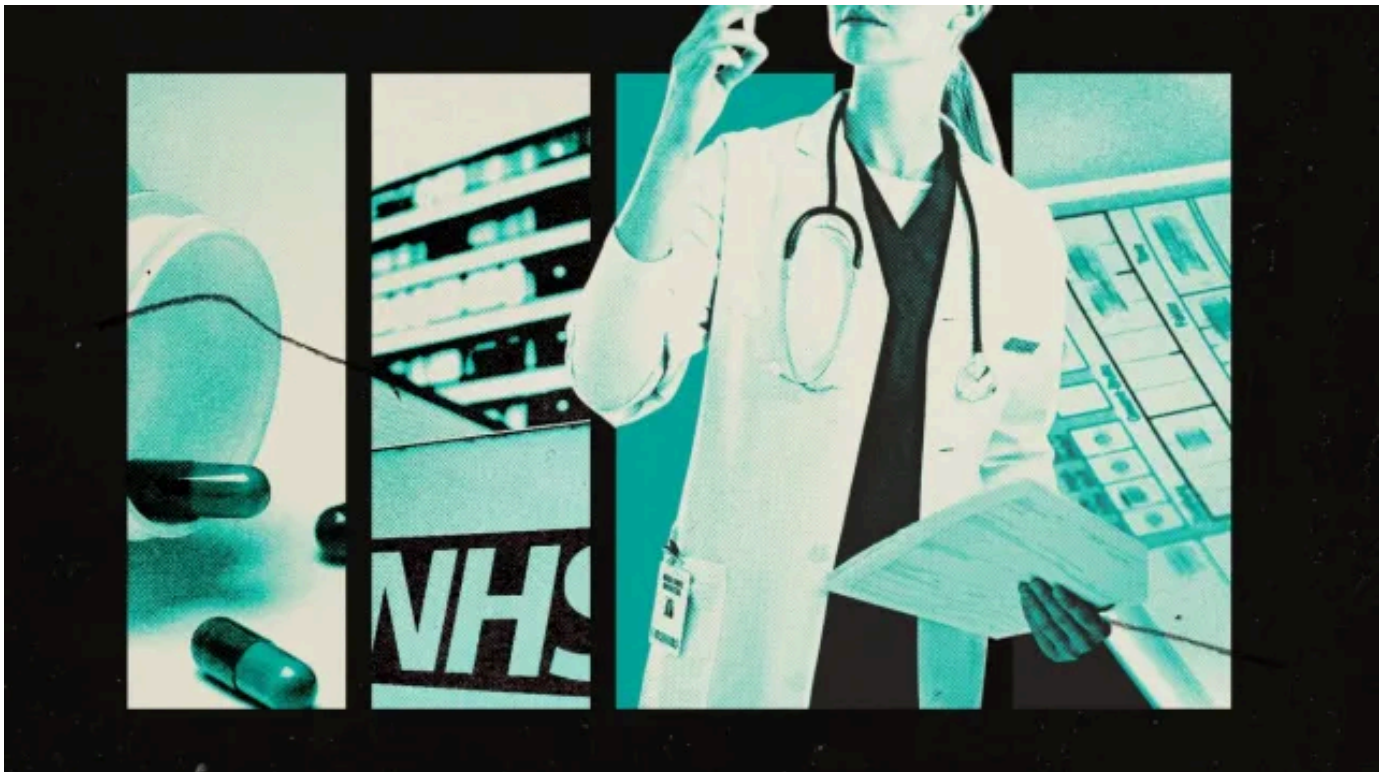




EXCLUSIVE

NHS compensation for medicine blunders at highest level in decade

The challenges of getting face-to-face appointments with GPs since the pandemic have contributed to costly mistakes being made by doctors, experts said



Patients being given the wrong drug or dosage, or drugs being injected or administered incorrectly, cost the NHS £54.9m in 2023-24

Alexa Phillips

July 05, 2025 10:00 am (Updated July 08, 2025 3:44 pm)

[NHS](#) spending on payouts for medication errors in England is now at its highest level in almost a decade, *The i Paper* can reveal.

Patients being given the wrong drug or wrong dosage, or drugs being injected or administered incorrectly, cost the NHS £54.9m in 2023-24. This number has more than doubled from the £21.5m paid out in 2016-17, according to data from NHS Resolution, which handles claims.

Some 264 people, including 19 children, have died due to such mistakes in cases closed since 2016-17, the data obtained by *The i Paper* via Freedom of Information requests showed.

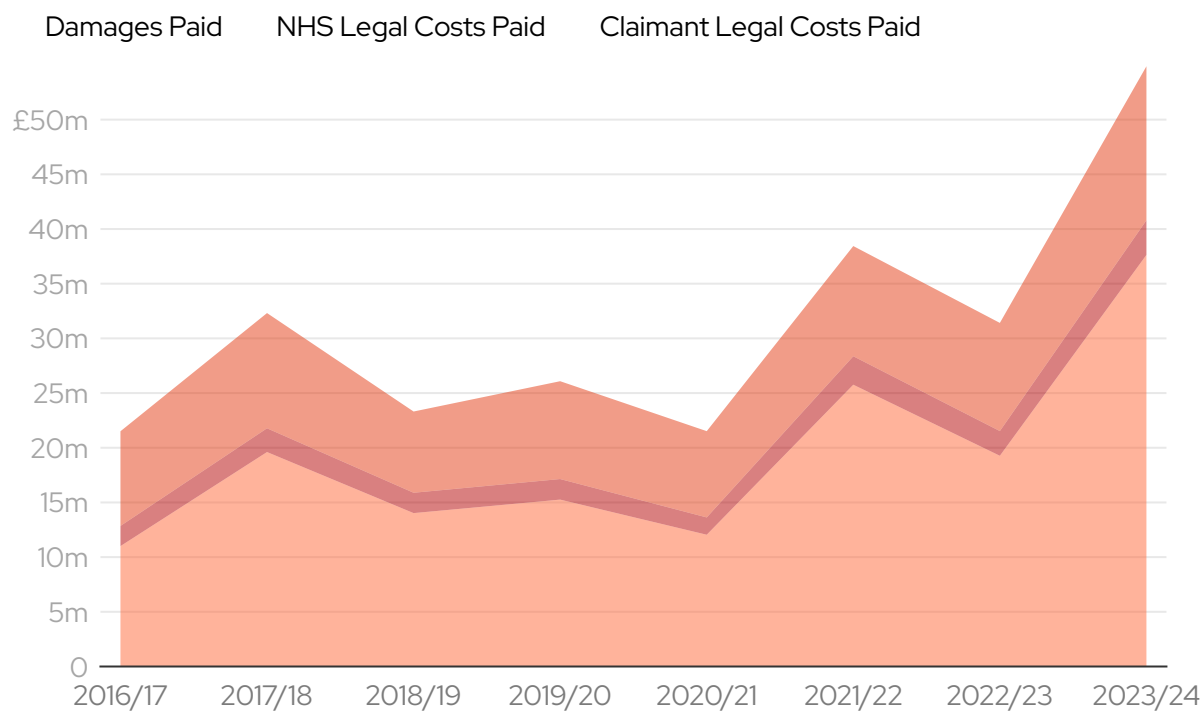
Experts said the [challenges of getting face-to-face appointments with GPs](#) since the pandemic and pressure on services have contributed to an increase in mistakes being made.

One patient told *The i Paper* he was left with “life-changingly bad” health problems after a GP incorrectly prescribed an antibiotic during a telephone appointment.

MPs urged the Government to invest in GP services to better protect patients and warned that a pledge to [shift care from hospitals into the community](#) would fail without more detailed plans and spending commitments.

Rising NHS legal bills for medicine mistakes

Costs by year of settlement or case closure



Source: NHS Resolution

Sir Keir Starmer launched the [Government’s 10-year plan for the NHS](#) in England on Friday, which promised to set up around 200 new neighbourhood health centres staffed by a mix of [GPs, nurses, social care workers, pharmacists](#), mental health specialists and other medics.

Since 2016 the NHS has spent £249m on payouts for medical blunders, which includes the cost of compensation and legal fees.

Some £37m was spent on payouts for mistakes that affected children.

The number of legal claims received has nearly doubled from 323 in 2016-17 to 591 in 2023/24, with cases affecting children at their highest level in at least nine years.

Shortage of face-to-face GP appointments

Elaine Farr, a solicitor at law firm Irwin Mitchell, said the cases she is seeing typically involve mistakes by [GPs](#).

She said: “The role of the GP has changed. Since Covid, people are finding it hard to get appointments, finding it hard to see anyone face-to-face and have those discussions.

“There are time constraints for GPs to get through a certain number of patients a day, and it’s not like in the old days, you’d have probably your same GP who would know you – you’d go in, you’d sit down, you’d have a chat.

“I just think they don’t have the capacity to take the time to sit with that person and get to know them, because chances are, you’ve not seen that particular GP before. I think that has changed since Covid, because a lot of appointments now are by telephone as well.”

Worst places to get a GP appointment



10 areas with highest number of patients per GP

Source: Royal College of GPs

Data from the Royal College of GPs recently revealed the scale of pressure that GPs are under across England in terms of treating an increasing population. A GP in the New Forest will treat 1,318 patients, while in Milton Keynes, one GP is responsible for 4,258 patients.

Frankie Rhodes, senior associate solicitor at Leigh Day, said that patients have not had prescriptions reviewed as regularly as they were pre-pandemic.

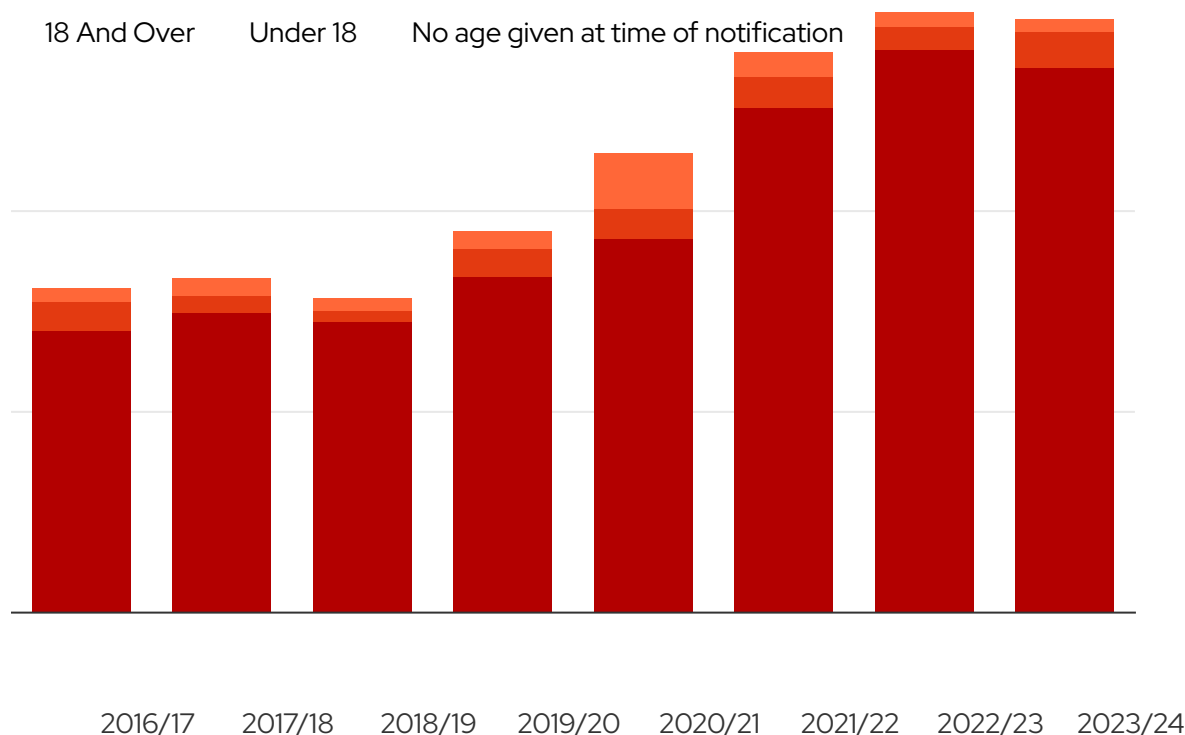
NHS staff in hospitals are also under “massive time pressure” as wards are not always adequately staffed, which is contributing to errors, she said.

NHS trusts can be reluctant to admit negligence, Rhodes claimed, adding that this can drag out cases and push up the legal fees they end up paying for in addition to compensation.

She is working on the case of Sunny Parker-Propst and Elena Ali, two premature babies who died at the Chelsea and Westminster Hospital within weeks of each other in 2020 after they were both given sodium nitrite instead of sodium bicarbonate.

An inquest jury returned verdicts of neglect in July 2024, but a civil claim against the NHS is still under way.

Rising claims received for medicine mistakes



Source: NHS Resolution

Simon Opher, a Labour MP, GP, and head of the cross-party group of MPs on health, said the pandemic led to GPs prescribing a lot more drugs without seeing patients in person.

“A lot of people have come back to face-to-face consulting, but it has changed the attitude and maybe slightly loosened our discipline around that area,” he said.

Dr Opher said face-to-face appointments need to be available more quickly for patients and it is important that people can see the same GP who gets to know them over time.

“There’s no doubt that that improves care and reduces errors as well,” he said. “Continuity of care has been evidenced to really improve care and avoid unnecessary prescriptions.”

GPs are given 10 minutes to see each patient, which Dr Opher described as an “incredibly limited” amount of time.

Patient deaths needing compensation

Number of claims where compensation was paid after the patient's death was caused by a medication error

Source: NHS Resolution

Joe Robertson, another Labour MP and member of the Health Select Committee, called on the Government to urgently address a shortage of face-to-face GP appointments.

“The NHS should be far more proactive, and the Government should ensure this happens, in cutting negligence claims and cutting mistakes which not only saves money but saves lives,” he said.

Paulette Hamilton, the acting chair of the Health Select Committee, said *The i Paper’s* findings were “concerning” and highlighted a need for action.

‘The stuff of nightmares’

Luke Rich, 47, from London, said he suffered a series of life-changing medical problems after a GP prescribed him an antibiotic he should not have been given.

He was prescribed ciprofloxacin during a telephone appointment in the first Covid lockdown in 2020.

Mr Rich, who has a urethral stricture, got worried after experiencing the urge to go to the bathroom and being unable to go. The sensation, which is known as tenesmus, had persisted for three days

During his telephone appointment, the GP listened to him describe his symptoms and said it sounded like he had a prostate infection. He prescribed him a two and a half week course – 28 pills – of ciprofloxacin without any tests or physical examination.

Mr Rich said he was not warned of the potential side effects.



Luke Rich said he feels 'totally let down' by the NHS (Photo: supplied)

In 2019, the Medicines and Health products Regulatory Agency restricted the use of the drug due to concerns about long-lasting, disabling and potentially irreversible side effects, such as tendon damage, muscle pain, muscle weakness, joint pain, joint swelling, peripheral neuropathy and central nervous system effects.

Mr Rich said he started feeling poorly soon after he started taking the drug. When he called his GP to complain, he was told to stick with the pills.

The NHS has since admitted that Mr Rich should have been informed of the potential side effects and told to stop taking the drug earlier. The NHS has also admitted that the injuries Mr Rich is suffering from were caused by medical negligence. A settlement is still in progress.

When Mr Rich finished taking the pills, he developed rings of blood around his joint and his stomach was in “such chronic agony” that he had to go to A&E.

He now suffers from “constant tendon pain from head to toe”, which can be traced back to weakness in his muscles, tendons and connective tissue brought on by the drug. He developed shooting nerve pain, back pain and suffered vision problems.

“It’s been the stuff of nightmares,” he said. “It’s been life-changingly bad.”

Since he took the drug, he is no longer able to dance professionally, teach swimming or ride a horse. He has tried taking some basic dance classes but got progressively more injured

because of how the drug has affected his tendons.

“I can’t even go to the door without pain,” he said. “If I try and do sport, and I will really try, it really hurts.”

He feels “totally let down” by the NHS and said he does not understand why his GP was able to prescribe such a powerful drug without further safeguards.

“It’s just absolutely been the most frightening, horrible journey.”

An NHS spokesperson said: “NHS staff work incredibly hard to care for patients and keep them safe, and although these incidents are relatively rare, it is vital that NHS organisations take effective steps to learn from them and improve.

“While there is more to do, the health service has made significant progress in implementing the [NHS Patient Safety Strategy](#) – helping to train thousands of staff in ways to care for patients more safely – helping to save thousands of lives so far.”

A Department of Health and Social Care spokesperson said they have taken action to prevent these kinds of mistakes in the future, having hired more than 1,900 additional GPs and upgraded more than 1,000 doctors surgeries.

“Through our 10 Year Health Plan, we will improve response times to patient safety incidents, where people will receive a personalised, rapid response to any concerns,” they added.