

Half of children's intensive care units dangerously full as Labour warns of New Year slump in care – Ashworth

Labour's new analysis of the latest weekly winter data released today by NHS England reveals that half of England's paediatric intensive care units were over 85% full last week.

In the period 18th December to 24th December, over one third of England's children's care units were 100% full, with not a single spare bed.

Labour's analysis further reveals:

- On Christmas Eve, one third of children's care units were running at dangerously high levels.
- On 19th December, the worst day last week, 55% of paediatric intensive care units were running at over 85% capacity, and 47% were 100% full, with not a single spare bed.

Responding to Labour's analysis of occupancy rates in children's care units, Jonathan Ashworth MP, Labour's Shadow

Health Secretary, said:

"Despite the very best efforts of our brilliant NHS staff, our findings today reveal a distressing picture of the unprecedented pressures on paediatric intensive care units across the country.

"To run a children's care unit above 85% occupancy places patient safety at significant risk and is an entirely intolerable situation.

"With the New Year fast approaching and demand likely to further increase, the Government must urgently explain in the New Year how they will avoid another appalling slump in care this winter."

Press release: Poisons from cigarettes

reach major body organs in seconds

Public Health England (PHE) releases a new TV advert highlighting the dangers of tar in cigarettes, as England's 7 million smokers are urged to make a quit attempt with help from Smokefree this New Year. The latest campaign shows how poisons from tar in cigarettes enter the bloodstream, spreading around the body within seconds and causing damage to major organs.

To help explain the ongoing internal harm being caused, a group of 7 lifelong smokers – including TV presenter and entrepreneur Hilary Devey – declare their intention to quit in January after seeing the results of a lab demonstration. The test results show how their smoking has led to elevated levels of cadmium (a metal used in batteries), cancer-causing nitrosamines and carbon monoxide in their blood. These toxic substances are amongst over 4,000 chemicals released into the body with each cigarette smoked, including more than 70 known cancer-causing compounds.

Elevated levels of these substances were seen in the participants' blood and can lead to an increased risk of major damage to the body.

Exposure to cadmium for a long period of time is associated with an increased risk of damage to the kidneys and bones and may lead to lung cancer. Research has shown that if you regularly smoke 20 or more cigarettes a day, you are twice as likely to develop kidney cancer compared with a non-smoker.

Tobacco-specific nitrosamines (TSNAs) are potent chemical compounds, many of which are carcinogenic (cancer-causing). They can cause DNA damage, cell death and are associated with cancers of the pancreas, mouth, respiratory and digestive tracts.

Carbon monoxide decreases the ability of the blood to carry oxygen and consequently puts a strain on the heart. Carbon monoxide is also associated with an increased risk of blood clots and coronary heart disease.

In the new film that supports the TV advert, Dr Dawn Harper, GP from Gloucester, explains the results of the tests to the smokers and how the quality of their blood would start to improve when they quit – ridding them of harmful poisons which cause major damage to the body. Dr Harper advises the smokers that there are many ways to quit, including free proven support from [NHS Smokefree](#). People can choose what works best for them: face-to-face help, stop smoking aids, a quitting app, email, social media, and SMS support.

Professor John Newton, Director of Health Improvement at Public Health England says:

Smoking is a deadly habit. Each year it kills 79,000 people in England and for every death, another 20 smokers have a smoking-related disease. That means one person is admitted to hospital every minute of every day due to smoking.

Our new TV ad shows how every cigarette sends a flood of poisonous chemicals through the bloodstream in seconds. People know that tar damages the lungs, but it's less well understood that the poisons also reach the other major organs in the body. We are urging every smoker to take advantage of the free Smokefree support and quit for good this New Year.

Dr Dawn Harper, GP and medical journalist says:

I see the damaging effects of smoking in my surgery almost every day. Tar from cigarettes causes damage to major organs, the bones and increases your risk of a range of cancers and diseases. But, the good news is that no matter how long you've smoked, quitting can reduce your chances of developing cancer, heart and lung disease and other serious smoking related illnesses. Some of the benefits are almost immediate, with improved energy and breathing within a matter of days.

I know how difficult it is to stop but the important thing is to commit to trying again, no matter how many times you might have tried and failed in the past – it's never too late.

Hilary Devey, TV presenter, entrepreneur and lifelong smoker says:

I've smoked at least 20-a-day for over 40 years. Like many, I've been hooked on cigarettes and ignoring the damage – even though I know the harm I'm doing, I've found it extremely difficult to quit for good. Even a stroke 3 years ago only led me to stop temporarily.

Seeing the high levels of poisonous chemicals in my blood from these tests really hit home how dangerous continuing to smoke is – and for that reason, I'm done!

I'm absolutely determined to try again this New Year and I hope other smokers across the country will join me making full use of all the free help available at Smokefree – this time next year we could be celebrating one year smoke-free and feeling the benefits.

Smokefree provides motivation, information and support for smokers who want to stop. Just search 'Smokefree' for free support and advice to help you quit smoking.

Background

1. To find out more about the range of free support and tools available to help people quit smoking, please search 'NHS Smokefree' online.
2. Download all [Smokefree films and images](#).

3. Carbon Monoxide, one of the toxic substances identified at elevated levels in the lab demonstration, is not contained in tar but is one of the most harmful elements in tobacco smoke.
4. [PHE](#) exists to protect and improve the nation's health and wellbeing, and reduce health inequalities. We do this through world-leading science, knowledge and intelligence, advocacy, partnerships and providing specialist public health services. We are an executive agency of the Department of Health, and are a distinct organisation with operational autonomy to advise and support government, local authorities and the NHS in a professionally independent manner. Follow us on Twitter: [@PHE_uk](#) and Facebook: www.facebook.com/PublicHealthEngland.

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[Councils forced to spend valuable resources tackling effects of Universal Credit](#)

Councils across the country are being forced to spend their own resources tackling the effects of Universal Credit and preparing for its roll out.

FOI requests submitted by Labour reveal Councils are committing funds towards offsetting and preparing for the impact of Universal Credit over and above Discretionary Housing Payments provided by the Department for Work and Pensions.

The data shows some Councils are having to provide additional rent arrears support and increase staffing as well as working with their local food banks and Citizens Advice to offset the impact of Universal Credit.

Newcastle City Council is spending nearly £400,000 of

its own resources supporting UC claimants, almost a quarter of which comes from additional rent arrears support. That's because the non-collection of rent purely as a result of UC is over £1.2 million across a tenancy base of just 27,000.

In London, Tower Hamlets Council has set aside £5 million over three years to help those affected by Universal Credit and are suffering hardship while Barking and Dagenham is budgeting £50,000 to support UC claimants from January 2018.

Examples of Councils needing, and preparing, to commit resources to offset the impact of Universal Credit (UC) include:

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Bath and

North East Somerset Council plans to spend its allocation of Discretionary Housing Payments. So far in 2017, nearly three quarters of its DHP spend has gone to supporting claimants in receipt of UC.

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Bolton

Council has a £750,000 Local Welfare Provision Scheme and a ring-fenced budget of £1.5 million over a five year period to tackle poverty.

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Bournemouth

Borough Council has recently commissioned a £10,000 annual service from the Citizen's Advice Bureaux to provide 2 days a week drop-in to help those people either claiming UC for the first time or who are experiencing problems with applying.

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Brent

Council is anticipating "additional demands on a number of Council departments" from the introduction of UC.

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Cheshire

West and Chester Council is spending more than £500,000 this year and next on additional staffing. It also has a budget of £60,000 for Discretionary Hardship Payments.

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City of

Wolverhampton Council expects demand for Discretionary

Housing Payments to increase following the expansion of UC during December.

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Cornwall

Council is predicting an increase in the number of people needing personal budget support for UC from 37 in December 2017 to 191 in March 2018, a rise of 416%.

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Dudley

Metropolitan Borough Council has increased staffing in its Income Management Team by £500,000 in the last three years to manage the impact of UC and other welfare reforms.

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Gateshead

Housing Company, which manages Gateshead Council's housing stock, is planning to spend an estimated £90,000 in 2017/18 and £270,000 in 2018/19 on additional staffing to support Universal Credit claimants and help prevent rent arrears.

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Halton

Borough Council has spent over £13,000 supporting UC claimants who have experienced delays receiving their first UC payment and those having budgeting issues.

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Haringey

Council has a fund of up to £900,000 to support families affected by welfare reform.

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Lambeth

Council is spending £775,000 providing advice to residents about social security, debt and money issues. Lambeth Housing are spending £87,000 to provide a supportive service for tenants impacted by welfare reform.

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Liverpool

City Council has spent £175,000 from its Local Welfare Provision Scheme for customers in receipt of UC.

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London

Borough of Barking and Dagenham is budgeting £50,000 to support UC claimants from January 2018.

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London

Borough of Bexley is spending £200,000 on homeless prevention work, including preventing evictions for rent arrears.

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Newcastle

City Council is spending over £390,000 of its own resources to support UC claimants. That includes £88,000 in rent arrears support as to date the non-collection of rent purely as a result of UC is over £1.2 million across a tenancy base of just 27,000.

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Royal

Borough of Kingston Council is setting aside £181,000 as “bad debt provision in anticipation of the potential increase in the number and value of bad debt write offs”.

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Sheffield

City Council is holding workshops to prepare for the full roll out of UC. The Council is working on the “understanding from other authorities who have already gone through full roll-out of UC [...] that rent arrears double when tenants move onto UC.”

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Shropshire

Council has spent over £20,000 supporting local foodbanks to “diversify the type of help they are able to give specifically to suit Universal Credit.”

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Sunderland

City Council is using resources from a £250,000 Local Welfare Provision Scheme to support residents claiming UC.

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Telford

& Wrekin Council is using resources from its Welfare Crisis Assistance Scheme to prevent tenants from being evicted due to rent arrears caused by UC.

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Tower

Hamlets Council has allocated £5 million over three years “to help those affected by Universal Credit and are suffering hardship”.

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Wakefield

Council has used a further £2,000 from

their Local Welfare Provision to support UC claimants.

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Warrington

Borough Council has spent £6,500 in Local Welfare Support payments supporting UC claimants.

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Waltham

Forest Council has arranged staff training on UC and is planning a £17,000 6-month project management resource to help prepare for the introduction of UC. It is also hosting a seminar on how UC will change the way staff need to work, the cost of which is £1,700.

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Wirral

Council is contributing nearly £300,000 to a budget for Discretionary Housing Payments for applicants who receive Housing Benefit or housing costs within UC.

Margaret

Greenwood MP, Labour's Shadow Minister for Employment, said:

“Universal Credit is causing misery and hardship for thousands of families this Christmas, and Councils are being expected to pick up the pieces.

“It's clear Councils are committing their own valuable resources from already-stretched budgets to offset the impact of Universal Credit and to prepare for the damage its roll out could cause.

“This is yet more evidence that the Government should immediately pause the roll out of Universal Credit so its fundamental flaws can be fixed.”

[The Today programme condemns populism](#)

I had hoped with Guest editors the Today programme would seek to reconnect for just a day or two with the taxpayers, motorists and Eurosceptics it regularly castigates the rest of the year. I should have known better. This morning they have just given an interview with an “expert” who told them that people voting for “populist” parties threatened the underpinnings of liberal democracy in Europe. So there we have it. People voting against the EU and Euro establishment in their countries are anti democratic forces. Why wasn't

the expert asked why in the EU you are only allowed to vote for what the Establishment thinks is right? Why do voters have to vote again when they get the answer to referendums wrong according to the Establishment? What should voters do when traditional parties remain wedded to Euro austerity policies?

[Euro papers withheld](#)

There's a surprise! The release of government documents includes delays to the release of European Exchange Rate Mechanism papers and a block on the release of certain Euro papers relating to 1992 when we dropped out of the European Exchange Rate Mechanism. This was the biggest economic policy error of the last quarter of the twentieth century in the UK. The Establishment and main political parties united to visit this disaster on us. It led to falling house prices, a big rise in unemployment, closed factories, bankrupt businesses, all in the name of European integration. The irony is it delivered what Project Fear wrongly said our vote to leave the EU would deliver in the winter of 2016-17! No wonder the Remain establishment is shy about revealing more of what happened then.