

Standards for safe staffing in Emergency Departments, Minor Injury Units, Assessment and Short Stay Units for children and young people¹

Purpose

The Association of British Paediatric Nurses (ABPN) aims to promote the development of children's nursing through evidence-based information about practice and education. This position statement has been produced by officers and members of the Association to provide the nursing workforce requirements for health care services accessed by children and young people.

The standards contained within this position statement are the minimum essential recommended for all providers of services for infants, children and young people

Background

The intensity of workload within all services and across all settings continues to increase as a result of changes in complexity of illness, advances in medicine, increased public expectations and changes in how services are configured, such as primary care out-of-hours provision². The Kings Fund highlighted that such changes have resulted in increased numbers attending emergency care departments, with more children and young people requiring assessment, observation and short stays, in acute settings^{3,4}.

The Association of British Paediatric Nurses (ABPN) has repeatedly stated that all health services accessed by children and young people must be age appropriate and delivered by suitably educated and skilled practitioners⁵.

The Royal College of Nursing (RCN) previously clearly defined the nursing workforce and safe standards related to the care of children and young people across all health care provision, including for example acute or mental health settings, community, social care or independent sector provision. The ABPN actively contributed to the first edition of the standards published in 2003⁶, and subsequent iterations^{7,8}. However, many of the RCN publications have over recent years been archived creating a void in the availability of evidence-informed, quality assured standards for practice guidance.

In this document, the ABPN has drawn upon more recent international comparisons in respect of paediatrics^{9,10}, acknowledging the increasing complexity in the needs of children and young people accessing services today.

Within Emergency Departments, Minor Injury Units and Assessment and Short Stay units

- all registered nurses must be trained in Basic Paediatric Life Support and safeguarding children to level 3 as defined by the intercollegiate framework¹¹
- a band 7 supernumerary supervisory ward sister/charge nurse
- at least one nurse per shift with Advanced Paediatric Life Support (APLS)/European Paediatric Advanced Life Support (EPALS) skills
- a minimum of one practice educator to update all staff
- various support roles including¹²:
 - a ward receptionist +/- administrative support for the ward sister/charge nurse
 - at least one health play specialist-
 - one housekeeper +/- one hostess as appropriate

The minimum baseline establishment should be increased by 27 percent to cover annual leave, sickness, study leave, parental leave and other leave¹³

The number of students on a shift should not exceed university, and individual clinical areas, agreed numbers.

Emergency Department standards^{14,15}

Dedicated children's emergency departments

- All registered nurses within a separate and dedicated children's emergency department must be registered children's nurses.
- A minimum of two such nurses on each shift must also possess recognisable post-registration trauma and emergency training, knowledge, skills and competencies

Specific CAMHS resources are required to provide support to acute children's inpatient services in respect of self-harm and other emergency services i.e. crisis intervention team.

Mixed adult and children's emergency departments

- A minimum of two registered children's nurses with trauma experience must be available at all times¹⁶
- All other registered nurses caring for children must attain and maintain the knowledge, skills and competence outlined in the RCN National Curriculum and competence framework – Emergency Nursing (level 1 and 2)^{17,18}. This includes knowledge and skills related to:
 - effective communication with children, young people and their parents
 - safeguarding children to level 3 as defined by the intercollegiate framework¹⁹
 - pain assessment and management
 - recognition of the sick child²⁰.

Specific CAMHS resources are required to provide support to acute children's inpatient services and other emergency services in respect of self-harm i.e. crisis intervention team.

Assessment and Short stay Unit standards²¹

- A minimum of two registered children's nurses available throughout opening hours
- A named senior children's nurse responsible for the management and coordination of the service

The nurse staffing must reflect the age of the children present, as well as their acuity²².

Minor Injury Unit standards^{23,24}

- All children must be assessed by a registered nurse with the appropriate knowledge, skills and competencies (ideally a registered children's nurse).
- All nurses who are not registered children's nurses must have the knowledge, skills and competencies related to
 - effective communication with children, young people and their parents
 - safeguarding children to level 3 as defined by the intercollegiate framework²⁵
 - pain assessment and management
 - recognition of the sick child²⁶

The ABPN believes

- children and young people have a right to be cared for in age-appropriate facilities and by nurses who have the right education, training, knowledge and skills to meet their needs^{27,28,29}
- staffing levels should be reviewed at least once a year³⁰
- there should be access to a senior children's nurse³¹ for advice at all times throughout the 24-hour period, as well as a named or designated safeguarding professional for advice 24 hours a day³²
- local and national workforce planning is essential, encompassing all services and sectors delivering care for children and young people³³
- **the standards contained within this position statement are the minimum essential recommended for all providers of services for infants, children and young people**

It is important to review local workforce priorities and responses alongside national workforce policy which can be accessed via national government websites.

Useful websites

NHS England <https://www.england.nhs.uk/>

Department of Health Northern Ireland <https://www.health-ni.gov.uk>

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References

- ¹ The term 'children and young people' is used to refer to infants (neonates), children and young people up to the age of 18, or at the point at which an individual's transition to adult health services is completed.
- ² Kings Fund & Nuffield Trust (2024) Public satisfaction with the NHS and social care in 2023 https://assets.kingsfund.org.uk/f/256914/x/48c40ea52b/public_satisfaction_nhs_social_care_2023_bsa_2024.pdf
- ³ Kings Fund (2013) Are accident and emergency attendances increasing? <https://www.kingsfund.org.uk/blog/2013/04/are-accident-and-emergency-attendances-increasing?>
- ⁴ Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health (2017) Standards for short stay paediatric assessment units <https://www.rcpch.ac.uk/search?keywords=short+stay+paediatric+assessment+units>
- ⁵ Association of British Paediatric Nurses Position Statement on Children and Young People's Rights [abpn_position_statement_children_and_young_peoples_rights.pdf](#) and Background Briefing paper on Children and Young People's Rights [abpn_background_briefing_children_and_young_people.pdf](#)
- ⁶ Royal College of Nursing (2003) Defining staffing levels for children and young people's services: RCN guidance for clinical professionals and service managers, 1st Edition London: RCN.
- ⁷ Royal College of Nursing (2007) Defining staffing levels for children and young people's services: RCN guidance for clinical professionals and service managers, 2nd edition, London: RCN.
- ⁸ Royal College of Nursing (2013) Defining staffing levels for children and young people's services: RCN guidance for clinical professionals and service managers, 3rd edition, London: RCN.
- ⁹ Ministry of Health, British Columbia August 2024 https://www.bcnu.org/files/mNPR_Hospital-Based_Care_Setting_Policy_Directive.pdf
- ¹⁰ <https://www.trustednursestaffing.com/nurse-patient-ratios-by-state/>
- ¹¹ Royal College of Nursing (2019) Safeguarding Children and Young People: Roles and competencies for health care staff
- ¹² Support roles should be used to ensure that registered nurses are used effectively.
- ¹³ Royal College of Nursing (2021) Nursing workforce standards, London: RCN
- ¹⁴ For additional nurse staffing standards for Emergency Departments see Royal College of Nursing and Royal College of Emergency Medicine (2020) Nursing Workforce Standards for Type 1 Emergency Departments
- ¹⁵ For additional nurse staffing standards for Emergency Departments see <https://www.trustednursestaffing.com/nurse-patient-ratios-by-state/>
- ¹⁶ Interim solutions until this standard can be met include increasing the knowledge and skills of nurses working in emergency or urgent care settings
- ¹⁷ Royal College of Nursing (2017a) National Curriculum and competence framework – Emergency Nursing (level 1 and 2) Available at: <https://www.rcn.org.uk/professional-development/publications/pub-005883>
<https://www.rcn.org.uk/Professional-Development/publications/pub-005923>
- ¹⁸ Royal College of Nursing (2020) Maximising Nursing Skills in Caring for Children and Young People in Emergency Settings, London: RCN Available at <https://www.rcn.org.uk/Professional-Development/publications/rcn-maximising-nursing-skills-cyp-pub009268>
- ¹⁹ Royal College of Nursing (2019) Safeguarding Children and Young People: Roles and competencies for health care staff
- ²⁰ Royal College of Nursing (2017b) Standards for Assessing, Measuring and Monitoring Vital Signs in Infants, Children and Young People <https://www.rcn.org.uk/Professional-Development/publications/pub-005942>
- ²¹ Royal College of Nursing (2017) Standards for Assessing, Measuring and Monitoring Vital Signs in Infants, Children and Young People <https://www.rcn.org.uk/Professional-Development/publications/pub-005942>
- ²² Patient dependency scoring and quality indicator monitoring should be used to provide an evidence base for daily adjustments in staffing levels.
- ²³ Children requiring assessment and treatment at minor injury units may present with mild pyrexial illnesses, minor cuts and bruises, minor gastrointestinal disturbances or respiratory illnesses, bites and stings.
- ²⁴ Mechanisms must be in place to ensure ready access to professional children's nursing leadership within the service
- ²⁵ Royal College of Nursing (2019) Safeguarding Children and Young People: Roles and competencies for health care staff

²⁶ Royal College of Nursing (2017) Standards for Assessing, Measuring and Monitoring Vital Signs in Infants, Children and Young People <https://www.rcn.org.uk/Professional-Development/publications/pub-005942>

²⁷ Association of British Paediatric Nurses Position Statement on Children and Young People's Rights [abpn_position_statement_children_and_young_peoples_rights.pdf](#) and Background Briefing paper on Children and Young People's Rights [abpn_background_briefing_children_and_young_people.pdf](#)

²⁸ ABPN Position Statement on Children's Nurse Education [abpn_position_statement_nurse_education_final_24_november_2024.pdf](#) and ABPN Background Paper on Children's Nurse Education [abpn_cn_education_background_paper_final_22nd_november_2024.pdf](#)

²⁹ <https://www.england.nhs.uk/long-read/national-standards-for-neonatal-qualified-in-specialty-qis-education/>

³⁰ To recognise changes in service configurations, reductions in lengths of stay, clinical complexity, increasing acuity, children and young people admitted in emotional distress including those who have self-harmed

³¹ A senior qualified children's nurse is a nurse that holds a children's nursing qualification, and a master's degree in an appropriate health/social care related subject, with a minimum of five years' full-time experience in uninterrupted clinical practice. The expectation is that this post would be at a minimum of Band 8a dependent on the full scope and remit of the position in which case the post may be graded higher where the remit is greater. All post holders of matron's positions in children's services must hold a registered children's nursing qualification.

³² Royal College of Nursing (2019) Safeguarding Children and Young People: Roles and competencies for health care staff

³³ Association of British Paediatric Nurses Workforce planning and nurse staffing position statement [abpn_position_statement_workforce_planning_and_nurse_staffing-final_nov_2024.docx](#) and background briefing paper [abpn_workforce_planning_and_nurse_staffing_background_briefing_paper-final_nov_2024.docx](#)