationale for the changes and what they mean for our patients and partners.

## What is changing?

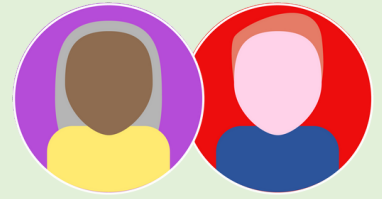
In August 2024, the Senedd's Health and Social Care Committee recommended that the eight-minute response time target introduced in 1974 for immediately life-threatening Red calls be assessed to see if it remained appropriate. The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care established a task group to review the target, which was made up of clinical experts in the field of pre-hospital emergency care and ambulance response, as well as senior NHS leaders. The task group concluded that the target was no longer appropriate or fit-for-purpose and that there was no available evidence that it supports better outcomes for patients. It also concluded that the existing Red category had broadened over time, leading to inefficient use of ambulance resources. Currently, an ambulance is immediately dispatched to people who initially appear seriously ill but who later transpire to be well enough to be discharged at scene without transport to hospital. These patients are subject to the same eight-minute target as a person with a clear clinical need for an immediate response in minutes, like a person in cardiac arrest. In March 2025, the Cabinet Secretary announced changes to the way ambulance performance will be measured in the future. The creation of new Purple Arrest and Red Emergency categories will signal a move away from response time measures and a focus on patient outcomes.

## How is performance against life-threatening emergencies measured currently?

The current target set by Welsh Government is to reach 65 per cent of immediately life-threatening Red calls across Wales within eight minutes.

## How will performance be measured against life-threatening emergencies in the future?

The existing Red category, which the task group concluded was too broad, will be split into two – a new Purple Arrest category for cardiac and respiratory arrests and a Red Emergency category where a person is at high risk of cardiac or respiratory arrest, e.g. choking, anaphylaxis, severe haemorrhage. Red Emergency calls are no less important than Purple Arrest calls and will be placed in the same 'queue' for dispatch and dispatched in time order, but the two categories will be subject to different outcome measures.



For Red Emergency calls, we will be measured by our clinical performance, i.e. the care we deliver to a patient and their outcome as a result. A number of additional clinical performance indicators will report metrics specific to patients and conditions within the Red category, such as pain management. The primary measure for Purple Arrest calls will be the percentage of people to have a heartbeat restored after a cardiac arrest, which is subsequently retained until arrival at hospital. This is otherwise known as the Return of Spontaneous Circulation, or ROSC. The expectation by Welsh Government is that ambulances will respond to Purple Arrest and Red Emergency calls in an average of six to eight minutes. The new approach forms part of a broader strategy to improve out-of-hospital cardiac arrest survival rates in Wales, which currently stand at less than five per cent.



## What will happen when I call 999 from 1 July 2025?

In the usual way, a call taker will ask you for the address of the emergency, whether the patient is breathing and what has happened to the patient, and the information is entered into our computerised priority dispatch system so that help can start to be arranged. This part remains unchanged. Patients in the Purple Arrest or Red Emergency categories will be sent an ambulance as quickly as possible so that our highly skilled clinicians can deliver life-saving interventions at the scene. Calls where there is no apparent immediate threat to life, including calls in the existing Amber and Green categories, will be subject to a rapid clinical review by a Clinical Navigator (Paramedic or Nurse) to ensure patients get the most appropriate help. If you need an immediate response, we will escalate your call to Purple Arrest or Red Emergency and send an ambulance as quickly as possible, but if there is no immediate need to send an ambulance, the call will be passed to one of our remote clinicians (Paramedic or Nurse) who will undertake a comprehensive clinical assessment to enable us to identify the most appropriate response to meet your needs. That might still be an ambulance, which we will send promptly – including to patients with suspected stroke, for example – but it could also be an Advanced Paramedic Practitioner in a car, a Community Welfare Responder, an appointment with your GP, self-care advice or something else.

## I'm a healthcare professional – what will happen when I call 999 on behalf of a patient from 1 July 2025?

If a healthcare professional calls 999 on behalf of a patient and there is an immediate threat to the patient's life, the call will be categorised as a Purple Arrest or Red Emergency and the patient will be sent an ambulance as quickly as possible. Calls where there is no immediate threat to life will be subject to a rapid clinical review by a Clinical Navigator (Paramedic or Nurse) to ensure the patient gets the most appropriate help. If a healthcare professional has concerns about the way a patient has been prioritised, there will be an opportunity for a clinician-to-clinician conversation with a Clinical Navigator to ensure the patient's needs are promptly and appropriately met. This process is designed to protect patient safety and ensure timely and effective clinical decision-making. During the pilot, we will continue to review and refine the process for managing 999 calls from healthcare professionals – including those that fall within the existing Amber category – so that it better meets the needs of patients and our system partners.

### Is this not just moving the goalposts?



Since 1974, our ambulance service has been measured by the time it takes to reach 999 calls. Until now, Wales was the only UK nation to retain an eight-minute response time target. It meant that a response in eight minutes and one second where a patient survived was a failure, but a response in seven minutes and 59 seconds where a patient died was perceived as meeting the target. The ambulance service of today provides much more sophisticated care, so shifting the focus to outcomes and how a patient's condition improves because of our interventions, rather than simply how many minutes it takes us to get there, is an important step to reflect that. This is already an approach used successfully in Ireland, Scotland and Australia where survival rates and outcomes have improved as a result.



### How will you report performance?

Performance will be reported in the usual way through the monthly NHS Wales Joint Commissioning Committee [Ambulance Service Indicators](#) and the monthly Welsh Government [NHS Activity and Performance Summary](#), as well as via our bi-monthly Trust Board meetings and Committee meetings.

### How else do you plan to improve cardiac arrest survival rates in Wales?

We will work even more collaboratively with the NHS Wales Save a Life Cymru (SaLC) programme to promote the importance of early cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) and defibrillation and improve accessibility of defibrillators. From July, we will be the host organisation for SaLC following its transition from Public Health Wales. Every second counts in a cardiac arrest, and early intervention – often from a bystander – will give a person the best possible chance of survival. That is why we are asking the public to consider the following:

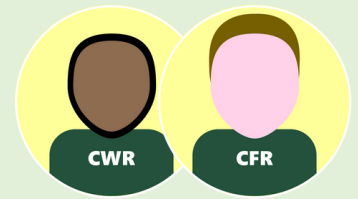
Learn how to perform CPR. The Resuscitation Council UK has produced this step-by-step guide: [How to do CPR | Resuscitation Council UK](#)



Register on the [GoodSAM](#) app if you are a qualified first aider to get an alert if there is a cardiac arrest in your area and start the 'chain of survival' before an ambulance arrives.



Volunteer as a [Community Welfare Responder \(CWR\)](#), then a [Community First Responder \(CFR\)](#). CFRs are trained by the ambulance service to attend 999 calls in their community and administer first aid in the minutes before an ambulance arrives, including CPR and defibrillation.



Register all new and existing defibrillators on the national defibrillator network The Circuit so that 999 call takers can see their location: [The Circuit - the national defibrillator network](#)



## When will the changes be introduced?

The new performance framework will be piloted for 12 months from 1 July 2025 and, following an independent evaluation, will be considered for permanent implementation from August 2026.

## Are there any other changes to come?

An additional review is underway to consider whether performance measures are required for incidents not within the Purple Arrest or Red Emergency categories, including conditions which fall within the existing Amber and Green categories, such as stroke and chest pain. The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care has established a national group of clinical, operational and policy leads to review and consider measures for these conditions. We will consider the findings of this additional review before finalising changes to our clinical model.

## What other improvements is the Welsh Ambulance Service making?

The Trust is embarking on a broader transformation of its clinical model to better meet the needs of patients and the wider system. The programme is underpinned by five pillars of work (Emergency Response, Remote Integrated Care, Urgent Community Response, Digital Front-End and Health Transport), designed to deliver safer care for patients and better outcomes, protect ambulance capacity for those who need it most and safely reduce hospital admissions. Over winter 2024/25, we collaborated with Welsh Government, commissioners and system partners to test a number of new approaches, including -

### Rapid Clinical Screening

This is the process whereby Clinical Navigators (Paramedic or Nurse) undertake a rapid clinical review of 999 calls to ensure patients get the most appropriate help. It was a concept tested over winter 2024/25 and which now forms part of our approach to managing 999 calls in line with our evolving integrated clinical services model and the new ambulance performance framework. Thirty Clinical Navigators have been appointed to run the new service and are based at the Trust's clinical contact centres in St Asaph, Carmarthen and Cwmbran. Click [here](#) to learn more about rapid clinical screening.

### Community Welfare Responders

We have been growing our numbers of CWRs, the volunteers trained by the ambulance service to provide an 'eyes on' service to patients when an ambulance might be delayed, or even unnecessary. CWRs attend 999 calls in their community and take a set of observations from patients, including heart rate and oxygen levels, which help our control room clinicians decide the appropriate next steps. Take a look at this [5 News](#) story about our CWRs.

### Mental Health Response Vehicle

We also launched an initiative in south Wales to help people in a mental health crisis. The Mental Health Response Vehicle provides specialist assessment, care and support for people with a mental health emergency who have called 999 and require a face-to-face response, as determined by a Senior Mental Health Clinician in the control room. A Senior Mental Health Clinician and Emergency Medical Technician work together to treat the patient's mental health and physical needs, providing a more holistic approach to care. Take a look at this [ITV Wales News](#) coverage about our Mental Health Response Vehicle.

### Hospital Handovers

More broadly, we will be working with Local Health Boards and Welsh Government to enact a recommendation by the [Ministerial Advisory Group](#) (MAG) to ensure that no ambulance handover exceeds 45 minutes by October 2025, with a focus on achieving the 15-minute handover target wherever possible. The recommendation, one of 29 made in a MAG report on NHS Wales performance and productivity, was welcome news for us and will enable a better experience for frontline staff, and by extension, a better experience for patients.

## How can I share feedback about my experience?

**Key to the success of all of these changes is feedback from patients. There are a number of ways to tell us about your experience of using the Welsh Ambulance Service:**

- Write to us at Patient Experience and Community Involvement Team, Welsh Ambulance Services University NHS Trust, **1 Matrix Park, Swansea Enterprise Park, SA6 8RE.**
- Email us at [PECI.team@wales.nhs.uk](mailto:PECI.team@wales.nhs.uk)
- Call us on **01792 311 773.**
- Visit the [Have Your Say](#) page on our website.
- Record your experience in our [Virtual Videobooth](#).