



Children's A&E Listening Event

Whiston Hospital
29 April 2024

healthwatch
Halton

healthwatch
Knowsley

healthwatch
St Helens

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Introduction

On Monday 29 April 2024 we held a Listening Event at the Children's A&E Department at Whiston Hospital.

The aim of the visit was to speak to patients to gather feedback about the hospital and find out what people think is good and what needs improving.

What is Healthwatch

Healthwatch is your champion for health and social care services.

Wherever you live in England, you'll have a local Healthwatch nearby (there are over 150 across the country). Healthwatch is here to listen to the issues that really matter to local communities and to hear about your experiences of using health and social care services. We're entirely independent and impartial, and any information you share with us is confidential.

What is a Healthwatch Listening Event?

Listening Events are designed to gain a snapshot view of the Accident and Emergency (A&E) departments at our local hospitals. Healthwatch Halton, Healthwatch Knowsley and Healthwatch St Helens undertake Listening Events periodically to gain the experiences of patients, to understand why they attended, and how they feel services could be improved. The purpose of these visits is to explore any themes emerging from comments made and feed these back to the hospitals, and service commissioners, to help improve services in the future.

Children's A&E Listening Event - Whiston Hospital

This visit was arranged in advance and took place to understand the reasons why people were attending, specifically whether they had attempted to access any other services prior to going to A&E.

Listening Events allows Healthwatch to gather the experiences of individuals, which provides additional rich and detailed information, enhancing the statistics regarding A&E attendance.

When was the Listening Event?

The visit took place to Whiston Children's A&E department on 29 April 2024 between 10.00am and 3.00pm.

Our Approach

Building on the established relationships Healthwatch has with Mersey and West Lancashire Teaching Hospitals NHS Trust, we made contact with the Trust's Quality Matron, Yvonne Mahambrey, to help arrange the visit.

Members of staff teams from Healthwatch Halton, Healthwatch Knowsley and Healthwatch St Helens took part in the visit, held conversations and completed surveys with parents of children and young people whilst they were waiting to be seen.

Throughout the visit, we were made to feel welcome by Trust Staff and Managers.

Who will this report be shared with?

This report has been produced based on the responses from the 31 people who completed our survey.

A copy of the final report will be published on the websites of Healthwatch Halton, Healthwatch Knowsley and Healthwatch St Helens and will be sent to the Trust, Healthwatch England, CQC and various stakeholders covering Halton, Knowsley and St Helens.

Summary of findings

The findings are based on analysis of the results of **31 survey responses** Healthwatch gathered during our time at the hospital.

Children's A&E provides a much better experience for parents and children than in the main A&E department.

The area is very clean and offers a pleasant environment for patients, and offers some really good facilities, such as baby rooms, drinks etc.

People's experiences

- **74% of people thought the service received in A&E was 'good' or 'amazing'**. 13% rated their experience as being poor or very poor.
- **62%** said they had been kept updated on their child's care and treatment.
- **90%** said their child's privacy had been maintained as much as possible during the time at A&E.
- **83% said they had not** been kept regularly informed about any waiting times or delays.

Why people attended A&E rather than other services

- **61%, (19 people), said they had looked for help elsewhere before deciding to bring their child to A&E.** Of the 19, seven (37%), had spoken to their GP practice. Five, (26%) had tried NHS 111, online and phone.
- **11 people** who sought help or advice prior to attending A&E **had then been advised to attend A&E.**
- Of the twelve people who chose not to seek help elsewhere before attending A&E, **five assumed it was the best place for their child to be treated** and five had been previously advised to come to A&E by another medical professional. One person suspected their child

needed a scan / xray. One person felt it was an emergency and they need to attend A&E. Two people also said family members had advised them to attend A&E

Transport

- Most people travelled to the hospital by car. Two people said ambulances had been due to bring them but due to waiting times of over 2.5 hours they came by car.
- Two people arrived by ambulance. They told us they waited less than 30 minutes for the ambulance to arrive. They rated the ambulance care as 'Amazing'
- One person told us they drove to the hospital but couldn't find a parking space, so returned home and then walked to the hospital. One person brought their child by public transport. They told us it took over an hour by bus from Runcorn.

Observations

During the visit our teams made the following observations:

Children's A&E was relatively quiet when we first arrived but became busier as the day went on.

The Children's A&E department is clean and bright. There is a ramp at the main entrance for accessibility. There are hand gels available, near the entrance and toilets. There are two toilets, an accessible toilet, breast feeding room and baby change room available within the children's A&E. A large floor sign warns of the symptoms of measles and asks people to tell reception if their child has any of these symptoms in the entrance area. Posters encouraging childhood vaccinations are displayed in the waiting room.

A large sign on the wall explains the **'Journey through the department'** explaining triage etc.

There is a brightly coloured mural on one wall, with a rainbow, star decorations across the ceiling and a sky light with balloon decor on the ceiling. A TV was on playing CBeebies programmes for children to enjoy. There were also some books, small chairs and young children's toys available. Cordial and water with cups were readily available for families to help themselves. There were also disposable sick bowls if needed.

We didn't observe any information on how to give feedback, or information on PALS or Healthwatch.

Reception staff explained that they have a hearing loop available.

We observed staff introduce themselves to patients by name and friendly interactions when observations needed to be taken in the waiting room.

During the morning session we noted 15 families struggling to gain entrance at the main door. We informed a nurse, who said the door was kept locked for safety as it is a Children's area. She explained it is not the best organisation but there is a sign to inform people about this outside the

unit. We checked the sign, which was A4 sized and situated to the left of the large double doors. It asked patients to sign in at the adults A&E and then press the buzzer at children's A&E to be let in. Everyone we saw had missed this sign and some people had just walked in as the door was open and stood looking lost at the reception desk. The reception desk had closed at around 11.00am. Some families approached the desk and did not know where to go. Two paramedics also approached the reception and then went through to find a nurse after trying a locked door to find somewhere to book the child in their care in.

No sign was on display at the reception to tell patients where to go. Some families told us they had walked around to different areas of the hospital before being able to find the correct way to book in.

On arrival for the afternoon session, we were unable to access the Children's A&E unit as the intercom was not being answered. A sign was visible stating to notify the main desk of arrival. A patient coming out of the department pressed the door release and we were able to gain entry. On gaining entry we noticed that reception was closed. The nurse's station was located down a short corridor.

We saw a number of families looking confused waiting by the main door that didn't open as they approached it. We let several families in. We informed staff about this.

During the afternoon session, the length of waiting times was commented on by most of the parents we spoke to. There appeared to be no direct communication to patients around how long the wait was for triage. Triage appeared to take place quickly.

One person told us they hadn't been told what their current wait was for or how long to expect to wait.

The waiting time was shown on a handwritten sign on reception, this showed seven hours in the morning and had the previous day's date. This was changed to 3.5 hours in the afternoon and the correct date, but most people told us they had been waiting longer than this.

A mother of a patient who has ADHD/ Autism was sitting on the floor away from the main waiting area with no access to additional seating. She felt that her child's needs were not considered in this setting.

One parent we spoke to said she was a regular attendee, due to complex needs of the child. She said she found staff rude and unwilling to prioritise needs of the patients.

Another patient commented on the lack of disabled drop off points outside A&E and the lack of signage to the building.

Another lady mentioned to us that there were no sandwiches in the vending machine or snacks available neither did there appear to be sockets to plug in phones while waiting,

Throughout our visit all staff we encountered were polite. They all wore name badges. We observed them being helpful, courteous, and caring to patients, friends and family. Staff were helpful to patients and this was noted by the majority of people we spoke to.

What was good.

Staff

There were lots of positive comments about the staff at the hospital.

One parent said, *'Everyone has been really friendly and informative.'*

Another said, *'Friendly staff in the reception at main A&E.'*

One more parent commented, *'The staff have been great and have kept us up to date. We were contacted on Friday to come in this morning.'*

Environment

A lot of comments mentioned how calm and quiet the Children's A&E area was. One parent said, *'It's quieter in children's area'* with another parent adding, *'It's calmer than in A&E and cleaner.'*

Another parent said, *'The toy area, and TV are good for the toddlers. It is nice and clean, I can wait to be seen here.'*

Yet another said, *'It's nicer to be here than the main A&E.'*

One parent liked the fact that there was, *'space for the pram.'*

Triage

There were many positive comments about triage, with one parent saying, *'They took our details really quickly'*, while another told us, *'It was fast to get the first triage check.'* Yet another parent said, *'Quick to triage and kept up to date.'*

One parent told us, *'We arrived at 8.00am and have seen the Doctor and had a blood test in about 2.5 hours. It was quick to get triaged too. Information given on a test and explained to us.'*

What was not so good.

Booking in

The reception desk in Children's A&E closed at approx. 11.00am on the day of our visit. This led to a lot of parents being confused as to what they needed to do when arriving. We received a lot of comments about this during our visit.

A small A4 notice, asking patients to sign in at the adults A&E and then press the buzzer at children's A&E to be let in, had been placed on the wall just outside the unit, but most parents didn't seem to notice the sign.

One parent told us, *'We had around 30 minutes before we could even book in with the walk across and queueing. We couldn't even see where to go.'*

Trying to get access into Children's A&E was difficult for many, with one parent telling us, *'We had to walk in the door as someone else left too, as it is locked.'*

Another parent said, *'We have no idea of waits. There is an old sign on reception and the desk is closed. We had a terrible time finding how to get in and tell someone we were here at all.'* Yet another gave a similar experience saying, *'I wasn't able to book in. The reception is closed so I just stood here until you saw us.'*

Another said, *'It has been very hard to book in. The door was locked so we tried walking around to the inside. We were told we were trying the wrong entrance and then sent to adults A&E to book in. It was very busy in there and I was concerned as I have my young baby with me to and don't want her around the germs. Adults A&E just told us we were booked in and to go back to the children's area.'*

Other comments included:

- ☉ *'The reception is shut. We had to book in at the other A&E and walk back around after asking a nurse. This is not ideal when you are fainting and sick.'*
- ☉ *'The reception desk was dark and closed, with no information. I don't know where to go to book her in.'*
- ☉ *'What's not good is having to register in main A&E as reception is closed in children's A&E.'*
- ☉ *'Staff were rude and we were made to feel we were not a priority.'*
- ☉ *'Having to give details in main A&E. It would be easier if this could be done in the children's A&E. It was ok as it is a Monday but if it had been a Friday or Saturday night, I would not have like to take my child in.'*

One parent asked for *'More information/communication about needing to provide details in main A&E.'*

Waiting times

There were comments about long waiting times and lack of information about waits including:

- 🗨️ *'There is no sign about waiting times except the old one on the closed desk.'*
- 🗨️ *'I would like to know an end point. What will happen now? How long will it take to know the blood test results.'*
- 🗨️ *'The signage about waiting times is from yesterday. We had to check in at the main A&E, there should be a better way of having to come back in after been discharged from Wards if you need to come back in. The waiting time hasn't been updated since yesterday and there is no one on reception.'*
- 🗨️ *'We were in A&E for over seven hours on our first visit.'*

Lack of a quiet area

One parent pointed out a lack of a space for her autistic child, with ADHD, to sit away from crowds and noise. They had to sit away from waiting area, and with no available seating they sat on the floor.

Suggestions and recommendations

These suggestions and recommendations are made for both the service provider and service commissioners.

- 1.** Review the current system used for parents and children entering the unit as it doesn't appear to be fit for purpose. The idea of the Children's A&E should be to spare parents and children the need to use the main A&E area, but they are currently ending up in a queue there.
- 2.** The current small A4 sized sign asking patients to sign in at the main A&E and press the buzzer to be let in should be replaced by a larger, clearer sign.
- 3.** The Children's A&E reception area should be staffed at all times.
- 4.** Provide an electronic screen within Children's A&E to display up-to-date waiting times and other information similar to the system used in the main A&E area.
- 5.** Consider providing a quiet section in the waiting area for children with Autism / ADHD.
- 6. Patient Feedback and Information:** To increase patient feedback on the service we suggest that clear information should be on display on how parents / children can give feedback on their experience, i.e. Friends and Family.

Mersey & West Lancashire Teaching Hospitals NHS Trust response

Thank you for providing the report on the recent joint visit to Children's A&E by Healthwatch Halton, Healthwatch Knowsley and Healthwatch St Helens on 29 April 2024. We appreciate the additional opportunity this allows to review and improve our services.

As a result of a recent recruitment programme, 6 new administration clerks have been recruited to address the gaps that has resulted in parents and children being required to enter the Main Department to register attendance. Moving forward, the paediatric ED reception area will be staffed 07:00-23:00 daily. As an interim measure, staff are being asked to contact the ED reception when a child arrives to ask staff to book in with children's ED. Signage is also being reviewed by our Estates and facilities Department. There are also plans for the addition of an electronic screen to display up-to date waiting times and other information like the system used in the main A&E area.

There is a designated cubicle in ED for patients with any additional needs such as children with Autism / ADHD. We will ensure that signage is also adequate requesting parents to approach a member of staff if they require the use of the facility.

Yvonne Mahambrey, Quality Matron – Patient Experience

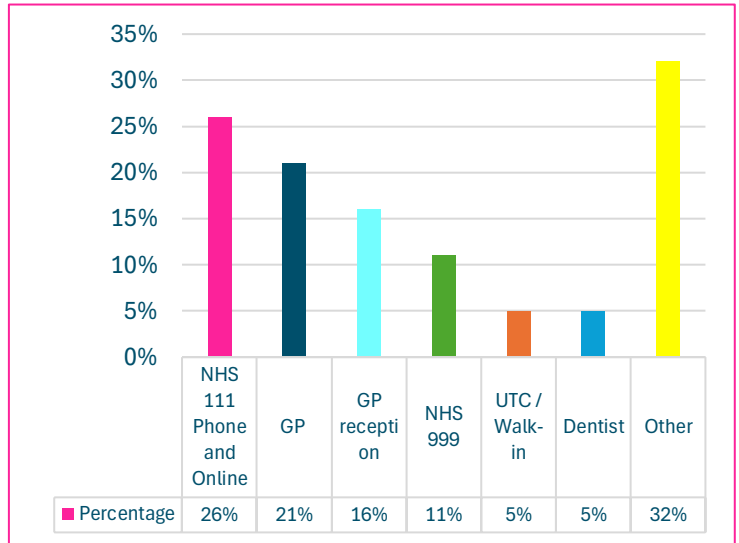
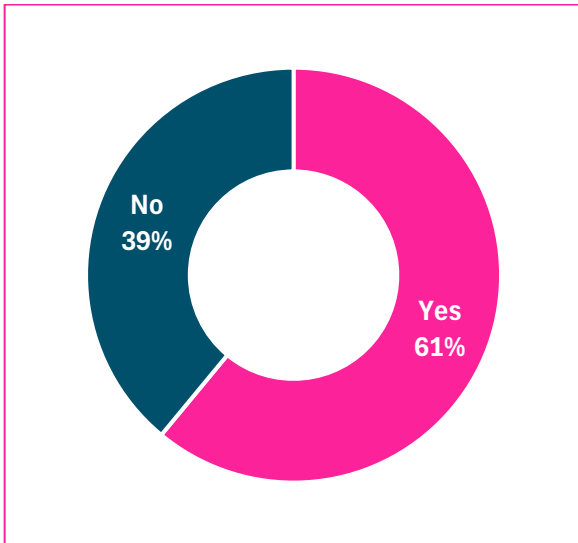
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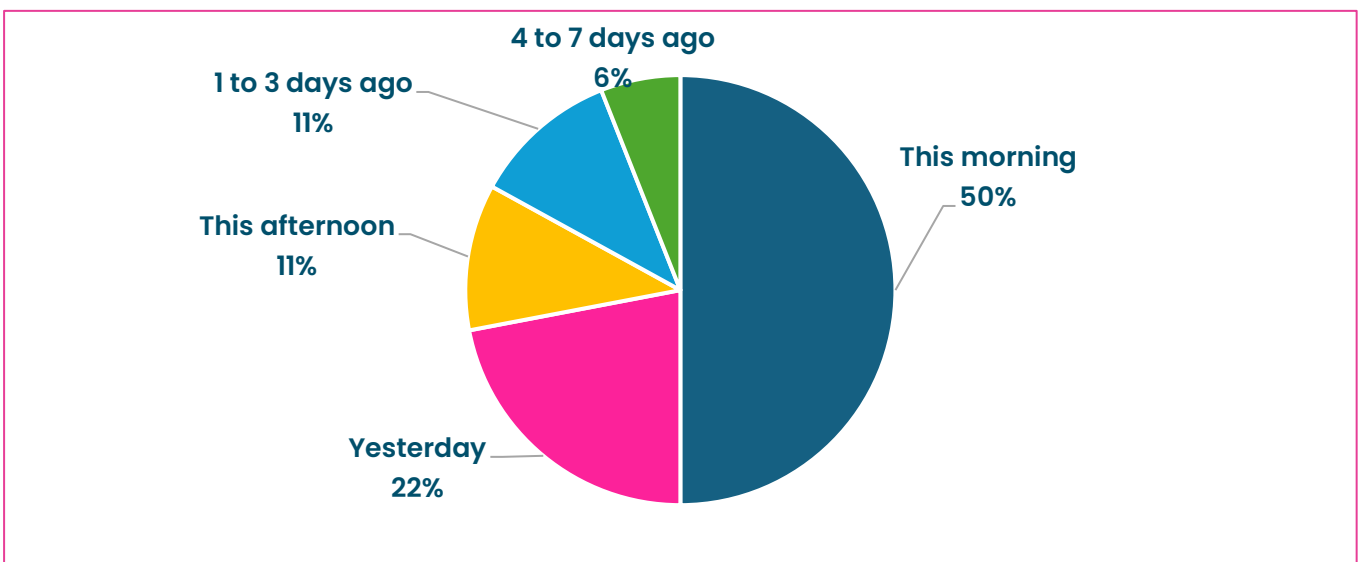
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Survey Results

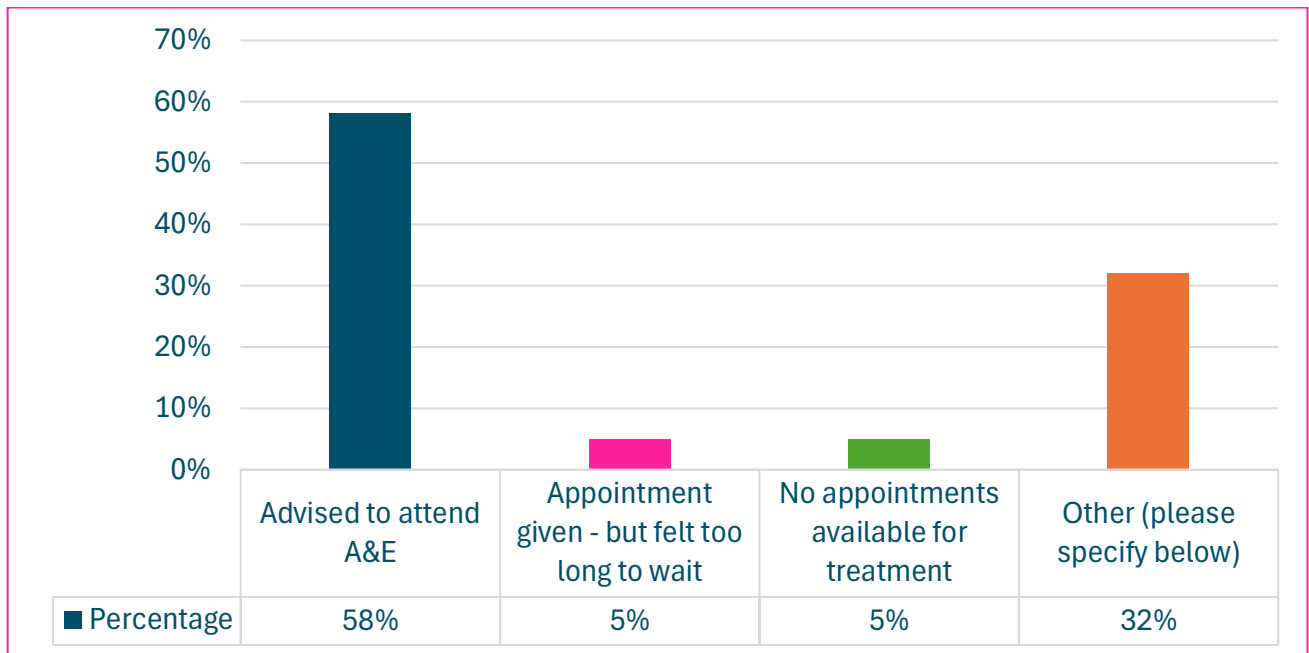
Before coming to A&E did you try speaking to anyone else, or try to go somewhere else for advice or treatment? If yes, where?



When did you try speaking to anyone else, or try to go somewhere else for advice?



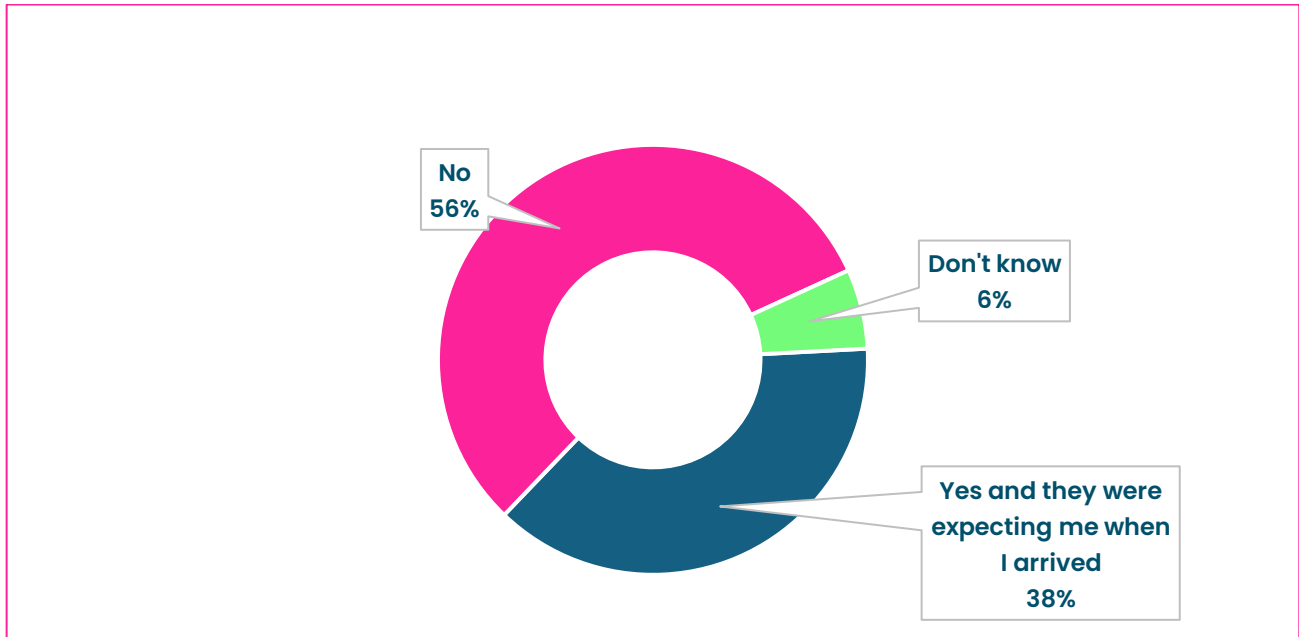
What was the outcome? (tick all that apply)



Comments

- 🗨️ *'Ambulance wait was too long, so we were advised to drive to A&E.'*
- 🗨️ *'Warrington A&E passed us to Alder Hey and Alder Hey Plastics was full today.'*
- 🗨️ *'They were going to send an ambulance but asked if we could make our own way.'*
- 🗨️ *'The GP called paediatrics for us to come in as daughter is not passing enough urine - we thought that we were going to CHOBS, didn't expect to come to A&E.'*
- 🗨️ *'We were asked to come back for bandages to be changed.'*
- 🗨️ *'Had to get an MRI scan.'*

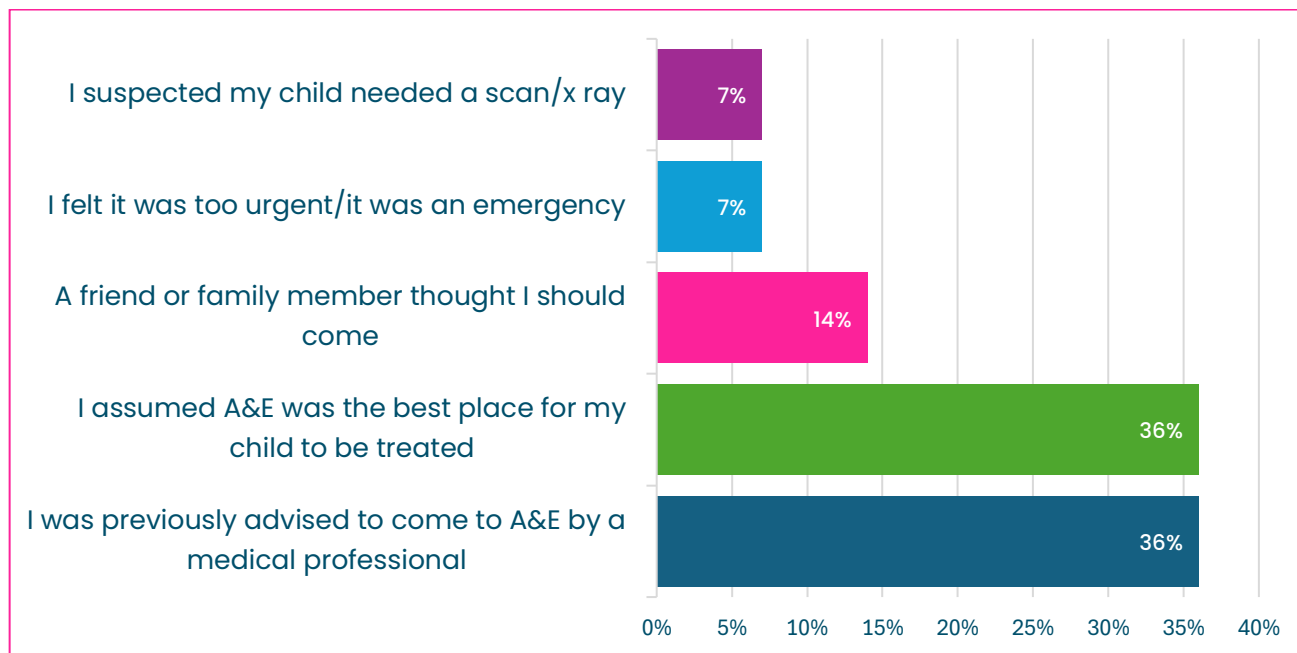
If you were told to attend A&E, were you advised that A&E knew you were coming?



Comments

- ☞ *'Told they couldn't contact A&E to say we were coming.'*
- ☞ *'Our GP tried to call ahead to A&E to say we were coming but couldn't get through or book us in.'*
- ☞ *'We were given a letter to bring.'*
- ☞ *'We were asked to come back to A&E to look at scans.'*

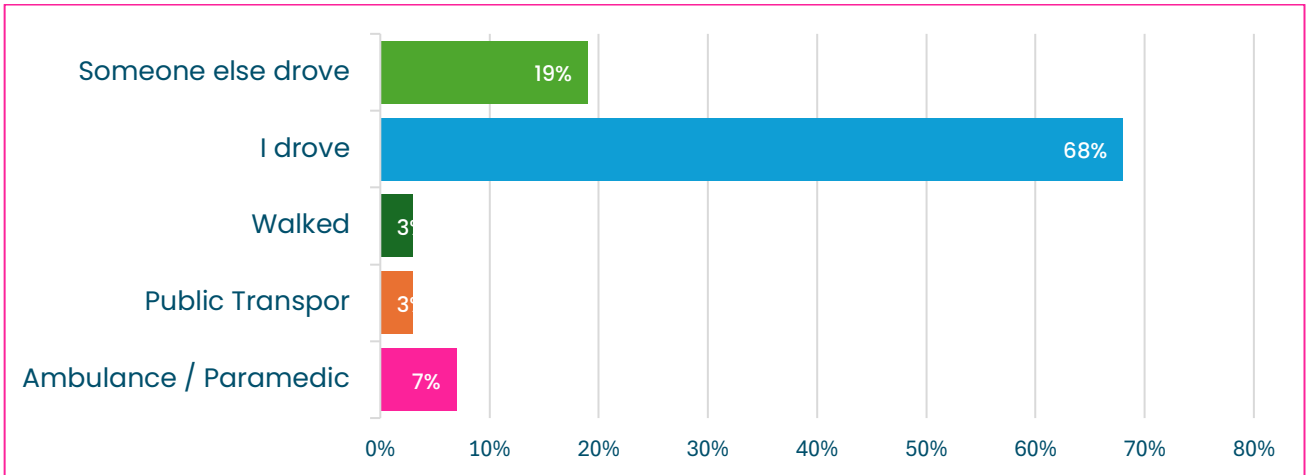
If you didn't try going anywhere else instead of A&E, why not?



Why was this the case?

- 🗨️ *'We were invited in for a follow up for my child. We have a time of 10am today.'*
- 🗨️ *'Banged head in school so brought here.'*
- 🗨️ *'Previous Experiences.'*
- 🗨️ *'My friend is a nurse and advised to come to A&E.'*
- 🗨️ *'My son has asthma, so I know to come to A&E when it is this bad.'*
- 🗨️ *'I think he has broken his fingers'*
- 🗨️ *'The school called and advised to bring to A&E'*
- 🗨️ *'Ongoing, seeing a consultant'*

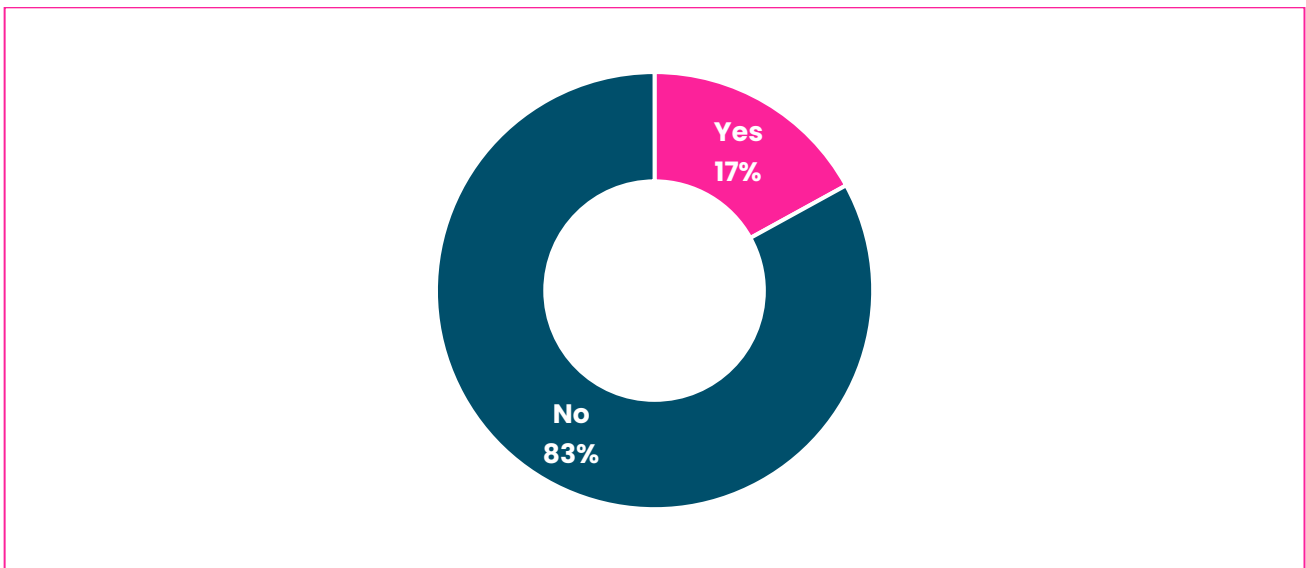
How did you travel here today?



If you came by ambulance, how would you rate the care you received?

Two patients were brought to A&E by ambulance / paramedic. The care received was rated as 'Amazing' by both.

Whilst in A&E, are you being/have you been kept regularly informed about waiting times or delays?



83% of respondents said they hadn't received information about waiting times or delays, while 17% said they had been kept informed on waiting times / delays.

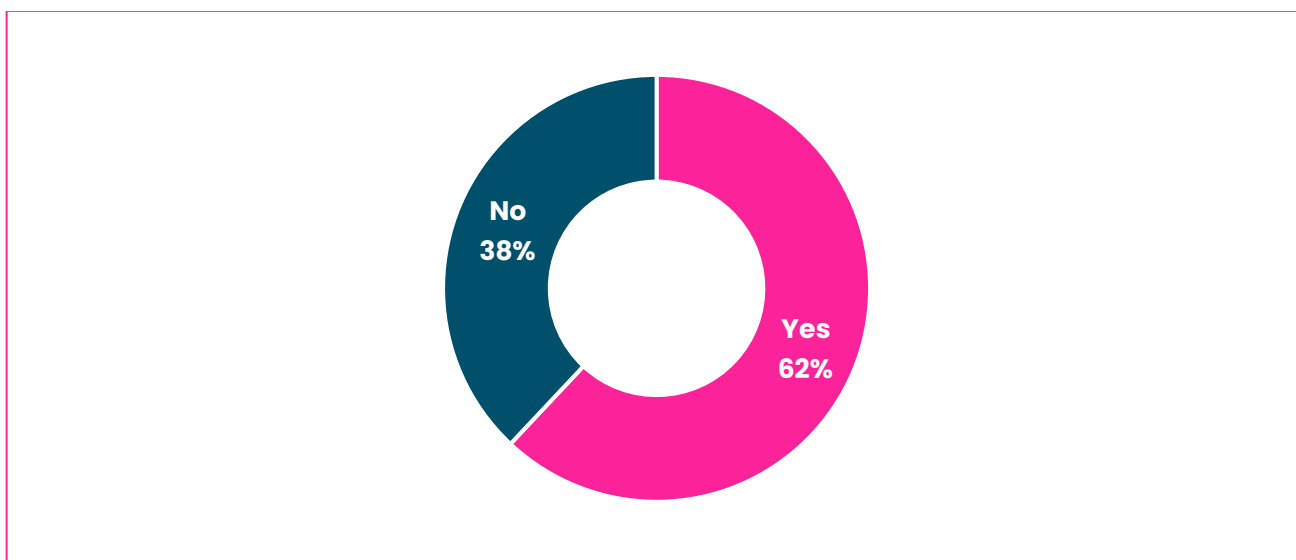
One parent told us, *'I have been informed about waiting times.'* Another said, *'We do have a time booked in.'*

Another parent commented that they had been *'Told via the signage'* while another parent told us, *'the signage is from yesterday'*.

One parent said, *'I've no idea of the waits'*, another told us, *'We are not sure of the waits as no one has mentioned them.'* Another commented, *'We were not told wait times. But we have been triaged, seen the doctor and had a blood test.'*

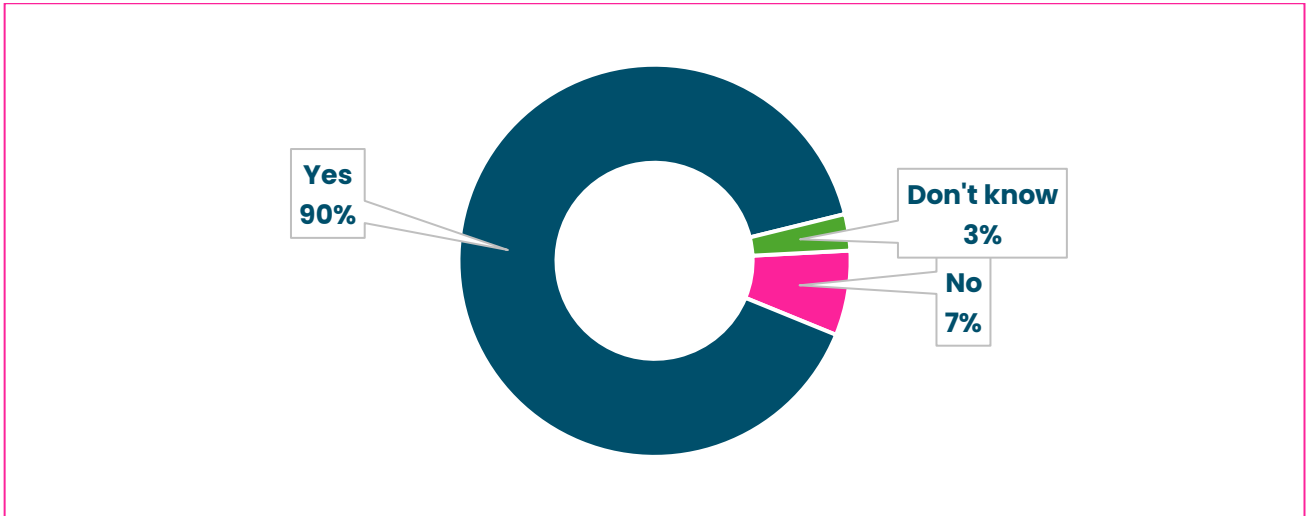
One person told us, *'Booked in at adult A&E, we were not told wait times.'*

Whilst in A&E, are you being/have you been kept up to date regards to your child's care and treatment?



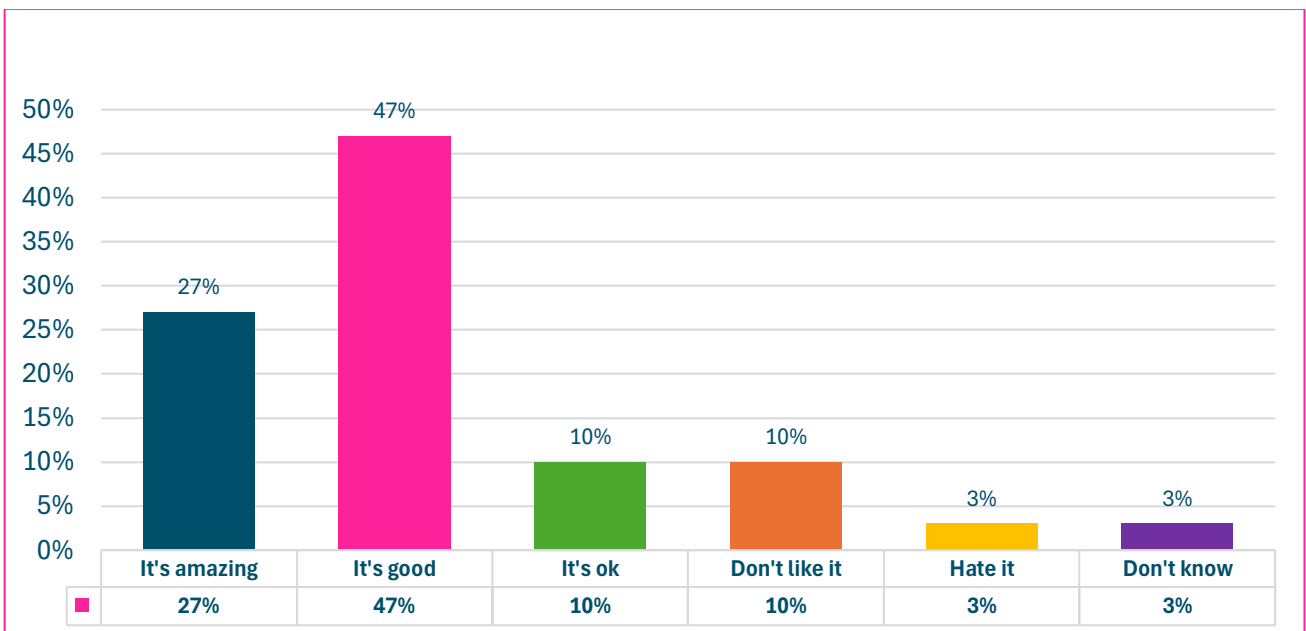
62% of parents said they had been kept updated on their child's care and treatment.

Do you feel your child's privacy has been maintained as much as possible, during your time at A&E?



The vast majority of parents said their child's dignity had been maintained. One parent felt this hadn't been maintained during booking in, saying *'We had to book in the adult A&E in the end and there was a big queue at their reception. It is not private at all and not nice for children, especially if issue a sensitive one.'*

How would you rate the service you have received so far ?



Over

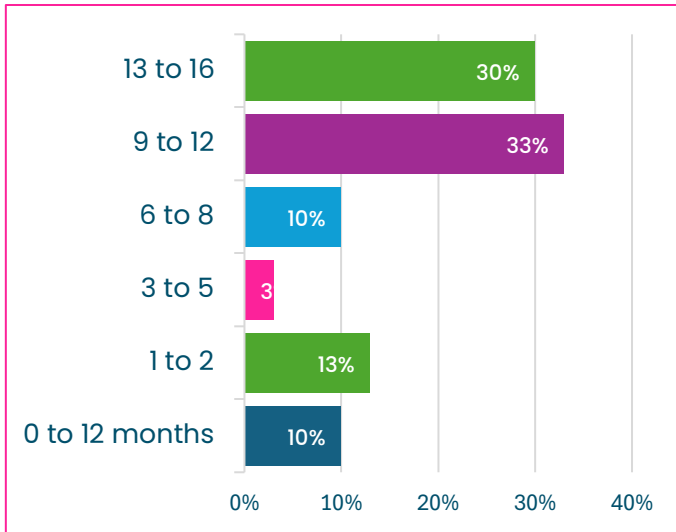
Which GP Practice are you registered with?

27 people gave details of which GP practice they were registered with.

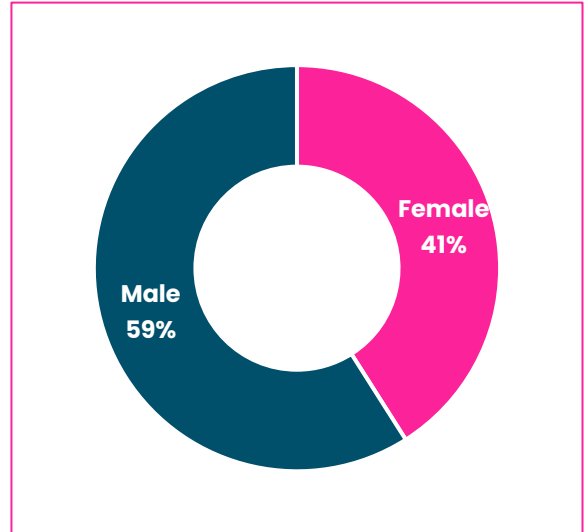
GP Practice	Patients
Aston - Manor Farm, Huyton	1
Bevan Group, Widnes	2
Crabstreet Health Centre, St Helens	1
Crossroads Surgery, Rainhill	1
Eccleston Medical Centre, St Helens	2
Fir Park Medical Centre, Widnes	4
Garston Vale Medical Practice	1
Langbank, Norris Green	1
Langton Lane, Rainhill	1
McMillan Surgery, Kirkby	1
Newton Le Willows Community Practice	1
Oaks Place, Widnes	1
Ormskirk House, St Helens	1
Park House medical centre, Prescot	1
Prescot Medical Centre	3
Towerhill Primary Care, Kirkby	1
Towerhouse Practice, Runcorn	1
Upton Rocks, Widnes	2
Whiston Health Centre	1

Demographics

Patient Age range



Gender





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