

Freedom of Information Request: Our Reference CTHB_328_17

You asked:

I've heard that there are fears that ear irrigation services are being moved from GP surgeries to hospitals.

Could you please answer these questions:

1. How many GP surgeries offer ear irrigation within the health board at the moment?
2. How many GP surgeries offered ear irrigation each year between 2016-17, 2015-16, 2014-15, 2013-14, 2012-13, 2011-12?
3. If there has been a change, is the ear irrigation still offered within the health board? Where?
4. If there has been a change, what is the reason for it?
5. What is the average waiting time for ear irrigation at the moment?
6. What was the average waiting time for ear irrigation each year between 2016-17, 2015-16, 2014-15, 2013-14, 2012-13, 2011-12?

Our response:

The Health Board does not hold the information requested in questions 1 and 2 that relate to GP surgeries. GPs are independent contractors, you would therefore need to contact the individual practices directly for their information. To aid and assist you with this, their details can be accessed via the following link.

<http://www.wales.nhs.uk/ourservices/directory/cwmtafuniversityhealthboard/gps>

Cwm Taf University Health Board (CTUHB) is unable provide information in relation to questions 3 to 6 in that the Health Board does not provide an "Ear Irrigation" service. CTUHB is however able to provide further information in relation to the "Aural Care" service. Launched on 1 September 2014, the nurse led service provides a specialist assessment and treatment facility for the removal of impacted wax through the process of "microsuction". The service spans all four localities across Cwm Taf (please see clinic table below) and currently has a waiting time of between 4 to 6 weeks.

Site	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Prince Charles Hospital			AM clinic		
Ysbyty Cwm Cynon	Two clinics running all day	Two clinics running all day			
Royal Glamorgan Hospital		AM clinic			
Ysbyty Cwm			Two clinics	Two clinics	

Rhondda			running all day	running all day	
Keir Hardie University Health Park			PM clinic		AM clinic

For ease of reference it may also be helpful to differentiate between Ear Microsuction and Ear Irrigation.

Ear microsuction is a technique for removing ear wax or debris using an ENT (Ear Nose and Throat) binocular operating microscope. This allows the clinician to look in the ear canal in great detail and use a very fine sterile suction device at low pressure to remove the wax. This process is not dissimilar to using a tiny vacuum cleaner inside the ear to remove the wax. Using **microsuction** means that clinicians can visualise the external ear canal and its contents in great detail while having minimal physical contact with the earlobe. This makes the process more comfortable for patients

There are a variety of reasons as to why ENT clinicians advocate **microsuction** as the preferred treatment of choice compared to the traditional forms of wax removal (e.g. **ear syringing** or **irrigation**, ear drops):

- safer
- faster
- better tolerated
- more effective
- usually does not require weeks of waiting for drops to soften the wax.

Ear Irrigation is the traditional method of ear wax removal by irrigation or known as ear syringing. In the past, large hand-held metal syringes were used to manually inject water at high pressure in the ear. This was designed to flush out wax. Ear syringing is now performed using Ear irrigation machines which apply a safer, more standardised pressure via special ear irrigator tips.