

# Crisis of Britain's NHS Hospitals: Surgeons at 50% Capacity Despite Record Waiting Times

Stringent measures to prevent Covid spread take their toll on medics working through backlog

By [Laura Donnelly](#) and [Henry Bodkin](#)

Global Research, September 03, 2020

[The Telegraph](#) 27 August 2020

Region: [Europe](#)

Theme: [Science and Medicine](#)

*Official figures show that more than 50,000 people have waited a year for treatment – up from 1,117 a year ago.*

*It comes amid concern about a surge in positive Covid cases, with daily records showing 1,522 cases, up from 1,048 the day before. However, weekly figures show [the first decline for six weeks](#), despite rises in the numbers being tested.*

[The vast majority of NHS surgery and other routine treatment was stopped for months](#) during lockdown.

But medics said efforts to restore services are moving too slowly, with some likening their hospitals to “the Mary Celeste” because so many patients were being kept away.

**Prof Neil Mortensen**, president of the Royal College of Surgeons, said the NHS was struggling to restore services, with a lack of routine testing for NHS staff hindering efforts to create “Covid-free” zones.

Prof Mortensen, who took up his post last month, said many patients had been left in pain and distress, following the decision to suspend routine surgery for months.

While some surgeons were left frustrated and “didn’t have much to do” for months during the epidemic, they were now finding that procedures intended to protect against Covid meant they could only cope with half their normal workload.

“Most surgeons would say productivity is around half what it was before,” said Prof Mortensen, a colorectal surgeon.

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Stringent measures to prevent Covid spread take their toll on medics working through backlog

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27 August 2020 • 9:52pm

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Our thanks to The Daily Telegraph

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