# UK regional delays in diagnosing and treating life-threatening aortic valve stenosis worsen, risking more deaths



Patients suffering from life-threatening aortic valve stenosis, a condition where a narrowing of a vital heart valve restricts blood flow to the body, are enduring dangerously long waits for diagnosis and treatment in the UK. According to new research shared exclusively with The Mail on Sunday, these delays vary significantly by region, reflecting a concerning postcode lottery.

Aortic valve stenosis affects over 300,000 Britons and is primarily caused by a build-up of calcium on the valve, a process accelerated by age, smoking, high blood pressure, and obesity. If left untreated, the condition can lead to heart failure and death. Life-saving intervention typically involves replacing the faulty valve surgically or through less invasive methods such as transcatheter aortic valve implantation (TAVI).

The new data reveals that patients in London face the longest delays, with half waiting more than six months from their first GP appointment to receive a diagnosis. Similarly, 46 percent of patients in the West Midlands endure waits exceeding six months, while the South West reports the shortest delays in England, with only 16 percent waiting longer than six months. Experts attribute these regional discrepancies largely to the pressures on GPs in densely populated areas, which restricts the time available to conduct detailed physical examinations that would detect telltale heart murmurs suggesting valve disease.

The initial symptoms—breathlessness, chest pain, and dizziness—require a thorough clinical examination using a stethoscope, followed by referral for diagnostic echocardiography. However, Wil Woan, chief executive of Heart Valve Voice, the organisation that commissioned the research, highlights that many symptomatic patients are not immediately examined by their doctors, contributing to delayed diagnosis.

This troubling picture is compounded by research indicating that over 400 patients with severe aortic stenosis die each year while awaiting treatment on NHS waiting lists. NHS delays are particularly concerning for interventions like TAVI, where the average wait time in the UK is reported to be around 142 days. This is considerably slower than many European counterparts, underscoring systemic shortcomings in timely access to critical procedures.

The scale of the aortic stenosis burden is substantial, with multiple studies estimating nearly 300,000 to over 290,000 adults aged 55 and older living with severe forms of the disease in the UK. Approximately two-thirds exhibit symptoms warranting treatment, while the remainder, though asymptomatic, remain at risk. This rising prevalence, driven by an ageing population, presents an escalating challenge for the NHS.

High-quality diagnostics and treatment options exist, ranging from echocardiograms and cardiac MRIs to surgical valve replacements and TAVI procedures. Private providers, such as HCA UK, report surgical success rates as high as 99 percent, demonstrating the potential for effective care when timely intervention occurs.

Calls for reform focus on increasing GP awareness and diagnostic vigilance, reducing waiting times for specialist assessments and TAVI procedures, and addressing regional inequalities to ensure patients receive prompt, life-saving care regardless of location. Failure to do so not only jeopardises patient outcomes but also places an increasing strain on the healthcare system as more cases progress to heart failure.

As the population ages and the prevalence of aortic valve stenosis grows, comprehensive strategies are urgently needed to tackle socio-demographic disparities and improve early detection and treatment pathways across the UK.

### 📌 Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/health/article-15118599/Six-month-wait-critical-heart-diagnosis.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[4]](https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/35082136/)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/health/article-15118599/Six-month-wait-critical-heart-diagnosis.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[4]](https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/35082136/), [[3]](https://www.theguardian.com/society/2022/jan/25/heart-disease-aortic-valve-stenosis-uk-prevalence-study)
* Paragraph 3 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/health/article-15118599/Six-month-wait-critical-heart-diagnosis.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[4]](https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/35082136/), [[7]](https://www.cprd.com/approved-studies/socio-demographic-differences-and-trends-incidence-prevalence-treatment-and)
* Paragraph 4 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/health/article-15118599/Six-month-wait-critical-heart-diagnosis.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[2]](https://www.theguardian.com/society/2025/may/18/heart-valve-condition-aortic-stenosis-deaths-nhs-waiting-list), [[6]](https://www.freeths.co.uk/insights-events/legal-articles/2025/delays-in-treating-aortic-stenosis-hundreds-dying-on-nhs-waiting-lists-each-year/)
* Paragraph 5 – [[3]](https://www.theguardian.com/society/2022/jan/25/heart-disease-aortic-valve-stenosis-uk-prevalence-study), [[4]](https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/35082136/)
* Paragraph 6 – [[5]](https://www.hcahealthcare.co.uk/conditions/aortic-stenosis), [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/health/article-15118599/Six-month-wait-critical-heart-diagnosis.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490)
* Paragraph 7 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/health/article-15118599/Six-month-wait-critical-heart-diagnosis.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[7]](https://www.cprd.com/approved-studies/socio-demographic-differences-and-trends-incidence-prevalence-treatment-and), [[2]](https://www.theguardian.com/society/2025/may/18/heart-valve-condition-aortic-stenosis-deaths-nhs-waiting-list)

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

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/health/article-15118599/Six-month-wait-critical-heart-diagnosis.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2025/may/18/heart-valve-condition-aortic-stenosis-deaths-nhs-waiting-list> - Research indicates that over 400 patients with severe aortic stenosis die annually while awaiting treatment on NHS waiting lists. The study highlights significant delays in accessing life-saving procedures like transcatheter aortic valve implantation (TAVI), with an average waiting time of 142 days across the UK. Experts express concern over the UK's lag in TAVI procedures compared to other European countries, emphasizing the need for systemic improvements to prevent unnecessary deaths.
3. <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2022/jan/25/heart-disease-aortic-valve-stenosis-uk-prevalence-study> - A major study estimates that nearly 300,000 individuals in the UK have aortic valve stenosis, a serious heart condition. The research underscores the potential strain on the NHS due to the large number of undiagnosed cases, with projections indicating an increase as the population ages. Early detection and treatment are crucial to prevent severe complications and improve patient outcomes.
4. <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/35082136/> - This study estimates that in 2019, approximately 291,448 individuals aged 55 and above in the UK had severe aortic stenosis. Of these, 68.3% were symptomatic and more readily treated, while 31.7% were asymptomatic. The research highlights the significant burden of severe aortic stenosis on the UK's healthcare system and the need for proactive management to prevent adverse outcomes.
5. <https://www.hcahealthcare.co.uk/conditions/aortic-stenosis> - HCA UK offers comprehensive diagnostic services for aortic stenosis, including cardiac MRI, chest X-rays, echocardiograms, ECGs, and exercise or stress tests. They provide a range of treatments such as medication, aortic valve replacement, TAVI, and balloon valvuloplasty. The facility boasts a 99% surgical success rate across all cardiac surgeries, ensuring high-quality care for patients with aortic stenosis.
6. <https://www.freeths.co.uk/insights-events/legal-articles/2025/delays-in-treating-aortic-stenosis-hundreds-dying-on-nhs-waiting-lists-each-year/> - An investigation by The Guardian reveals that over 400 patients with severe aortic stenosis die annually while waiting for treatment on NHS lists. The article discusses the critical importance of early detection and timely intervention to prevent life-threatening complications associated with untreated aortic stenosis, emphasizing the need for systemic improvements in the healthcare system.
7. <https://www.cprd.com/approved-studies/socio-demographic-differences-and-trends-incidence-prevalence-treatment-and> - This national database study aims to explore socio-demographic differences in the incidence, prevalence, treatment, and outcomes of patients with aortic stenosis in the UK. The research seeks to identify potential health inequalities and inform future healthcare policies to address disparities in the management of aortic stenosis among different population groups.