

REPORT OF A BREACH OF THE CODE OF PRACTICE FOR STATISTICS



1. Core Information

Title and link to statistical output	Waiting times for suspected and diagnosed cancer patients https://www.england.nhs.uk/statistics/statistical-work-areas/cancer-waiting-times/
Name of producer organisation	NHS England
Name and contact details of person dealing with report	Paul McDonnell
Link to published statement about the breach (if relevant)	
Date of breach report	12 March 2019

2. Circumstances of breach

Relevant principle(s) and practice(s)	Practice T3.4 Statistical content has been made public or supplied to parties not essential for statistical production without prior permission for access, through accidental or wrongful release.
Date of occurrence of breach	7 March 2019

Give an account of what happened including roles of persons involved, dates, times etc

NHS England commission NHS Digital to collect and report on cancer waiting times data. The system managed by NHS Digital has role-based user accounts to ensure that access to national data is limited to the producers of the official statistics. A further set of user accounts enable Cancer Alliances, who are accountable for cancer waiting times operational delivery, to access data for the Providers and Commissioners they are accountable for, prior to publication, for the specific purpose of taking timely operational action to manage performance.

NHS Digital incorrectly gave a Cancer Alliance a national user account which enabled them to see national data prior to publication. This breach occurred on 7 March when the January 2019 cancer waiting times data was generated.

NHS England were alerted to this issue via email at 21:54 on 11 March 2019. This email was read at 9:20 on 12 March 2019. Once the nature of the breach had been confirmed, which involved speaking to the Cancer Alliance user (around 10:00), NHS England immediately informed the lead official for Official Statistics in NHS England of the breach, and alerted NHS Digital at 10:27 on 12 March 2019 requesting they take immediate action to update the account, and to undertake a review to be assured that no other account holders were affected. NHS Digital removed the account at 11:50 on 12 March 2019 and started the process of reviewing. When NHS England spoke to the user affected (around 10:00 on 12 March 2019) NHS England made clear of the error which had occurred and the user's responsibility not to make use of any of the national data they had been given access to in error. The user confirmed that they would not make any use of this data.

3. Impact of the breach

Provide details of the impact of the breach both inside the producer body and externally

The breach does not appear to have had any consequences since the Cancer Alliance user in receipt of national data had taken no action with it.

4. Corrective actions (taken or planned) to prevent re-occurrence

Describe the short-term actions made to redress the situation and the longer-term changes to procedures etc

In the short term, the user account has been updated, and the user informed of their responsibility not to use the national information they had been given access to. NHS Digital have checked that the permissions granted to other users are correct.

In the medium term, NHS Digital will carry out a review to understand the root cause and what actions are needed to mitigate the risk of error. Amongst other things, the review will consider the default access levels for users; clearer instructions and sign off for IT staff allocating user accounts; and instructions for users to respect the intention of the restrictions. NHS Digital will provide NHS England with details of the revised processes such that NHS England can be assured the processes are adequate.