

INFORMATION  
ANALYSIS  
DIRECTORATE



# Northern Ireland Waiting Time Statistics: Diagnostic Waiting Times Quarter Ending December 2018



Department of  
**Health**

An Roinn Sláinte

Máinnystrie O Poustle

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# Reader Information

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**Purpose:** This statistical release presents information on waiting times and reporting times for diagnostic services in Northern Ireland and reports on the performance of the Health and Social Care (HSC) Trusts against the draft 2018/19 Ministerial waiting time target and the draft 2018/19 Ministerial diagnostic reporting turnaround target:

*“By March 2019, 75% of patients should wait no longer than 9 weeks for a diagnostic test, with no patient waiting longer than 26 weeks”.*

*“By March 2019, all urgent diagnostic tests should be reported on within two days of the test being undertaken”.*

This statistical release details information on waiting times and reporting times for diagnostic services in HSC Trusts at 31<sup>st</sup> December 2018. Data are presented by HSC Trust, diagnostic category, diagnostic test, and time band. Further information on routine diagnostic reporting times is available in the accompanying CSV file.

**Statistical Quality:** The ‘*Diagnostic 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/publications/diagnostic-waiting-times-supporting-documentation>

**Internet:** <https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/articles/diagnostic-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, academics, and Health & Social Care stakeholders, the media and general public.

**Price:** Free

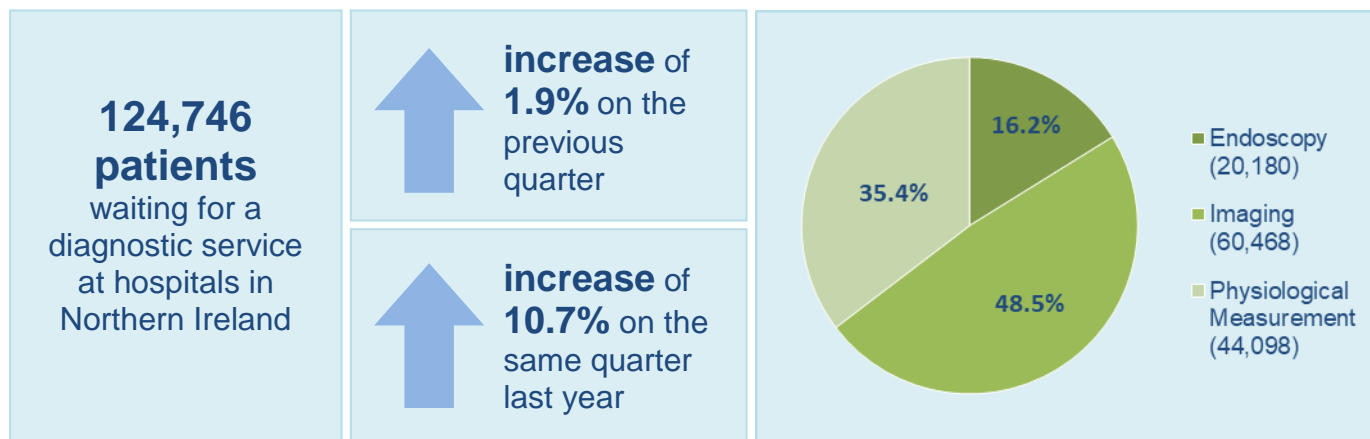
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**By March 2019, 75% of patients should wait no longer than 9 weeks for a diagnostic test, with no patient waiting longer than 26 weeks.**

## Total number of patients waiting at 31<sup>st</sup> December 2018

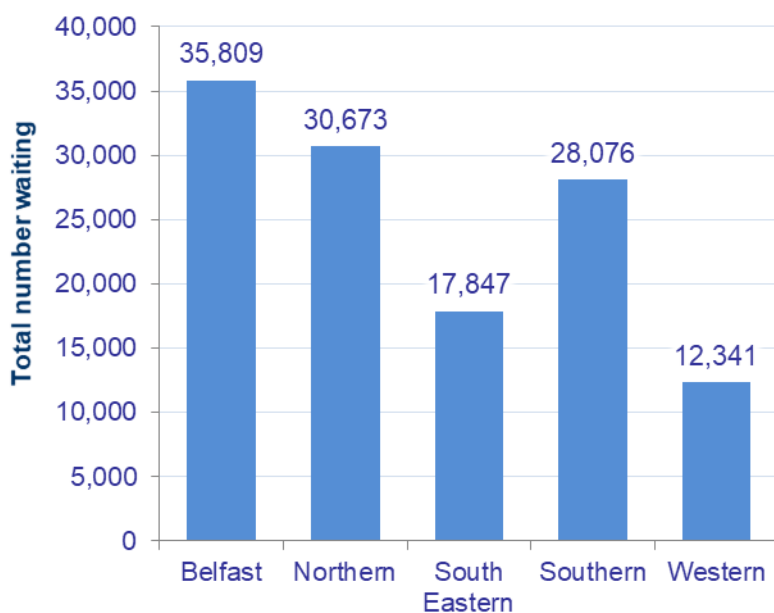


Source: SDR1

At 31<sup>st</sup> December 2018, a total of 124,746 patients were waiting for a diagnostic test, 1.9% (2,359) more than at 30<sup>th</sup> September 2018 (122,387), and 10.7% (12,076) more than at 31<sup>st</sup> December 2017 (112,670) (Table 1).

A number of diagnostic services may not be provided at all of the five HSC Trusts in Northern Ireland. In this situation, patients from one HSC Trust area will be waiting to be seen at a service provided at another HSC Trust. Data users should be cautious in how they use these data (see explanatory note 10).

Almost a third (28.7%) were waiting for diagnostic tests in the Belfast HSC Trust, with a further 24.6% in the Northern HSC Trust, 22.5% in the Southern HSC Trust, 14.3% in the South Eastern HSC Trust and 9.9% in the Western HSC Trust (Table 2).



Source: SDR1

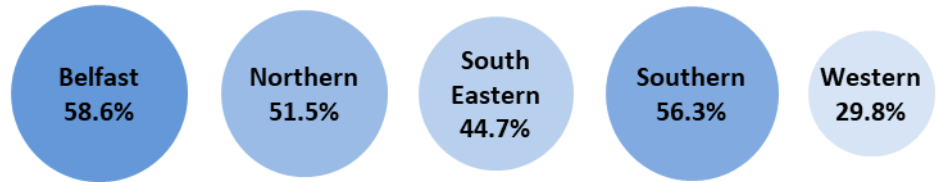
More than two thirds (69.2%, 86,367) of the 124,746 patients were waiting for a diagnostic test within one of the following seven diagnostic services: Non-obstetric Ultrasound; Magnetic Resonance Imaging; Echocardiography; Computerised Tomography; Peripheral Neurophysiology; Gastroscopy and Pure Tone Audiometry (Table 3).

## Patients waiting more than 9 weeks at 31<sup>st</sup> December 2018

Achievement of the 9 week target requires that less than 25% of patients should be waiting over 9 weeks for a diagnostic test.

This element was **not achieved** by Northern Ireland as a whole

**51.5%**  
of patients were waiting longer than 9 weeks



### % Patients waiting over 9 weeks

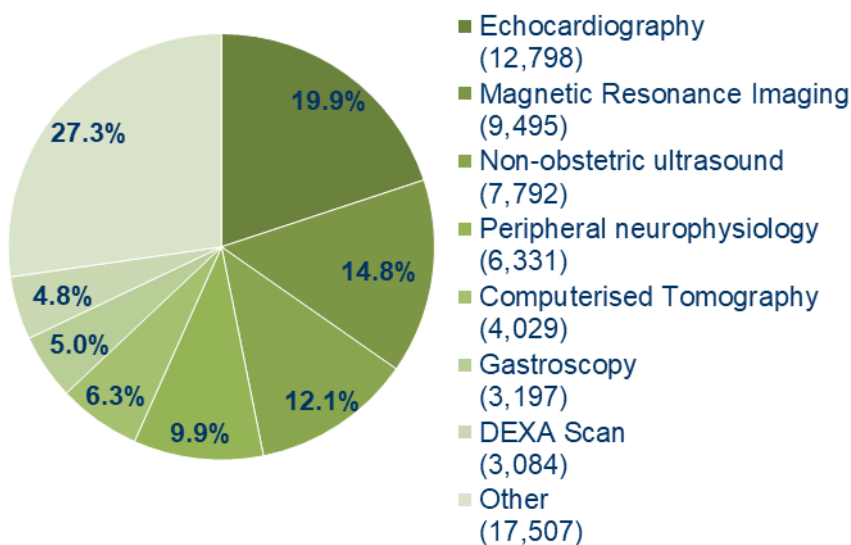
Source: SRD1 Part 1&2

At 31<sup>st</sup> December 2018, 51.5% (64,233) of patients were waiting more than 9 weeks for a diagnostic test, compared with 51.1% (62,481) at 30<sup>th</sup> September 2018 and 49.5% (55,723) at 31<sup>st</sup> December 2017 (Table 1).

At 31<sup>st</sup> December 2018, the 9 week element of the target was not achieved by Northern Ireland as a whole, or by any individual HSC Trust. Data users should be aware that not all diagnostic services are provided at every HSC Trust (see explanatory note 10).

Almost two thirds (58.6%, 20,994) of patients were waiting longer than 9 weeks in Belfast HSC Trust at 31<sup>st</sup> December 2018, 56.3% (15,806) in the Southern HSC Trust, 51.5% (15,790) in the Northern HSC Trust, 44.7% (7,970) in the South Eastern HSC Trust and 29.8% (3,673) in the Western HSC Trust (Table 2).

### Patients waiting over 9 weeks by diagnostic service



Over two thirds (72.7%, 46,726) of the 64,233 patients waiting more than 9 weeks were waiting for one of the following diagnostic tests: Echo-cardiography; Magnetic Resonance Imaging; Non-Obstetric Ultrasound; Peripheral Neuro-physiology; Computerised Tomography; Gastroscopy and DEXA Scan (Table 3).

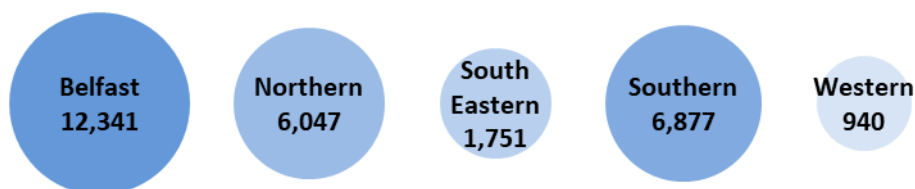
Source: SDR1

## Patients waiting more than 26 weeks at 31<sup>st</sup> December 2018

Achievement of the 9 week target requires that no patients should be waiting over 26 weeks for a diagnostic test.

This element was **not achieved** by Northern Ireland as a whole

**27,956** patients were waiting longer than 26 weeks



### Number waiting over 26 weeks

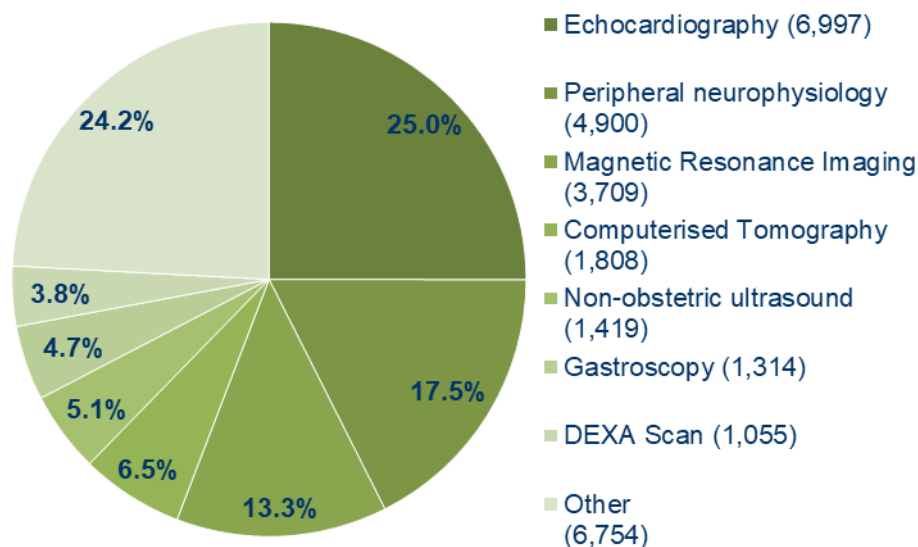
Source: SDR1

At 31<sup>st</sup> December 2018, 22.4% (27,956) of patients were waiting more than 26 weeks for a diagnostic test compared with 20.7% (25,332) at 30<sup>th</sup> September 2018 and 19.1% (21,521) at 31<sup>st</sup> December 2017 (Table 1).

At 31<sup>st</sup> December 2018, the 26 week element of the target was not achieved by Northern Ireland as a whole or by any individual HSC Trust (Table 2). Data users should be aware that not all diagnostic services are provided at every HSC Trust (see explanatory note 10).

Over a third (34.5%, 12,341) of patients in the Belfast HSC Trust were waiting longer than 26 weeks at 31<sup>st</sup> December 2018, 24.5% (6,877) in the Southern HSC Trust, 19.7% (6,047) in the Northern HSC Trust, 9.8% (1,751) in the South Eastern HSC Trust and 7.6% (940) in the Western HSC Trust (Table 2).

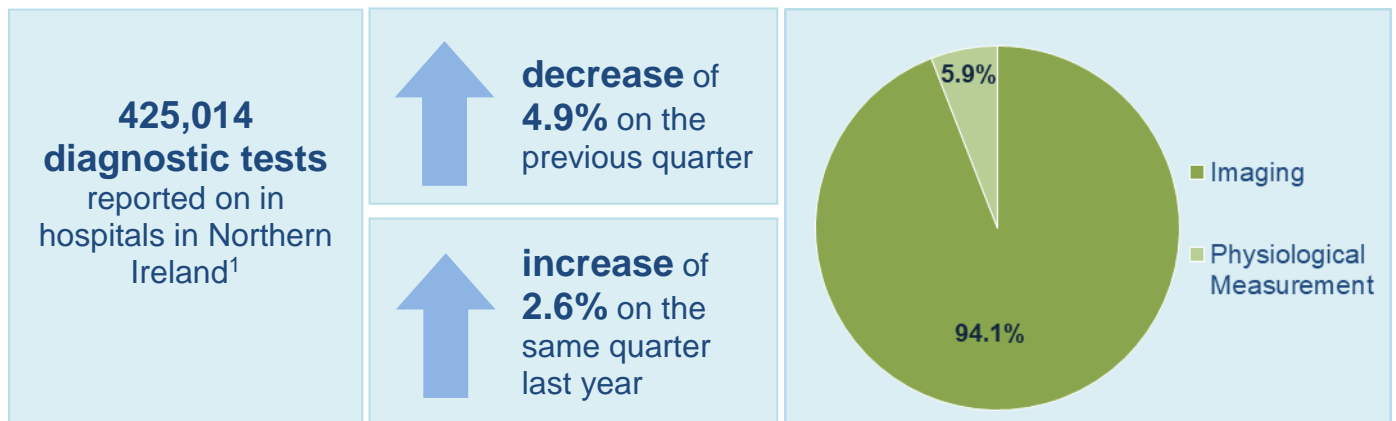
### Patients waiting over 26 weeks by diagnostic service



Source: SDR1

Three quarters (75.8%, 21,202) of the 27,956 patients waiting more than 26 weeks were waiting for one of the following diagnostic tests: Echocardiography; Peripheral Neurophysiology; Magnetic Resonance Imaging; Computerised Tomography; Non-Obstetric Ultrasound; Gastroscopy and DEXA Scan (Table 3).

## Total number of diagnostic tests reported on during quarter ending December 2018

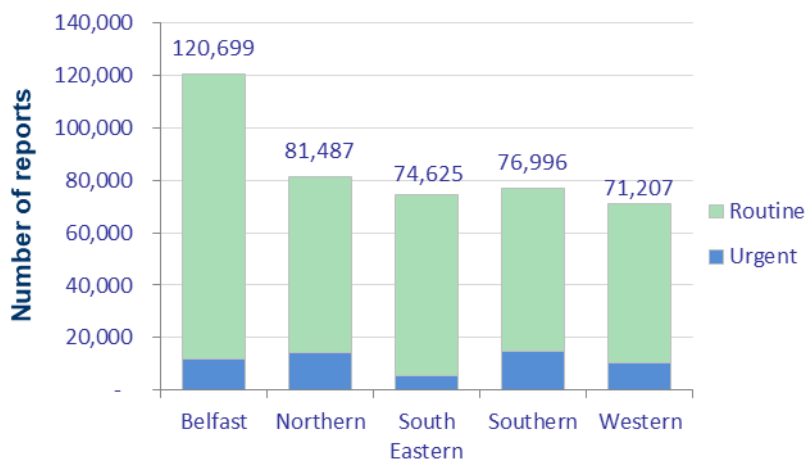


Source: DRTT Return

A total of 425,014 diagnostic tests were reported on and dispatched to the referring clinician at hospitals in Northern Ireland during the quarter ending December 2018, 4.9% (19,776) more than the quarter ending September 2018 (405,238), and 2.6% (10,730) more than the quarter ending December 2017 (414,284) (Table 4).

Of the 425,014 reported diagnostic tests, 94.1% (399,872) were reporting on an Imaging test and 5.9% (25,142) were reporting on a Physiological Measurement test<sup>1</sup> (Table 4).

Approximately one in eight (13.4%, 57,123) of the diagnostic tests reported on during quarter ending December 2018 were urgent diagnostic tests, with the remaining 86.6% (367,891) being routine diagnostic tests<sup>2</sup> (Table 4).



Source: DRTT Return

Over one quarter (28.4%) of diagnostic tests were reported and dispatched in the Belfast HSC Trust<sup>1</sup>, with a further 19.2% in the Northern HSC Trust, 18.1% in the Southern HSC Trust, 17.6% in the South Eastern HSC Trust and 16.8% in the Western HSC Trust.

<sup>1</sup> Diagnostic reporting turnaround times relate only to a selected subset of Imaging and Physiological Measurement tests. Day case endoscopies are reported on the day of the test and as such are not included.

<sup>2</sup> Reporting times of routine diagnostic tests are available in the accompanying CSV file.

**By March 2019, all urgent diagnostic tests should be reported on within 2 days of the test being undertaken.**

## Urgent diagnostic tests reported on within 2 days during quarter ending December 2018

This element was **not achieved** by Northern Ireland as a whole

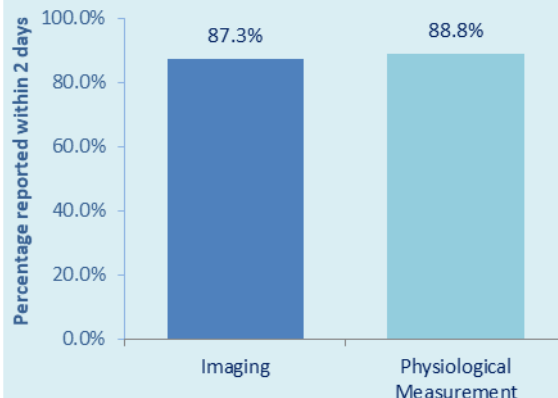


**increase of 3.3 percentage points** on the previous quarter



**decrease of 1.3 percentage points** on the same quarter last year

**87.4%** of urgent diagnostic tests reported on within 2 days

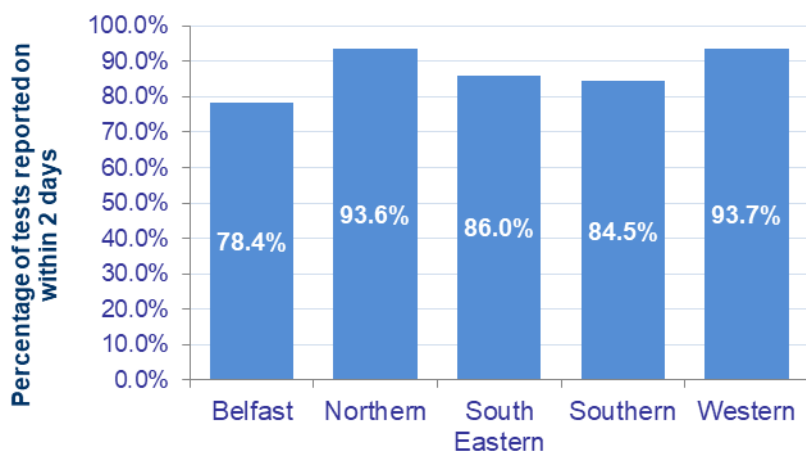


Source: DRTT Return

Achievement of the diagnostic reporting turnaround time target requires that all urgent diagnostic tests should be reported and dispatched within 2 days.

Of the 57,123 urgent diagnostic tests reported on during quarter ending December 2018, 87.4% (49,940) were reported on within 2 days, compared with 84.1% (46,438) during the quarter ending September 2018 and 86.2% (44,855) during the quarter ending December 2017 (Table 5).

Of the 57,123 urgent diagnostic tests reported on during the quarter ending December 2018, 52,585 were imaging reports and 4,538 were physiological measurement reports. A total of 87.3% of urgent imaging tests were reported on within 2 days compared with 88.8% of urgent physiological measurement tests (Table 6).



Source: DRTT Return

During quarter ending December 2018, the 2 day target was not achieved by any HSC Trust, although the Western Trust reported on 93.7% of urgent diagnostic tests within 2 days (Table 7).



## Appendix 1: Tables

**Table 1: Number of patients waiting for a diagnostic service by diagnostic category – 31<sup>st</sup> December 2018<sup>1</sup>**

Diagnostic Category		Current Quarter (31 <sup>st</sup> Dec 2018)	Previous Quarter (31 <sup>st</sup> Sep 2018)	Same Quarter Last Year (31 <sup>st</sup> Dec 2017)
<b>Imaging</b>	Total Patients Waiting	60,468	58,140	58,215
	Number waiting over 9 weeks	24,705	22,550	24,179
	<i>Percentage waiting over 9 weeks</i>	40.9%	38.8%	41.5%
	Number waiting over 26 weeks	8,038	5,043	7,958
<b>Physiological Measurement</b>	Total Patients Waiting	44,098	43,757	36,591
	Number waiting over 9 weeks	28,108	27,786	21,784
	<i>Percentage waiting over 9 weeks</i>	63.7%	63.5%	59.5%
	Number waiting over 26 weeks	14,449	14,538	9,630
<b>Endoscopy</b>	Total Patients Waiting	20,180	20,490	17,864
	Number waiting over 9 weeks	11,420	12,145	9,760
	<i>Percentage waiting over 9 weeks</i>	56.6%	59.3%	54.6%
	Number waiting over 26 weeks	5,469	5,751	3,933
<b>Total</b>	Total Patients Waiting	124,746	122,387	112,670
	Number waiting over 9 weeks	64,233	62,481	55,723
	<i>Percentage waiting over 9 weeks</i>	51.5%	51.1%	49.5%
	Number waiting over 26 weeks	27,956	25,332	21,521

Source: SDR1

<sup>1</sup>Refer to Explanatory Notes 1–15 & 22-25

**Table 2: Number of patients waiting for a diagnostic service, by HSC Trust – 31<sup>st</sup> December 2018<sup>1</sup>**

HSC Trust	Patients Waiting for Diagnostic Service by Weeks Waiting						Total Waiting
	0 - 6	>6 - 9	>9 - 13	>13 - 21	>21-26	>26	
Belfast	11,332	3,483	2,987	3,773	1,893	12,341	35,809
Northern	11,753	3,130	3,041	4,544	2,158	6,047	30,673
South Eastern	7,453	2,424	2,358	2,847	1,014	1,751	17,847
Southern	8,920	3,350	3,332	3,989	1,608	6,877	28,076
Western	6,923	1,745	1,109	1,176	448	940	12,341
<b>Total</b>	<b>46,381</b>	<b>14,132</b>	<b>12,827</b>	<b>16,329</b>	<b>7,121</b>	<b>27,956</b>	<b>124,746</b>

Source: SDR1

<sup>1</sup>Refer to Explanatory Notes 1–15 & 22-25

**Table 3: Number of patients waiting for a diagnostic service by type of service and weeks waiting – 31<sup>st</sup> December 2018<sup>1</sup>**

Diagnostic Test	Patients Waiting for Diagnostic Service by Weeks Waiting						Total Waiting
	0 - 6	>6 - 9	>9 - 13	>13 - 21	>21-26	>26	
Non-obstetric ultrasound	11,488	3,511	2,467	2,875	1,031	1,419	22,791
Magnetic Resonance Imaging	5,736	2,230	1,994	2,685	1,107	3,709	17,461
Echocardiography	3,079	1,237	1,673	2,554	1,574	6,997	17,114
Computerised Tomography	5,035	930	793	1,001	427	1,808	9,994
Peripheral neurophysiology	568	283	431	641	359	4,900	7,182
Gastroscopy	2,291	671	621	883	379	1,314	6,159
Pure tone audiometry	1,900	980	958	1,053	336	439	5,666
DEXA Scan	1,620	720	773	929	327	1,055	5,424
Colonoscopy	1,987	484	527	647	268	1,052	4,965
Ambulatory ECG monitoring (24 hr holter)	1,624	545	385	572	244	859	4,229
Plain Film Xrays	2,824	186	28	10	0	1	3,049
Flexi sigmoidoscopy	810	261	367	402	194	812	2,846
Cystoscopy	939	221	243	302	133	506	2,344
Arthroscopy	87	71	117	192	84	984	1,535
Sleep studies	702	244	195	135	53	40	1,369
EEG	309	112	129	217	91	217	1,075
Patient Activated Ambulatory Function	286	98	76	143	52	397	1,052
Exercise tolerance testing	544	156	110	100	39	13	962
Perfusion studies	248	104	151	162	89	159	913
Other	4,304	1,088	789	826	334	1,275	8,616
<b>All diagnostic tests</b>	<b>46,381</b>	<b>14,132</b>	<b>12,827</b>	<b>16,329</b>	<b>7,121</b>	<b>27,956</b>	<b>124,746</b>

Source: SDR1

<sup>1</sup>Refer to Explanatory Notes 1–15 & 22-25

**Table 4: Number of diagnostic tests reported and dispatched by priority of report – QE December 2018<sup>2</sup>**

Priority of Report	Diagnostic Category	QE	QE	QE
		December 2018	September 2018	December 2017
<b>Urgent</b>	Imaging	52,585	50,379	47,079
	Physiological Measurement	4,538	4,817	4,986
<b>Routine</b>	Imaging	347,287	332,358	341,428
	Physiological Measurement	20,604	17,684	20,791
<b>Total</b>	Imaging	399,872	382,737	388,507
	Physiological Measurement	25,142	22,501	25,777

Source: DRTT Return

<sup>2</sup>Refer to Explanatory Notes 1-3, 5 & 16–25

<sup>R</sup> Figures have been revised

**Table 5: Number of urgent diagnostic tests reported and dispatched – QE December 2018<sup>2</sup>**

Urgent Diagnostic Tests	QE December 2018	QE September 2018	QE December 2017
Total reported	57,123	55,196	52,065
Number reported within 2 days	49,940	46,438	44,855
% reported on <i>within 2 days</i>	87.4%	84.1%	86.2%

Source: DRTT Return

<sup>2</sup>Refer to Explanatory Notes 1-3, 5 & 16–25

<sup>R</sup> Figures have been revised

**Table 6: Number of urgent diagnostic tests reported and dispatched by diagnostic category and time in days– QE December 2018<sup>2</sup>**

Diagnostic Category	Length of time reporting in days				Total Reported
	0 - 2 days	>2 - 14 days	>14 - 28 days	>28 days	
Imaging	45,910	5,852	644	179	52,585
Physiological Measurement	4,030	474	29	5	4,538
<b>Total</b>	<b>49,940</b>	<b>6,326</b>	<b>673</b>	<b>184</b>	<b>57,123</b>

Source: DRTT Return

<sup>2</sup>Refer to Explanatory Notes 1-3, 5 & 16–25

**Table 7: Number of urgent diagnostic tests reported and dispatched by HSC Trust and time in days – QE December 2018<sup>2</sup>**

HSC Trust	Length of time reporting in days				Total Reported
	0 - 2 days	>2 - 14 days	>14 - 28 days	>28 days	
Belfast	9,169	1,927	453	143	11,692
Northern	13,608	927	6	5	14,546
South Eastern	4,897	711	80	4	5,692
Southern	12,302	2,129	106	25	14,562
Western	9,964	632	28	7	10,631
<b>Total</b>	<b>49,940</b>	<b>6,326</b>	<b>673</b>	<b>184</b>	<b>57,123</b>

Source: DRTT Return

<sup>2</sup>Refer to Explanatory Notes 1-3, 5 & 16–25

## Appendix 2: Explanatory Notes

1. The sources for the data contained in this release are the quarterly Departmental Returns SDR1 and the DRTT Return. Note that, prior to September 2018, diagnostic waiting time data was provided separately for 16 selected diagnostic services in the SDR1 Part 1, with all other diagnostic services provided by the HSCB on the SDR1 Part 2 return. The diagnostic reporting turnaround time information is provided by the HSCB on the DRTT return.
2. The '*Diagnostic 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/publications/northern-ireland-waiting-time-statistics-diagnostic-waiting-times-december-2018>
3. All of the data contained in the tables can be supplied by individual diagnostic service or HSC Trust if this level of detail is required. In addition, quarterly data relating to diagnostic waiting times and diagnostic reporting turnaround times has also been published in spreadsheet format (CSV), split by HSC Trust and diagnostic service, in order to aid secondary analysis. These data are available at: <https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/publications/northern-ireland-waiting-time-statistics-diagnostic-waiting-times-december-2018>
4. From September 2018, the CSV file has a number of changes. Barium Studies and Fluoroscopy diagnostic waits have been combined together and Computerised Tomography has been split into General, Colonoscopy and Cardiac waits. In addition, all patients waiting >26 weeks have now been split into the following timebands >26-36, >36-52, >52-65, >65-78 and >78.
5. The diagnostic waiting times and diagnostic reporting turnaround times returns (SDR1 Parts 1 and 2, DRTT) include patients living outside Northern Ireland and privately funded patients waiting for diagnostic services in Health Service hospitals in Northern Ireland.
6. HSC Trusts use the Northern Ireland Picture Archive and Communications System (NIPACS) as the mechanism for managing imaging services. The HSC Board has carried out a validation exercise with Trusts to address any data quality issues. The quality of imaging waiting times and reporting times has improved in recent years.
7. A **diagnostic service** provides an examination, test, or procedure used to identify a person's disease or condition and which allows a medical diagnosis to be made. There are three categories of diagnostic test: Imaging test; Physiological Measurement test; and Day Case Endoscopy.

8. The **diagnostic waiting time** relates to all tests with a diagnostic element. Included are tests that are part diagnostic and subsequently part therapeutic. A therapeutic procedure is defined as a procedure which involves actual treatment of a person's disease, condition or injury. Purely therapeutic procedures are excluded from the diagnostic waiting times target. Patients currently admitted to a hospital bed and waiting for an emergency procedure, patients waiting for a planned procedure and patients waiting for procedures as part of screening programmes are also excluded from the waiting times target.
9. The waiting time for a diagnostic service commences on the date on which the referral for the service is received by the Health Care provider and stops on the date on which the test is performed. Patients who cannot attend (CNA) have their waiting time adjusted to commence on the date they informed the HSC Trust that they could not attend, while patients who do not attend (DNA) have their waiting time adjusted to commence on the date of the DNA.
10. A number of diagnostic services may not be provided at all of the five HSC Trusts in Northern Ireland. In this situation, patients from one HSC Trust area will be waiting to be seen at a service provided at another HSC Trust. 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 HSC Trust area. 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.
11. A number of the diagnostic services, particularly endoscopies, reported on the SDR 1 (Part 1 & 2) returns are managed as an admission: either an inpatient admission or a day case. As such, they will be included in both the inpatient and day case waiting time and diagnostic waiting time figures. Due to the risk of multiple counting, these two sets of data should not be combined to give an estimate of the total number of patients waiting for admission or a diagnostic service.
12. Some people will be waiting on more than one waiting list or be on the same waiting list for more than one outpatient appointment/admission/diagnostic test at the same time due to having more than one condition.
13. The draft 2018/19 Ministerial diagnostic waiting time target, states that, by March 2019, 75% of patients should wait no longer than 9 weeks for a diagnostic test, with no patient waiting longer than 26 weeks.

14. For Tables 2 and 3, each diagnostic waiting time band relates to the number of completed weeks a patient has been waiting for a diagnostic service. 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 week (greater than 6 weeks but waiting no longer than 9 weeks) time band.
15. Patients waiting 'longer than 9 weeks' for a diagnostic service includes all patients in the >9 - 13, >13 - 21, >21-26, >26-36, >36-52, >52-65, >65-78 and >78 week time bands. All patients waiting 'over 26 weeks' includes everyone in the >26-36, >36-52, >52-65, >65-78 and >78 week time bands.
16. The diagnostic reporting turnaround time is the time interval between the completion of the diagnostic test and the results of that test being verified or dispatched to the referring clinician in Northern Ireland, whichever is applicable.
17. Diagnostic reporting times apply to a selected subset of imaging and physiological measurement diagnostic services. These services are: Magnetic Resonance Imaging; Computerised Tomography; Non-Obstetric Ultrasound; Barium Studies; DEXA Scan; Radio-Nuclide Imaging; Pure Tone Audiometry; Echocardiography; Perfusion Studies; Peripheral Neurophysiology; Sleep Studies; and Urodynamics Pressures and Flows and Plain Film X-rays.
18. Data for Plain Film X-rays is only available from April 2015 onwards, as such DRTT figures should not be compared prior to this date.
19. The draft 2018/19 Ministerial diagnostic reporting turnaround target, states that, by March 2019, all urgent diagnostic tests should be reported on within two days of the test being undertaken.
20. Further information on routine diagnostic reporting times are available in the accompanying CSV file at: <https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/articles/diagnostic-waiting-times>
21. The information on diagnostic and reporting times contained within this publication is currently under review. The Department is looking at how this information is sourced and the validation procedures that are carried out with a view to improving the quality. All quality issues identified as part of this review are being addressed on an ongoing basis.
22. Resubmissions for Quarter Ending June 18 were received from Belfast and Northern HSC Trusts for the SDR1 return and from Northern HSC Trust for the DRTT return. These amendments have been reflected in this publication.

23. The Department of Health's policy is to publish revised figures with subsequent statistical releases unless it is decided that the magnitude of the change merits earlier notification.
24. The information contained within this publication is not National Statistics.
25. Figures relating to diagnostic waiting times and diagnostic reporting turnaround times for the quarter ending 31<sup>st</sup> March 2019 will be released on Thursday 30<sup>th</sup> May 2019.

**Further information on Diagnostic Waiting Times in Northern Ireland is available from:**

Hospital Information Branch  
Information & Analysis Directorate  
Department of Health  
Stormont Estate  
Belfast, BT4 3SQ

✉ Email: [statistics@health-ni.gov.uk](mailto: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:**

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