# Unsafe NHS maternity units expose women and staff to rising risks amid infrastructure crisis



Pregnant women in NHS maternity units across England are facing unsafe environments due to the deteriorating condition of hospital buildings, according to a recent report by NHS England. The findings reveal a deeply troubling picture: water leaks, power outages, and faulty equipment are causing widespread safety incidents and disruption of services, including delays to planned caesarean sections. The report recorded over 14,000 safety incidents linked directly to poor physical conditions in maternity units over the past three years, underlining a growing crisis in the infrastructure supporting NHS maternity care.

The report highlights that at least seven per cent of maternity buildings are at risk of imminent breakdown, classified in the worst-rated category D. Meanwhile, 42 per cent are rated category C, meaning significant repairs or replacement are needed within three years. London is the region most severely affected, followed by the South West and other parts of the country including the North East, Yorkshire, and Midlands. The unsafe conditions include outdated and frequently malfunctioning equipment, overcrowded wards, and wards insufficiently spacious to accommodate emergencies or proper care. The report also stresses the absence of adequate CCTV, poor ventilation, limited natural lighting, and a lack of private spaces within emergency departments for families experiencing pregnancy loss.

Water and sewage issues topped the list of disruptions, with 5,341 incidents related to water, sewerage, and drainage recorded between April 2020 and March 2023. Ventilation and heating problems accounted for nearly 3,000 incidents, while structural leaks and flooding contributed to further instability. This is echoed by investigative findings that hospitals have experienced more than 450 sewage leaks in the past year alone, with incidents reported on maternity wards, cancer wards, and casualty departments. Such conditions not only threaten patient safety but also impair staff’s ability to provide essential care.

Additional concerns raised include overcrowded nurseries with insufficient spacing between cots, heightening infection risks, and inadequate rest facilities for staff, including the lack of overnight rest spaces for consultants. Rising demand has also led to a shortage of post-natal beds, exacerbating challenges within already strained services.

These alarming findings align with a broader assessment by the Care Quality Commission (CQC), which found that nearly half of maternity units inspected require improvement or are inadequate, citing consistent issues such as poor incident reporting and delays that prompt some women to leave care prematurely. The CQC has urged urgent action to prevent such substandard care and the normalisation of avoidable harm in maternity services. This call to action resonates with NHS England’s commitment to allocate funding to trusts to address the most critical risks, compelling NHS leaders to ensure their facilities meet safe standards.

The infrastructural decline is part of a wider problem facing NHS hospitals in England, where maintenance backlogs have soared to £13.8 billion, driven by persistent problems with leaking roofs, broken equipment, and failing heating systems. These failures translate into considerable clinical downtime, with more than 600 days of deprived clinical service lost due to urgent repair needs. The scale of the crisis has forced many NHS trusts to close wards temporarily or permanently—impacting maternity, A&E, and paediatric units alike—further straining patient care capacity and safety.

NHS England’s recent infrastructure review of maternity and neonatal services underscores the pressing need for significant investment to enhance the experiences of patients and staff, improve safety, and provide high-quality care. The data makes it clear that without urgent and sustained funding and action, the physical state of NHS maternity facilities will continue to pose serious risks to mothers, babies, and healthcare workers.

### 📌 Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.independent.co.uk/news/health/maternity-units-crumbling-hospitals-nhs-england-b2825328.html), [[7]](https://www.england.nhs.uk/publication/maternity-and-neonatal-infrastructure-review-findings/)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.independent.co.uk/news/health/maternity-units-crumbling-hospitals-nhs-england-b2825328.html)
* Paragraph 3 – [[1]](https://www.independent.co.uk/news/health/maternity-units-crumbling-hospitals-nhs-england-b2825328.html), [[6]](https://www.theguardian.com/society/2023/feb/17/nhs-unsafe-sewage-leaks)
* Paragraph 4 – [[1]](https://www.independent.co.uk/news/health/maternity-units-crumbling-hospitals-nhs-england-b2825328.html)
* Paragraph 5 – [[2]](https://www.cqc.org.uk/press-release/action-needed-now-prevent-harm-maternity-services-becoming-normalised), [[4]](https://news.sky.com/story/maternity-failings-uncovered-within-nhs-in-england-are-widespread-says-health-watchdog-13217298)
* Paragraph 6 – [[1]](https://www.independent.co.uk/news/health/maternity-units-crumbling-hospitals-nhs-england-b2825328.html), [[3]](https://www.theguardian.com/society/2024/dec/28/nhs-patients-at-risk-as-hospital-urgent-repair-costs-triple-in-decade), [[5]](https://www.itv.com/news/2023-07-11/almost-50-of-hospitals-have-closed-wards-over-maintenance-issues)
* Paragraph 7 – [[7]](https://www.england.nhs.uk/publication/maternity-and-neonatal-infrastructure-review-findings/)

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/health/maternity-units-crumbling-hospitals-nhs-england-b2825328.html> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.cqc.org.uk/press-release/action-needed-now-prevent-harm-maternity-services-becoming-normalised> - The Care Quality Commission (CQC) has highlighted widespread concerns regarding the quality and safety of NHS hospital maternity services. A recent inspection programme covering 131 maternity units revealed that nearly half (48%) were rated as 'requires improvement' or 'inadequate'. Common issues identified include inconsistent reporting of serious incidents, delays in assessments leading to women discharging themselves, and units lacking adequate space and facilities. The CQC has called for urgent action to prevent poor care and preventable harm from becoming normalised.
3. <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2024/dec/28/nhs-patients-at-risk-as-hospital-urgent-repair-costs-triple-in-decade> - The Guardian reports that NHS hospitals in England have experienced a significant increase in urgent repair costs over the past decade, with the maintenance backlog now reaching £13.8 billion in 2023-24. This surge is attributed to issues such as faulty roofs, water leaks, and broken lifts or heating systems, leading to over 600 days of lost clinical time in the last year. The escalating repair costs and infrastructure failures are raising concerns about patient safety and the overall state of NHS facilities.
4. <https://news.sky.com/story/maternity-failings-uncovered-within-nhs-in-england-are-widespread-says-health-watchdog-13217298> - Sky News reports that the Care Quality Commission (CQC) has found widespread failings within NHS maternity services across England. A review of 131 inspections revealed that nearly half (48%) of the units were rated as 'inadequate' or 'requires improvement'. The CQC identified issues such as inconsistent reporting of serious incidents, delays in assessments leading to women discharging themselves, and units lacking adequate space and facilities. The watchdog has called for urgent action to prevent poor care and preventable harm from becoming normalised.
5. <https://www.itv.com/news/2023-07-11/almost-50-of-hospitals-have-closed-wards-over-maintenance-issues> - ITV News reports that almost half of NHS hospitals in England have been forced to close wards and vital services due to maintenance issues such as flooding, power cuts, and structural problems. A Freedom of Information request revealed that 42% of responding NHS Trusts had temporarily or permanently closed wards, departments, or services since 2020. The closures have impacted areas including accident and emergency departments, maternity wards, and paediatric units, raising concerns about patient safety and the state of NHS facilities.
6. <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2023/feb/17/nhs-unsafe-sewage-leaks> - The Guardian reports that hospitals in England have recorded more than 450 sewage leaks in the last 12 months, posing risks to patients and staff. Freedom of information requests revealed instances of sewage leaks on cancer wards, maternity units, and A&E departments. The investigation uncovered multiple cases of urine and faeces flowing into hospital rooms and general wards. Health officials have called the revelations shocking, highlighting the deteriorating state of NHS facilities due to underinvestment.
7. <https://www.england.nhs.uk/publication/maternity-and-neonatal-infrastructure-review-findings/> - NHS England has published the findings of a comprehensive infrastructure review of maternity and neonatal services. The report highlights the need for significant investment to enhance patient and staff experience and improve services for women, babies, and their families. It underscores the importance of addressing the current state of NHS facilities to provide high-quality care and ensure the safety of patients and staff.