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Northern Ireland Waiting Time Statistics: Diagnostic Waiting Times Quarter Ending June 2020

Reader Information

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 2020/21 Ministerial waiting time target and the draft 2020/21 Ministerial diagnostic reporting turnaround target:

“By March 2021, 75% of patients should wait no longer than 9 weeks for a diagnostic test, with no patient waiting longer than 26 weeks”.

“By March 2021, 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 30th June 2020. 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>

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. Users should also 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 data, given that hospital records may not be fully updated at this time.

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, healthcare professionals, academics, and Health & Social Care stakeholders, the media and general public.

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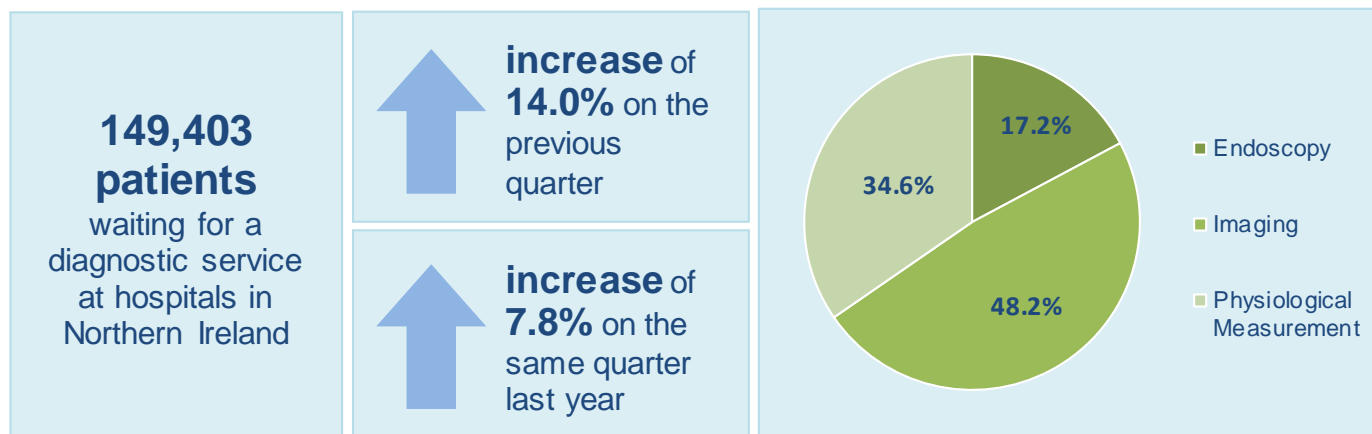
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By March 2021, 75% of patients should wait no longer than 9 weeks for a diagnostic test, with no patient waiting longer than 26 weeks.

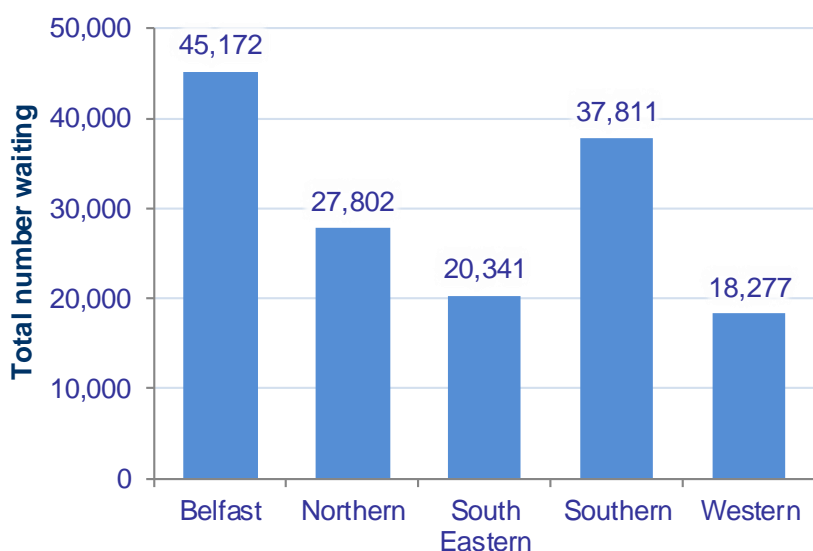
Total number of patients waiting at 30th June 2020



Source: SDR1

At 30th June 2020, a total of 149,403 patients were waiting for a diagnostic test, 14.0% (18,363) more than at 31st March 2020 (131,040), and 7.8% (10,756) more than at 31st June 2019 (138,647) (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 therefore be cautious in how they use these data (see explanatory note 10).



Almost a third (30.2%) were waiting for diagnostic tests in the Belfast HSC Trust, with a further 25.3% in the Southern HSC Trust, 18.6% in the Northern HSC Trust, 13.6% in the South Eastern HSC Trust and 12.2% in the Western HSC Trust (Table 2).

Source: SDR1

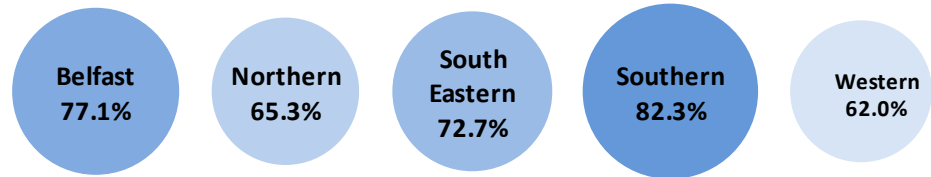
Over three fifths (61.6%, 92,070) of the 149,403 patients were waiting for a diagnostic test within one of the following seven diagnostic services: Non-obstetric Ultrasound; Magnetic Resonance Imaging; Echocardiography; Computerised Tomography; Peripheral Neurophysiology; Plain Film X-Rays and Gastroscopy. (Table 3).

Patients waiting more than 9 weeks at 30th June 2020

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

73.8%
of patients were waiting longer than 9 weeks



Percentage waiting over 9 weeks

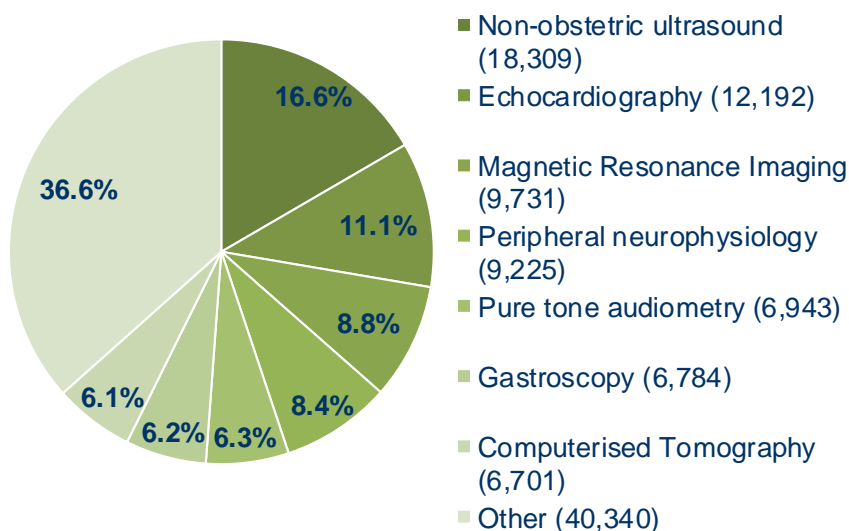
Source: SRD1

At 30th June 2020, 73.8% (110,225) of patients were waiting more than 9 weeks for a diagnostic test, compared with 55.1% (72,248) at 31st March 2020 and 52.7% (73,087) at 31st June 2019 (Table 1).

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).

More than four fifths of patients (82.3%, 31,112) were waiting longer than 9 weeks in the Southern HSC Trust, around three quarters in the Belfast (77.1%, 34,830) and South Eastern (72.7%, 14,797) HSC Trusts and almost two thirds in both the Northern (65.3%, 18,149) and Western (62.0%, 11,337) HSC Trusts (Table 2).

Patients waiting over 9 weeks by diagnostic service



Of the 110,225 patients waiting more than 9 weeks, almost two thirds (63.4%, 69,885) were waiting for one of the following diagnostic tests: Non-Obstetric Ultrasound; Echocardiography; Magnetic Resonance Imaging; Peripheral Neurophysiology; Pure Tone Audiometry, Gastroscopy and Computerised Tomography. (Table 3).

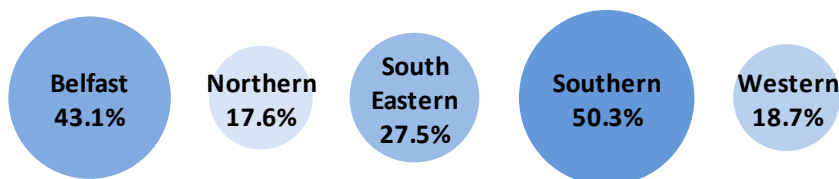
Source: SDR1

Patients waiting more than 26 weeks at 30th June 2020

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

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

35.1%
of patients were waiting longer than 26 weeks



Percentage waiting over 26 weeks

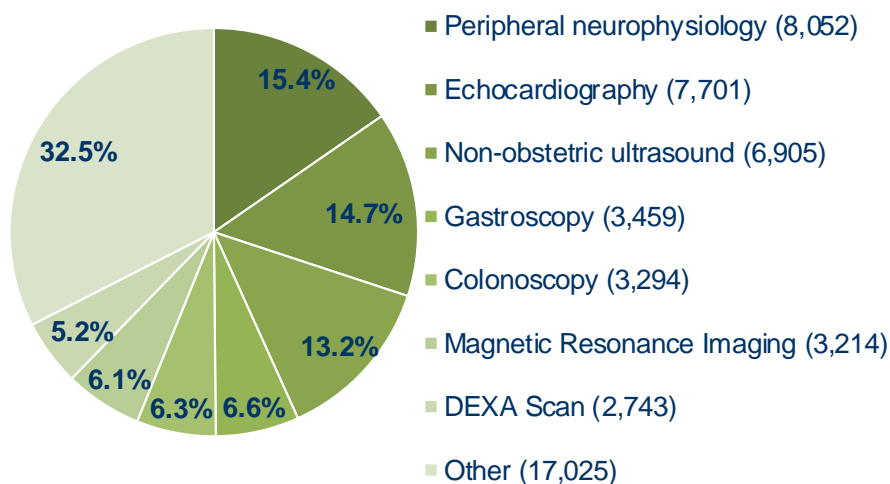
Source: SDR1

At 30th June 2020, 35.1% (52,393) of patients were waiting more than 26 weeks for a diagnostic test compared with 27.3% (35,784) at 31st March 2020 and 25.6% (35,519) at 31st June 2019 (Table 1).

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).

Of patients waiting in the Southern HSC Trust, half (50.3%, 19,020) were waiting longer than 26 weeks, 43.1% (19,489) in the Belfast HSC Trust, 27.5% (5,586) in the South Eastern HSC Trust, 18.7% (3,414) in the Western HSC Trust and 17.6% (4,884) in the Northern HSC Trust (Table 2).

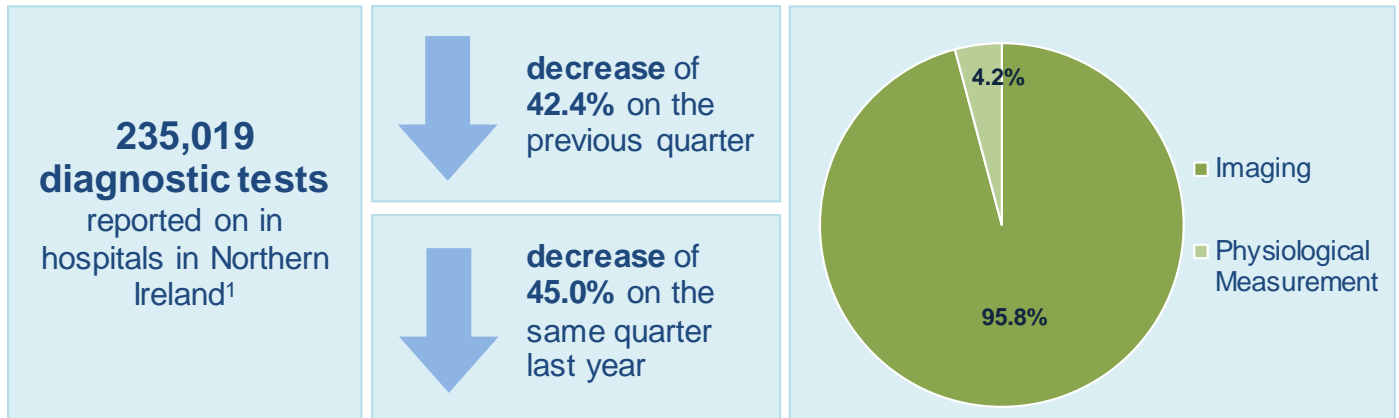
Patients waiting over 26 weeks by diagnostic service



Source: SDR1

Over two thirds (67.5%, 35,368) of the 52,393 patients waiting more than 26 weeks were waiting for one of the following diagnostic tests: Peripheral Neurophysiology; Echocardiography; Non-Obstetric Ultrasound; Gastroscopy; Colonoscopy; Magnetic Resonance Imaging and DEXA Scan. (Table 3).

Total number of diagnostic tests reported on during quarter ending June 2020

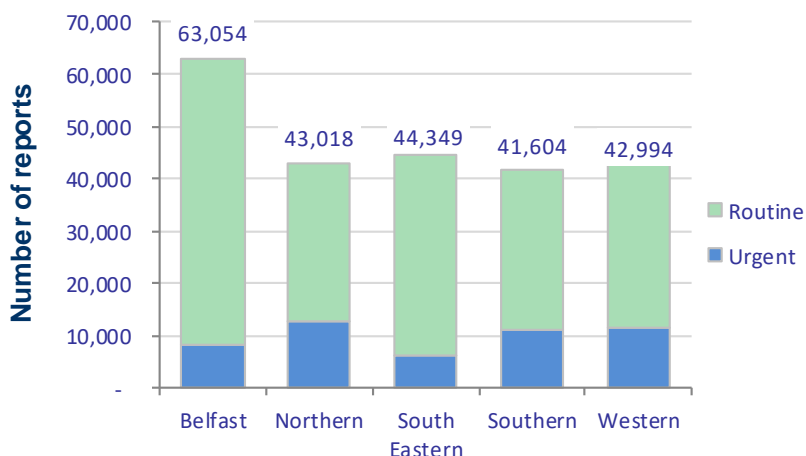


Source: DRTT Return

A total of 235,019 diagnostic tests were reported on and dispatched to the referring clinician at hospitals in Northern Ireland during the quarter ending June 2020, 42.4% (172,993) fewer than the quarter ending March 2020 (408,012), and 45.0% (192,566) fewer than the quarter ending June 2019 (427,585) (Table 4).

Of the 235,019 reported diagnostic tests, 95.8% (225,248) were reporting on an Imaging test and 4.2% (9,771) were reporting on a Physiological Measurement test (Table 4).

Approximately a fifth (21.0%, 49,452) of the diagnostic tests reported on during quarter ending June 2020 were urgent diagnostic tests, with the remaining 79.0% (185,567) being routine diagnostic tests¹ (Table 4).



More than a quarter (26.8%) of diagnostic tests were reported and dispatched in the Belfast HSC Trust, with a further 18.9% in the South Eastern HSC Trust, 18.3% in the Northern and Western HSC Trusts and 17.7% in the Southern HSC Trust.²

Source: DRTT Return

¹ Reporting times of routine diagnostic tests are available in the accompanying CSV file.

² 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.

Urgent diagnostic tests reported on within 2 days during quarter ending June 2020

By March 2021, all urgent diagnostic tests should be reported on within 2 days of the test being undertaken.

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

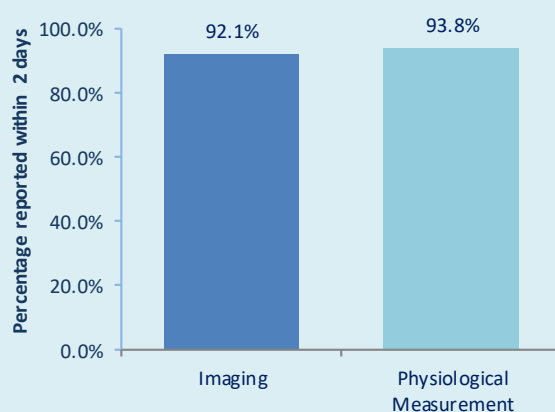


increase of 6.8 percentage points on the previous quarter

92.2% of urgent diagnostic tests reported on within 2 days



Increase of 8.2 percentage points on the same quarter last year

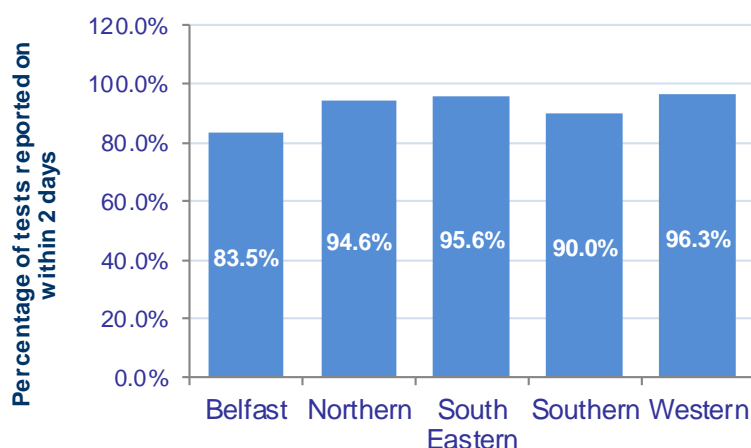


Source: DRTT Return

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

Of the 49,452 urgent diagnostic tests reported on during quarter ending June 2020, 92.2% (45,613) were reported on within 2 days, compared with 85.4% (53,797) during the quarter ending March 2020 and 84.0% (51,511) during the quarter ending June 2019 (Table 5).

Of the 49,452 urgent diagnostic tests, 44,363 were imaging reports and 5,089 were physiological measurement reports. A total of 92.1% of urgent imaging tests were reported on within 2 days compared with 93.8% of urgent physiological measurement tests (Table 6).



During the quarter ending June 2020, the 2 day target was not achieved by any HSC Trust, although the Western Trust reported on 96.3% of urgent diagnostic tests within two days (Table 7).

Source: DRTT Return

Appendix 1: Tables

Table 1: Number of patients waiting for a diagnostic service by diagnostic category – 30th June 2020¹

Diagnostic Category		Current Quarter (June 2020)	Previous Quarter (March 2020)	Same Quarter Last Year (June 2019)
Imaging	Total Patients Waiting	71,984	61,154	71,083
	Number waiting over 9 weeks	45,952	27,867	31,088
	<i>Percentage waiting over 9 weeks</i>	63.8%	45.6%	43.7%
	Number waiting over 26 weeks	16,746	10,252	12,803
Physiological Measurement	Total Patients Waiting	51,710	46,403	48,236
	Number waiting over 9 weeks	43,183	29,608	31,296
	<i>Percentage waiting over 9 weeks</i>	83.5%	63.8%	64.9%
	Number waiting over 26 weeks	23,313	17,122	17,657
Endoscopy	Total Patients Waiting	25,709	23,483	19,328
	Number waiting over 9 weeks	21,090	14,773	10,703
	<i>Percentage waiting over 9 weeks</i>	82.0%	62.9%	55.4%
	Number waiting over 26 weeks	12,334	8,410	5,059
Total	Total Patients Waiting	149,403	131,040	138,647
	Number waiting over 9 weeks	110,225	72,248	73,087
	<i>Percentage waiting over 9 weeks</i>	73.8%	55.1%	52.7%
	Number waiting over 26 weeks	52,393	35,784	35,519

Source: SDR1

¹Refer to Explanatory Notes 1–15 & 22-25

Table 2: Number of patients waiting for a diagnostic service, by HSC Trust – 30th June 2020¹

HSC Trust	Patients Waiting for Diagnostic Service by Weeks Waiting						Total Waiting
	0 - 6	>6 - 9	>9 - 13	>13 - 21	>21-26	>26	
Belfast	8,492	1,850	1,968	9,487	3,886	19,489	45,172
Northern	7,610	2,043	1,965	9,316	1,984	4,884	27,802
South Eastern	4,679	865	1,540	5,177	2,494	5,586	20,341
Southern	5,408	1,291	1,104	7,352	3,636	19,020	37,811
Western	5,743	1,197	1,170	5,396	1,357	3,414	18,277
Total	31,932	7,246	7,747	36,728	13,357	52,393	149,403

Source: SDR1

¹Refer to Explanatory Notes 1–15 & 22-25

Table 3: Number of patients waiting for a diagnostic service by type of service and weeks waiting – 30th June 2020¹

Diagnostic Test	Patients Waiting for Diagnostic Service (Weeks Waiting)						Total Waiting
	0 - 6	>6 - 9	>9 - 13	>13 - 21	>21-26	>26	
Non-obstetric ultrasound	6,183	1,338	1,185	7,696	2,523	6,905	25,830
Magnetic Resonance Imaging	4,118	796	723	4,020	1,774	3,214	14,645
Echocardiography	1,659	589	583	2,612	1,296	7,701	14,440
Computerised Tomography	3,467	613	585	2,987	1,010	2,119	10,781
Peripheral neurophysiology	265	132	131	631	411	8,052	9,622
Plain Film Xrays	5,824	605	360	1,609	8	4	8,410
Gastroscopy	1,154	404	397	2,072	856	3,459	8,342
Pure tone audiometry	741	242	1,133	2,705	1,251	1,854	7,926
Colonoscopy	1,061	318	328	1,635	497	3,294	7,133
DEXA Scan	1,118	368	356	1,863	576	2,743	7,024
Ambulatory ECG monitoring (24 hr holter)	1,070	381	286	1,239	293	1,910	5,179
Flexi sigmoidoscopy	431	128	149	849	363	2,305	4,225
Sleep studies	318	119	135	838	217	361	1,988
Barium Studies/Fluoroscopy	429	104	104	472	261	610	1,980
Magnetic Resonance Imaging (Cardiac)	224	86	101	268	216	1,030	1,925
Cystoscopy	525	117	100	264	106	590	1,702
Spirometry (inc.flow volume curves)	388	85	130	633	205	127	1,568
Arthroscopy	30	6	8	141	98	1,183	1,466
Ambulatory BP	179	64	90	565	182	267	1,347
Other	2,748	751	863	3,629	1,214	4,665	13,870
All diagnostic tests	31,932	7,246	7,747	36,728	13,357	52,393	149,403

Source: SDR1

¹Refer to Explanatory Notes 1–15 & 22-25

Table 4: Number of diagnostic tests reported and dispatched by priority of report – QE June 2020²

Priority of Report	Diagnostic Category	Current Quarter (Jun 2020)	Previous Quarter (Mar 2020)	Same Quarter Last Year (Jun 2019)
Urgent	Imaging	44,363	56,755	56,073
	Physiological Measurement	5,089	6,215	5,220
Routine	Imaging	180,885	324,417	347,564
	Physiological Measurement	4,682	20,625	18,728
Total	Imaging	225,248	381,172	403,637
	Physiological Measurement	9,771	26,840	23,948

Source: DRTT Return

²Refer to Explanatory Notes 1-3, 5 & 16–25

Table 5: Number of urgent diagnostic tests reported and dispatched – QE June 2020²

Urgent Diagnostic Tests	Current Quarter (Jun 2020)	Previous Quarter (Mar 2020)	Same Quarter Last Year (Jun 2019)
Total reported	49,452	62,970	61,293
Number reported within 2 days	45,613	53,797	51,511
<i>% reported on within 2 days</i>	<i>92.2%</i>	<i>85.4%</i>	<i>84.0%</i>

Source: DRTT Return

²Refer to Explanatory Notes 1-3, 5 & 16–25

Table 6: Number of urgent diagnostic tests reported and dispatched by diagnostic category and time in days– QE June 2020²

Diagnostic Category	Length of time reporting in days				Total Reported
	0 - 2 days	>2 - 14 days	>14 - 28 days	>28 days	
Imaging	40,838	3,074	380	71	44,363
Physiological Measurement	4,775	262	30	22	5,089
Total	45,613	3,336	410	93	49,452

Source: DRTT Return

²Refer 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 June 2020²

HSC Trust	Length of time reporting in days				Total Reported
	0 - 2 days	>2 - 14 days	>14 - 28 days	>28 days	
Belfast	6,892	1,038	268	55	8,253
Northern	11,954	625	55	8	12,642
South Eastern	6,012	258	18	0	6,288
Southern	9,874	1,026	53	20	10,973
Western	10,881	389	16	10	11,296
Total	45,613	3,336	410	93	49,452

Source: DRTT Return

²Refer 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/articles/diagnostic-waiting-times>.
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-june-2020>
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 202/21 Ministerial diagnostic waiting time target, states that, by March 2021, 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 2020/21 Ministerial diagnostic reporting turnaround target, states that, by March 2021, 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/publications/northern-ireland-waiting-time-statistics-diagnostic-waiting-times-june-2020>
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 September 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 30th September 2020 will be released on Thursday 26th November 2020.

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

This Statistical bulletin and others published by Hospital Information Branch are available to download from the DoH Internet site at:

<https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/publications/type/statisticalreports>