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A Scottish health board was forced to cancel a fifth of planned operations in December, new figures have revealed.

ISD Scotland data showed, in NHS Highland, 19 per cent of elective operations were called off.

Around half of those were due to capacity issues within hospitals in the area.

Nationwide, 10.1 per cent of operations were cancelled, the highest in almost a year.

It is the latest set of statistics illustrating the difficulties being faced by the NHS around Christmas.

Health boards are continually failing to hit the four-hour waiting time for accident and emergency patients, while delayed discharge continues to be a problem.

Other reasons set out by ISD Scotland for cancellations are hospitals scrapping procedures for clinical reasons, and patients themselves deciding against going under the knife.

Scottish Conservative shadow health secretary Donald Cameron said:

“Everyone appreciates the winter months are the toughest for health boards to deal with.

“But even so, for one in five planned operations to be cancelled is nothing short of dreadful.

“It’s a massive inconvenience for patients across the Highlands, many of whom are vulnerable and in need of care, and may well be coming a long distance.

“There will always be occasions when the patient wants to cancel the procedure, but this is clearly far too high a statistic.

“The SNP has been in sole charge of health for a decade now and this falls squarely at its door.

“NHS Highland has not had its problems to seek, and it’s essential these appalling figures are not repeated in future months.”

To see a spreadsheet of all cancelled procedures, visit:

<http://www.scottishconservatives.com/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/2017-02-07-Cancellations.xlsx>