

Wessex Secure Data Environment

Turning NHS data into discoveries that help people live healthier lives

1. What is the Wessex Secure Data Environment?

The Wessex Secure Data Environment (Wessex SDE) is a secure NHS system. It allows approved researchers to study NHS health information safely. It is built to the highest standards of privacy and security for NHS health and care data.

The data stays under NHS control at all times. It is not copied or sent out. Researchers only see de-identified data. This means information that could directly identify you, such as your name, address or NHS number, is removed.

The SDE is only used for health research and NHS planning. This includes a wide range of studies, such as understanding diseases, testing new treatments, improving how services work, and using new technologies like artificial intelligence. It also helps the NHS understand demand for services and plan staffing and resources. It is not used to make decisions about your care. It does not replace the systems your doctor or hospital use.

The Wessex SDE is hosted by University Hospital Southampton NHS Foundation Trust, working with NHS organisations across Hampshire, the Isle of Wight and Dorset.

2. What is NHS health and care data

Health data is any recorded information about a person's physical or mental health in the past, present, or future.

This means that health data may come from any interaction with the healthcare system, for example during an appointment with a GP, or with a nurse or doctor in a hospital. Health data may also be gathered from medical devices and from diagnostic tests (for example, blood tests or genetic tests).

Some health data are simple numbers (like your height or weight) or are picked from standardised lists (like information about prescriptions, test results, or vaccinations). Other data are free-text notes (like the comments your GP writes during a visit).

Health data records include personal information. This includes things like your name, NHS number, or your address. These can be used to identify you and to link records from different places together.

3. The "Five Safes": Our Standards for Your Safety

We follow a national safety framework called the 'Five Safes' to protect your privacy at every step.

- **Safe People:** Only trained and approved researchers, who are checked by the NHS, can apply to use the SDE. This can include people from the NHS, universities, charities, and other approved organisations. Researchers must complete security training, sign legal agreements, and follow strict rules. Access can be removed if these rules are not followed.
- **Safe Projects:** Every study must show a clear public benefit and have the right legal and ethics approvals. All applications are reviewed by our independent Data Access Committee. This includes members of the public, NHS staff, researchers, and data experts.
- **Safe Data:** Researchers never see information that directly identifies you, such as your name, address, or NHS number. Identifiable information is kept separate and always stays under NHS control. Information that could identify you is replaced with secure codes before research begins. This is called pseudonymisation. Researchers only see the information they need for their approved study.
- **Safe Settings:** Research takes place inside a secure NHS system. Researchers cannot download, copy, or remove data from the system. They can only use approved research tools, and all activity is monitored to make sure the rules are followed.
- **Safe Outputs:** Trained NHS staff checks results before they can leave the system. Only anonymous results, such as overall numbers and trends, can be published.

You can see all approved projects in our Data Use Register at wessexsde.nhs.uk/data-use-register.

4. Legal approval & public oversight:

The use of NHS patient data for research is carefully regulated.

The Health Research Authority checks that we follow the right rules. Following advice from an independent group called the Confidentiality Advisory Group, it has granted Section 251 support. Section 251 support allows approved research using NHS data to take place without asking every patient for consent, where this is not practical and there is a clear public benefit.

We have also worked with people across Wessex to agree how NHS data should be used responsibly. We call this our social licence. This has helped us set clear expectations for how the SDE operates, including the safeguards, limits, and types of

research the public supports. We use this to guide our decisions and to make sure the way we use data reflects what people told us they expect.

Members of the public are involved in all aspects of how the SDE is run. This includes taking part in discussions about how data is used, reviewing our materials, and sitting on the independent Wessex Data Access Committee, which reviews data access requests and advises on which research projects should go ahead.

5. Your data and your choice

Your health data is the information the NHS records about you each time you receive care. This can include information about your health, appointments, hospital visits, test results, and treatments.

If you are happy for your data to be used for approved research and planning, you do not need to do anything.

You have the right to opt out at any time. Your choice will not affect your care.

To opt out:

- Across England:
www.nhs.uk/your-nhs-data-matters
- From the Wessex SDE only:
Email: optout@wessexsde.nhs.uk
Phone: 02381 205 314

6. Find Out More

Visit WessexSDE.nhs.uk for more information.

Information is available in accessible formats, including Easy Read and Large Print.