





Northern Ireland Waiting Time Statistics:

Outpatient Waiting Times
Quarter Ending March 2021





Reader Information

Purpose:

This statistical release presents information on waiting times for a first consultant-led outpatient appointment in Northern Ireland and reports on the performance of the Health and Social Care (HSC) Trusts against the 2020/21 Draft Ministerial waiting time target, which states that:

"By March 2021, 50% of patients should wait no longer than 9 weeks for a first outpatient appointment; with no patient waiting longer than 52 weeks."

This statistical release details information on the number of patients waiting, and length of time waiting, for a first consultant-led outpatient appointment in HSC Trusts at 31st March 2021 (including patients waiting to be seen at a Day Case Procedure Centre (DPC)). It also includes activity for a first consultant-led outpatient appointment commissioned by the Health Service during the quarter ending March 2021. Data are presented by HSC Trust, specialty and time band. Information on Integrated Clinical Assessment and Treatment Services (ICATS) waiting times are available in the accompanying CSV file.

Statistical Quality:

The 'Outpatient Waiting Times Publication – Supporting Documentation' booklet details the technical guidance and definitions used, as well as notes on how to use the data contained within this statistical release. This booklet is available to view or download from:

booklet is available to view or download from:

https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/publications/outpatient-waiting-times-

supporting-documentation.

Due to the redeployment of resources during the COVID-19 pandemic, the data contained within this publication has not been subject to the usual level of quality assurance; data related to the Southern HSC Trust for quarter ending December 2020 is provisional and will be amended

as necessary in future publications.

Internet: https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/articles/outpatient-waiting-times

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Target audience: Department of Health (DoH), Chief Executives of the HSC Board and

Trusts in Northern Ireland, health care professionals, Health & Social Care stakeholders, academics, the media and the general public.

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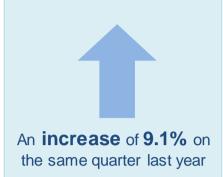
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By March 2021, 50% of patients should wait no longer than 9 weeks for a first outpatient appointment, and no patient should wait longer than 52 weeks.

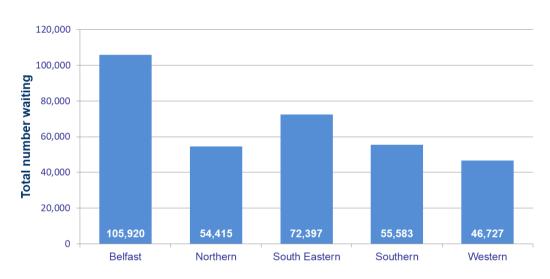
There were
335,042 patients
waiting for a first outpatient
appointment in Northern
Ireland





Source: DoH Outpatient Waiting Times Dataset

At 31st March 2021, 335,042 patients were waiting for a first consultant-led outpatient appointment, 3.7% (11,868) more than at 31st December 2020 (323,174) and 9.1% (27,976) more than at 31st March 2020 (307,066) (Table 1). This does not include patients waiting to be seen at a Day Case Procedure Centre.



Almost a third (31.6%) of those waiting were in the Belfast HSC Trust, with a further 21.6% in the South Eastern HSC Trust, 16.6% in the Southern HSC Trust, 16.2% in the Northern HSC Trust and 13.9% in the Western HSC Trust (Table 2b).

Source: DoH Outpatient Waiting Times Dataset

A number of outpatient services may not be provided at a patient's local HSC Trust, and instead are provided as centralised services for Northern Ireland. As patients are reported against the HSC Trust responsible for the service to which they have been referred, users should be cautious in how they use these data (see explanatory note 9).

Of the 335,042 patients waiting, 61.1% (204,744) were waiting in one of the following specialties: Ear, Nose and Throat (ENT) (43,739); General Surgery (41,629); Dermatology (26,888); Gynaecology (25,909); Trauma and Orthopaedic (T&O) Surgery (25,084); Neurology (21,040) and Ophthalmology (20,455) (Table 3b).

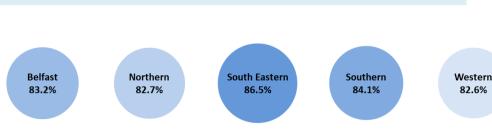
Patients waiting more than 9 weeks at 31st March 2021

By March 2021, 50% of patients should wait no longer than 9 weeks for a first outpatient appointment

This element was **not achieved** by Northern

Ireland as a whole

83.9%
of patients
were waiting longer
than 9 weeks

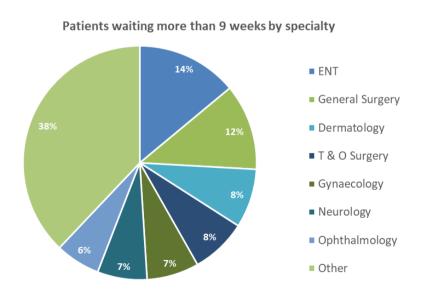


Percentage waiting over 9 weeks

Over four fifths (83.9%, 281,140) of patients were waiting more than 9 weeks for a first consultant-led outpatient appointment at 31st March 2021, compared with 85.3% (275,651) at 31st December 2020 and 79.1% (242,864) at 31st March 2020 (Table 1).

The 9 week element of the target was not achieved by Northern Ireland as a whole or by any individual HSC Trust (Table 2a). Data users should be aware that not all outpatient services are provided at every HSC Trust (see explanatory note 9).

Almost nine out of ten (86.5%, 62,642) patients in the South Eastern HSC Trust were waiting longer than 9 weeks; 84.1% (46,734) in the Southern HSC Trust, 83.2% (88,174) in the Belfast HSC Trust, 82.7% (45,014) in the Northern HSC Trust and 82.6% (38,576) in the Western HSC Trust (Table 2a).



More than three-fifths (62.1%, 174,520) of the 281,140 patients waiting more than 9 weeks were for one waiting of the following specialties: Ear, Nose and Throat (ENT); General Surgery; Dermatology; Trauma and Orthopaedic (T&O) Surgery; Gynaecology; Neurology and Ophthalmology (Table 3a).

Patients waiting more than 52 weeks at 31st March 2021

By March 2021, no patient should wait longer than 52 weeks for a first outpatient appointment

This element was **not achieved** by Northern

Ireland as a whole

189,753
patients
were waiting longer
than 52 weeks

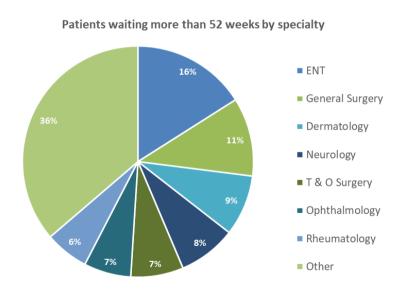


Percentage waiting over 52 weeks

At 31st March 2021, 56.6% (189,753) of patients were waiting more than 52 weeks for a first consultant-led outpatient appointment, compared with 51.9% (167,806) at 31st December 2020, and 38.1% (117,066) at 31st March 2020 (Table 1).

The 52 week element of the target was not achieved by Northern Ireland as a whole or by any individual HSC Trust (Table 2a). Data users should be aware that not all outpatient services are provided at every HSC Trust (see explanatory note 9).

Over three fifths (65.3%, 47,265) of patients in the South Eastern HSC Trust were waiting longer than 52 weeks, 55.8% (30,999) in the Southern HSC Trust, 54.2% (25,308) in the Western HSC Trust, 54.1% (57,262) in the Belfast HSC Trust, and 53.1% (28,919) in the Northern HSC Trust (Table 2a).



Almost two thirds (63.7%, 120,909) of the 189,753 patients waiting more than 52 weeks were in one of the following specialties: Ear, Nose and Throat (ENT); General Surgery; Dermatology; Neurology; Trauma and Orthopaedic (T&O) Surgery; Ophthalmology and Rheumatology (Table 3a).

Patients waiting for a first consultant-led outpatient appointment at a Day Case Procedure Centre

In October 2016 the then Health Minister launched 'Health and Wellbeing 2026: Delivering Together,' a strategy which underpins the Northern Ireland Executive's draft Programme for Government ambition to support people to lead long, healthy and active lives.

As part of this strategy, the Elective Care Plan was published in February 2017 which stated that 'Regional Elective Care Assessment and Treatment Centres will be established to deliver large volumes of assessments and non-complex routine surgery across a broad range of specialties.' In March 2018, prototype 'Day Case Procedure Centres' (DPCs) became operational for the surgical treatment of Cataracts and Varicose Veins for outpatients and day cases. Patients waiting for either of these procedures can now be referred to a DPC for treatment rather than attend the hospital site they may have been referred to previously.

DPCs have been set up in the following locations:

DPC	Location(s) of Centre					
	Mid Ulster Hospital (Northern HSC Trust)					
Cataracts	Downe Hospital (South Eastern HSC Trust)					
	South Tyrone Hospital (Southern HSC Trust)					
Varicose Veins	Lagan Valley Hospital (South Eastern HSC Trust)					
vancose veins	Omagh Hospital and Primary Care Complex (Western HSC Trust)					

Due to these changes in operational service delivery and concomitant changes in how Outpatient waiting times are recorded, the following data and information about DPC Waiting Lists is provisional and subject to revision.

At 31st March 2021, 12,476 patients were waiting to be seen for a first consultant-led outpatient appointment at a Cataracts DPC (Table 5a). The notable increase in patients waiting for an appointment at a DPC when compared with previous quarters is largely attributable to the recoding of information within hospital systems; a large number of patients formerly recorded under the Ophthalmology specialty are currently undergoing a validation exercise to correctly record their wait at a DPC instead. There were no outpatients waiting for varicose veins treatment at a DPC.

Completed waits for a first outpatient appointment commissioned by the Health Service during quarter ending March 2021

There were
71,078
first outpatient
attendances
commissioned by the Health
Service





Source: QOAR, R-QOAR and IS1 Part 1Returns

Users should be aware that the COVID-19 Pandemic drastically altered the functions of hospitals during the current reporting period and should exercise caution when using these provisional data given that hospital records may not be fully updated at this time.

There were 66,439 attendances for a first consultant-led outpatient appointment in Health Service hospitals in Northern Ireland, 2.8% (1,781) more than the number of attendances during the previous quarter (64,658), and 35.2% (36,133) less than the number of attendances during the quarter ending March 2020 (102,572). During the quarter ending March 2021, 155 patients attended their appointment at a Day Case Procedure Centre (DPC) (Table 4).



Within the Independent Sector, 4,484 Health Service patients attended a first outpatient appointment, almost four times the figure during the quarter ending December 2020 (1,236), and 78.3% (1,969) more than in the same quarter last year (2,515) (Table 4).

When the number of attendances commissioned by the Health Service within the Independent Sector (4,484) is combined with that for outpatients attending a first outpatient appointment in Health Service hospitals (66,439), and those attending a DPC (155), provisional figures indicate that 71,078 outpatients attended a first appointment in Northern Ireland commissioned by the Health Service. This is an increase of 7.6% (5,023) on the number seen during the quarter ending December 2020 (66,055), and 32.5% (34,190) less than during the quarter ending March 2020 (105,268) (Table 4)).

Appendix 1: Tables

Table 1: Quarterly outpatient waiting lists - 31st March 2021¹

First Consultant-Led Outpatient Appointment	Current Quarter (31st Mar 2021)	Previous Quarter (31st Dec 2020)	Same Quarter Last Year (31st Mar 2020)
Total Patients Waiting	335,042	323,174	307,066
Number waiting over 9 weeks	281,140	275,651	242,864
Percentage waiting over 9 weeks	83.9%	85.3%	79.1%
Number waiting over 52 weeks	189,753	167,806	117,066

Source: DoH Outpatient Waiting Times Dataset

¹Refer to Explanatory Notes 1–10 & 13-14

Table 2a: Number of patients waiting for a first consultant-led outpatient appointment by HSC Trust and weeks waiting – 31st March 2021¹

HSC Trust	Patie	Patients waiting for a first consultant-led outpatient appointment, by weeks waiting .								
noc must	0 - 6	>6 - 9	>9 - 12	>12 - 15	>15 - 18	>18 - 52	>52	Total Waiting		
Belfast	13,738	4,008	3,332	2,324	3,267	21,989	57,262	105,920		
Northern	7,305	2,096	1,620	1,233	1,591	11,651	28,919	54,415		
South Eastern	7,781	1,974	1,719	1,060	1,534	11,064	47,265	72,397		
Southern	6,937	1,912	1,622	1,147	1,692	11,274	30,999	55,583		
Western	6,484	1,667	1,283	972	1,489	9,524	25,308	46,727		
Total	42,245	11,657	9,576	6,736	9,573	65,502	189,753	335,042		

Source: DoH Outpatient Waiting Times Dataset

¹Refer to Explanatory Notes 1–10 & 13-14

Table 2b: Percentage of patients waiting for a first consultant-led outpatient appointment by HSC Trust and weeks waiting – 31st March 2021¹

		•									
HSC Trust	Patients waiting for a first consultant-led outpatient appointment, by weeks waiting										
noc Trust	0 - 6	>6 - 9	>9 - 12	>12 - 15	>15 - 18	>18 - 52	>52				
Belfast	13.0%	3.8%	3.1%	2.2%	3.1%	20.8%	54.1%				
Northern	13.4%	3.9%	3.0%	2.3%	2.9%	21.4%	53.1%				
South Eastern	10.7%	2.7%	2.4%	1.5%	2.1%	15.3%	65.3%				
Southern	12.5%	3.4%	2.9%	2.1%	3.0%	20.3%	55.8%				
Western	13.9%	3.6%	2.7%	2.1%	3.2%	20.4%	54.2%				
Total	12.6%	3.5%	2.9%	2.0%	2.9%	19.6%	56.6%				

Source: DoH Outpatient Waiting Times Dataset

¹Refer to Explanatory Notes 1–10 & 13-14

Table 3a: Number of patients waiting for a first consultant-led outpatient appointment by weeks waiting and specialty – 31st March 2021¹

Specialty	Patients waiting for a first consultant-led outpatient appointment, by weeks waiting							Total Waiting
	0 - 6	>6 - 9	>9 - 12	>12 - 15	>15 - 18	>18 - 52	>52	waiting
ENT	3,390	1,050	895	608	874	6,536	30,386	43,739
General Surgery	6,575	1,578	1,222	866	1,416	9,106	20,866	41,629
Dermatology	3,284	660	582	382	604	5,222	16,154	26,888
Gynaecology	4,271	1,321	1,144	824	1,138	7,751	9,460	25,909
T & O Surgery	2,602	740	682	501	766	5,796	13,997	25,084
Neurology	1,316	393	350	290	413	2,895	15,383	21,040
Ophthalmology	2,333	711	596	424	614	3,267	12,510	20,455
Rheumatology	1,259	441	362	247	351	2,676	11,613	16,949
Gastroenterology	2,380	671	483	337	470	3,162	7,677	15,180
Paediatrics	2,799	894	673	435	597	3,377	6,206	14,981
Oral Surgery	711	261	202	151	213	1,383	9,639	12,560
General Medicine	1,428	400	301	233	342	2,107	6,613	11,424
Thoracic Medicine	1,096	367	322	253	317	2,250	6,413	11,018
Urology	1,612	336	252	143	217	1,618	6,024	10,202
Cardiology	2,156	564	463	282	344	2,704	3,396	9,909
Pain Management	625	224	194	140	224	1,387	5,608	8,402
Plastic Surgery	580	142	98	71	97	823	3,080	4,891
Geriatric Medicine	567	113	123	131	75	321	552	1,882
Endocrinology	488	150	140	100	99	541	197	1,715
Other	2,773	641	492	318	402	2,580	3,979	11,185
All Specialties	42,245	11,657	9,576	6,736	9,573	65,502	189,753	335,042

¹Refer to Explanatory Notes 1–10 & 13-14

Table 3b: Percentage of patients waiting for a first consultant-led outpatient appointment by weeks waiting and specialty – 31st March 2021¹

Patients waiting for a first consultant-led outpatient appointment, by weeks									
Specialty			waiting						
	0 - 6	>6 - 9	>9 - 12	>12 - 15	>15 - 18	>18 - 52	>52		
ENT	7.8%	2.4%	2.0%	1.4%	2.0%	14.9%	69.5%		
General Surgery	15.8%	3.8%	2.9%	2.1%	3.4%	21.9%	50.1%		
Dermatology	12.2%	2.5%	2.2%	1.4%	2.2%	19.4%	60.1%		
Gynaecology	16.5%	5.1%	4.4%	3.2%	4.4%	29.9%	36.5%		
T & O Surgery	10.4%	3.0%	2.7%	2.0%	3.1%	23.1%	55.8%		
Neurology	6.3%	1.9%	1.7%	1.4%	2.0%	13.8%	73.1%		
Ophthalmology	11.4%	3.5%	2.9%	2.1%	3.0%	16.0%	61.2%		
Rheumatology	7.4%	2.6%	2.1%	1.5%	2.1%	15.8%	68.5%		
Gastroenterology	15.7%	4.4%	3.2%	2.2%	3.1%	20.8%	50.6%		
Paediatrics	18.7%	6.0%	4.5%	2.9%	4.0%	22.5%	41.4%		
Oral Surgery	5.7%	2.1%	1.6%	1.2%	1.7%	11.0%	76.7%		
General Medicine	12.5%	3.5%	2.6%	2.0%	3.0%	18.4%	57.9%		
Thoracic Medicine	9.9%	3.3%	2.9%	2.3%	2.9%	20.4%	58.2%		
Urology	15.8%	3.3%	2.5%	1.4%	2.1%	15.9%	59.0%		
Cardiology	21.8%	5.7%	4.7%	2.8%	3.5%	27.3%	34.3%		
Pain Management	7.4%	2.7%	2.3%	1.7%	2.7%	16.5%	66.7%		
Plastic Surgery	11.9%	2.9%	2.0%	1.5%	2.0%	16.8%	63.0%		
Geriatric Medicine	30.1%	6.0%	6.5%	7.0%	4.0%	17.1%	29.3%		
Endocrinology	28.5%	8.7%	8.2%	5.8%	5.8%	31.5%	11.5%		
Other	24.8%	5.7%	4.4%	2.8%	3.6%	23.1%	35.6%		
All Specialties	12.6%	3.5%	2.9%	2.0%	2.9%	19.6%	56.6%		

¹Refer to Explanatory Notes 1–10 & 13-14

Table 4: Number of completed waits for a first consultant-led outpatient appointment commissioned by the Health Service: QE March 2019 - QE March 2021²

	Numbe	er of Complete	ed First Outpati	ent Waits
Quarter Ending	Within Within Day Health Case Independent Service Procedure Sector* Hospitals Centres*		Total Commissioned by Health Service	
Mar-19	119,502	45	2,766	122,313
Jun-19	117,985	106	1,579	119,670
Sep-19	114,423	109	1,168	115,700
Dec-19	114,817	155	1,135	116,107
Mar-20	102,572	181	2,515	105,268
Jun-20 (p)	34,641	0	297	34,938
Sep-20 (p)	55,603	61	614	56,278
Dec-20 (p)	64,658	161	1,236	66,055
Mar-21 (p)	66,439	155	4,484	71,078

Source: QOAR, R-QOAR and IS1 Part 1 Returns

Table 5a: Number of patients waiting for a first consultant-led outpatient appointment at a Cataracts Day Case Procedure Centre, by weeks waiting, 31st March 2021

	Patients							
Specialty	waiting							Total Waiting
	0 - 6	>6 - 9	>9 - 12	>12 - 15	>15 - 18	>18 - 52	>52	
Ophthalmology	931	264	261	219	411	2,886	7,504	12,476

⁽p) Data are currently provisional

^{*} Not National Statistics

²Refer to Explanatory Notes 1-2, 4 & 11–14

^{*} Not National Statistics

Appendix 2: Explanatory Notes

- 1. The sources for the data contained in this release are the DoH CH3, QOAR, R-QOAR and IS1 Part 1 Returns and the DoH Outpatient Waiting Times Dataset. These returns collect information from Health and Social Care Trusts on a quarterly basis.
- 2. The 'Outpatient Waiting Times Publication Supporting Documentation' booklet details the technical guidance and definitions used, as well as notes on how to use the data contained within this statistical release. This booklet is available to view or download from: https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/articles/outpatient-waiting-times.
- 3. All of the data contained in the tables are available on a quarterly basis and can be supplied by individual specialty or Provider HSC Trust if this level of detail is required. In addition, quarterly data relating to waiting times for a first consultant-led outpatient appointment have been published in spreadsheet format (CSV), split by HSC Trust, Specialty and Programme of Care, in order to aid secondary analysis. These data are available at https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/publications/northern-ireland-waiting-time-statistics-outpatient-waiting-times-March-2021.
- 4. Information includes patients living outside Northern Ireland and privately funded patients waiting for treatment in Health Service hospitals in Northern Ireland.
- 5. Outpatient waiters are defined as patients still waiting for their first outpatient appointment at the end of the quarter, including those who have cancelled or missed a previous appointment. An outpatient appointment is to enable a patient to see a consultant, a member of their team or locum for such a member, in respect of one referral. Waiting time for a first outpatient appointment begins on the date the HSC Trust receives a referral for a first outpatient appointment and ends on the date a patient attends a first outpatient appointment. Patients who cannot attend (CNA) have their waiting time adjusted to commence on the date they informed the HSC Trust they could not attend, while patients who do not attend (DNA) have their waiting time adjusted to commence on the date of their DNA.
- 6. From 1st April 2014, Oral Surgery services undertaken by consultants contracted to the South Eastern HSC Trust were centralised, meaning that records for patients waiting for this service in both the Northern and Southern HSC Trusts are now held and managed in the South Eastern HSC Trust.
- 7. Each outpatient waiting time band relates to the number of completed weeks a patient has been waiting for outpatient assessment. For example, a patient waiting exactly 6 weeks would be

included in the 0-6 week time band and a patient waiting 6 weeks and 1 day would be included in the >6-9 (greater than 6 weeks but waiting no longer than 9 weeks) time band. The Ministerial target, for outpatient waiting times, as set out in the Health and Social Care (Commissioning Plan) Direction states that by March 2021, 50% of patients should wait no longer than nine weeks for a first outpatient appointment, with no patient waiting longer than 52 weeks.

- 8. Some people will be waiting on more than one waiting list or be on the waiting list for more than one outpatient appointment/admission/diagnostic test at the same time due to having more than one condition.
- 9. A number of outpatient services may not be provided at a patient's local HSC Trust or at each of the five HSC Trusts, and instead are provided as centralised services for Northern Ireland. In such circumstances, patients from one HSC Trust area will be waiting to be seen at a service provided at another HSC Trust. In some cases a consultant from one HSC Trust may provide a 'visiting' service at another HSC Trust, and so the patient may not be reported at the HSC Trust at which they attend. Users should therefore be cautious in how they use these data. For example, they should not be used to calculate the total number of patients waiting per head of the population residing within each Trust area, as HSC Trusts that provide services for the whole of Northern Ireland will have a higher number of patients waiting per head of the population than those that provide more localised services. Neither should the actual number of patients waiting longer than the recommended waiting time be used as indicator of poor performance within an individual HSC Trust. Users who require an indication of the latter are advised to refer to the commentary section of the publication which provides an indication of the percentage of total waiters that have been waiting over the maximum recommended waiting times, within each HSC Trust
- 10. In February 2019, prototype 'Day Case Procedure Centres' (DPCs) became operational for the surgical outpatient treatment of Cataracts. Patients waiting for this procedure can now be referred to a DPC for treatment rather than attend the hospital site they may have been referred to previously.
- 11. The total number of completed outpatient waits each quarter, within HSC hospitals, is derived as the total number of attendances at a first outpatient appointment from the Departmental Quarterly Outpatient Activity Return (QOAR) and the Regional Quarterly Outpatient Activity Return (R-QOAR).
- 12. The number of patients who received an outpatient assessment, commissioned by the Health Service, in the Independent Sector is collected on the IS1 Part 1 Return. These figures are provided by the HSC Board. They are published for each transferring Health and Social Care

Trust (Trust responsible for the patient's waiting time). They are not National Statistics and they have not been validated by the Department; however, they have been included to provide users with a comprehensive view of completed outpatient waits during each quarter.

- 13. HIB surveyed data providers during 2011/12 to ascertain the cost of producing, validating and submitting the information required for this publication. This relates to the time taken to generate, validate and submit data, over and above what is already required by their organisation for internal performance management purposes. The cost to data providers of compliance within HIB's requirements for this publication, based on HSC salary costs, was £3,110.
- 14. Figures relating to outpatient waiting times for the quarter ending 30th June 2021 will be released on Thursday 26th August 2021.

Appendix 3: National Statistics

National Statistics status means that our statistics meet the highest standards of trustworthiness, quality and public value, and it is our responsibility to maintain compliance with these standards.

The statistics last underwent a full assessment against the Code of Practice in 2011: https://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/images-assessmentreport153statisticsonhospitalwaitingtimesinnorthernirelan_tcm97-41176.pdf.

Designation was awarded in December 2013: <a href="https://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/images-

letterofconfirmationasnationalstatisticsassessmentreport15 tcm97-42663.pdf.

Since the assessment by the Office for Statistics Regulation, we have continued to comply with the Code of Practice for Statistics.

Further information on Outpatient Waiting Times in Northern Ireland is available from:	
Hospital Information Branch	
nformation & Analysis Directorate	
Department of Health	
Stormont Estate	
Belfast, BT4 3SQ	
⊠ Email: statistics@health-ni.gov.uk	
This Statistical bulletin and others published by Hospital Information Branch are available to download from the DoH Internet site at:	
nttps://www.health-ni.gov.uk/topics/doh-statistics-and-research	