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Northern Ireland Waiting Time Statistics: Diagnostic Waiting Times Quarter Ending September 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 September 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.

Price: Free

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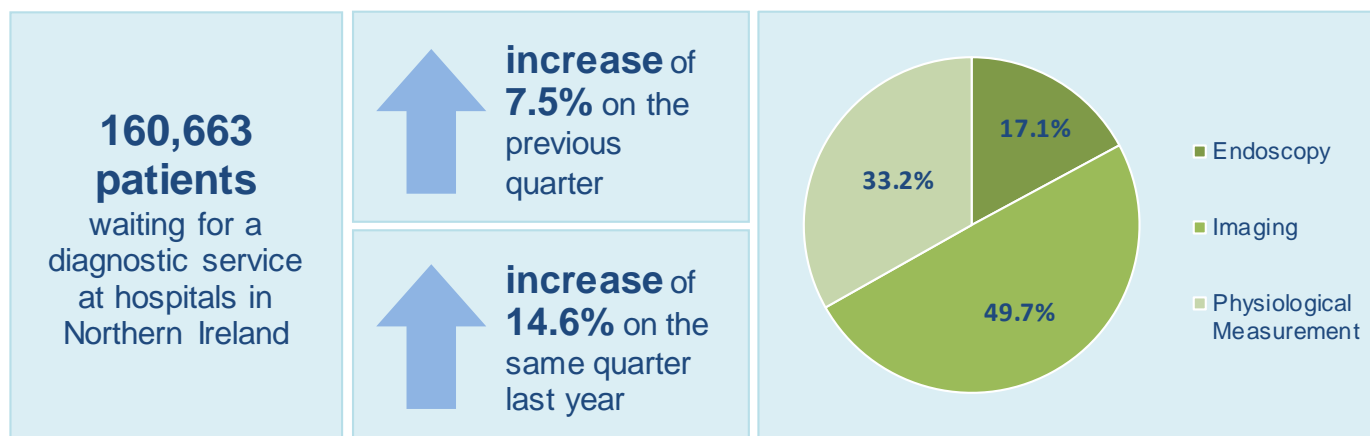
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By March 2021, 75% of patients should wait no longer than 9 weeks for a diagnostic test, with no patient waiting longer than 26 weeks.

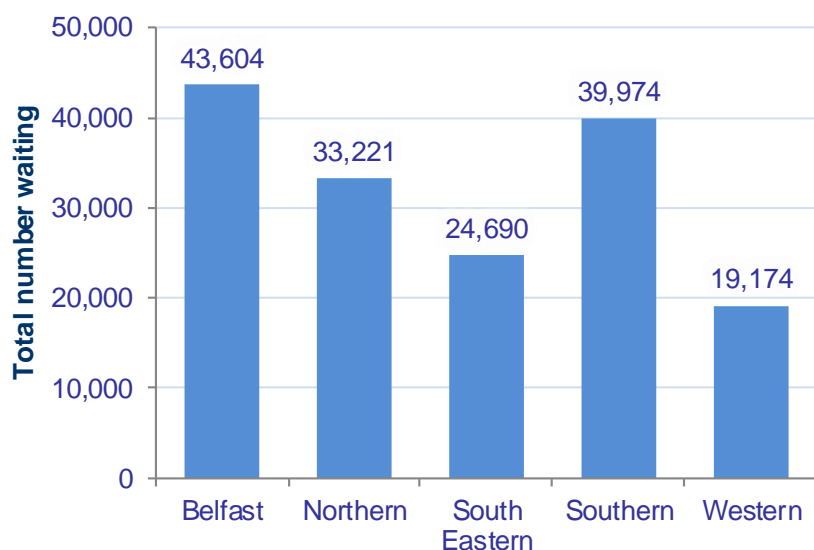
Total number of patients waiting at 30th September 2020



Source: SDR1

At 30th September 2020, a total of 160,663 patients were waiting for a diagnostic test, 7.5% (11,260) more than at 30th June 2020 (149,403), and 14.6% (20,426) more than at 30th September 2019 (140,237) (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).



More than a quarter (27.1%) were waiting for diagnostic tests in the Belfast HSC Trust, with a further 24.9% in the Southern HSC Trust, 20.7% in the Northern HSC Trust, 15.4% in the South Eastern HSC Trust and 11.9% in the Western HSC Trust (Table 2).

Source: SDR1

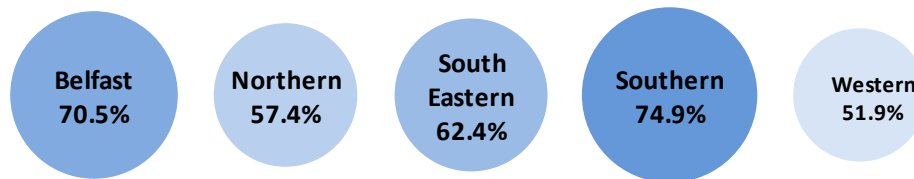
Over three fifths (61.4%, 98,640) of the 160,663 patients were waiting for a diagnostic test within one of the following seven diagnostic services: Non-obstetric Ultrasound; Echocardiography; Magnetic Resonance Imaging; Plain Film X-Rays; DEXA Scans; Computerised Tomography and Peripheral Neurophysiology. (Table 3).

Patients waiting more than 9 weeks at 30th September 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

65.4%
of patients were waiting longer than 9 weeks



Percentage waiting over 9 weeks

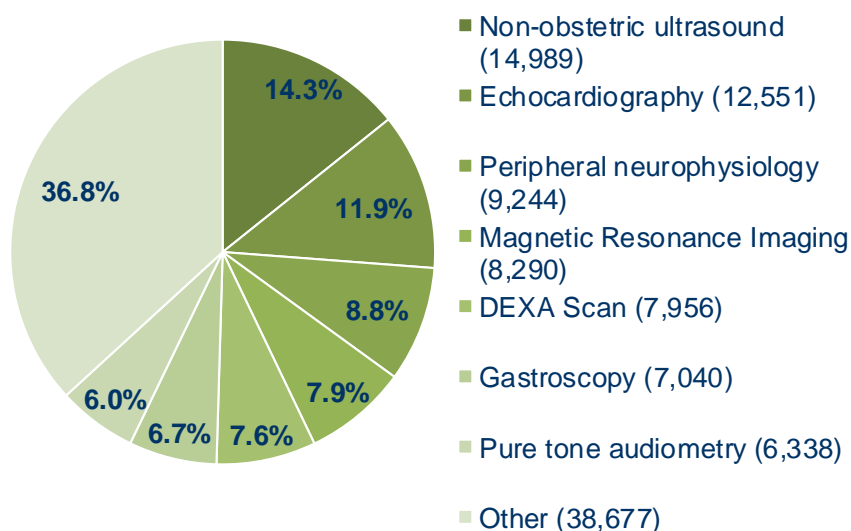
Source: SRD1

At 30th September 2020, 65.4% (105,085) of patients were waiting more than 9 weeks for a diagnostic test, compared with 73.8% (110,225) at 30th June 2020 and 56.9% (79,842) at 30th September 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).

In the Southern HSC Trust, three-quarters (74.9%, 29,944) of patients were waiting longer than 9 weeks, 70.5% (30,735) in the Belfast HSC Trust, 62.4% (15,401) in the South Eastern HSC Trust, 57.4% (19,054) in the Northern HSC Trust and more than half (51.9%, 9,951) in the Western HSC Trust (Table 2).

Patients waiting over 9 weeks by diagnostic service



Of the 105,085 patients waiting more than 9 weeks, almost two thirds (63.2%, 66,408) were waiting for one of the following diagnostic tests: Non-Obstetric Ultrasound; Echocardiography; Peripheral Neurophysiology; Magnetic Resonance Imaging; DEXA Scan; Gastroscopy and Pure Tone Audiometry. (Table 3).

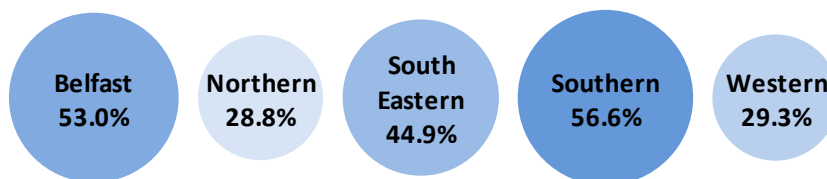
Source: SDR1

Patients waiting more than 26 weeks at 30th September 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

44.8%
of patients were waiting longer than 26 weeks



Percentage waiting over 26 weeks

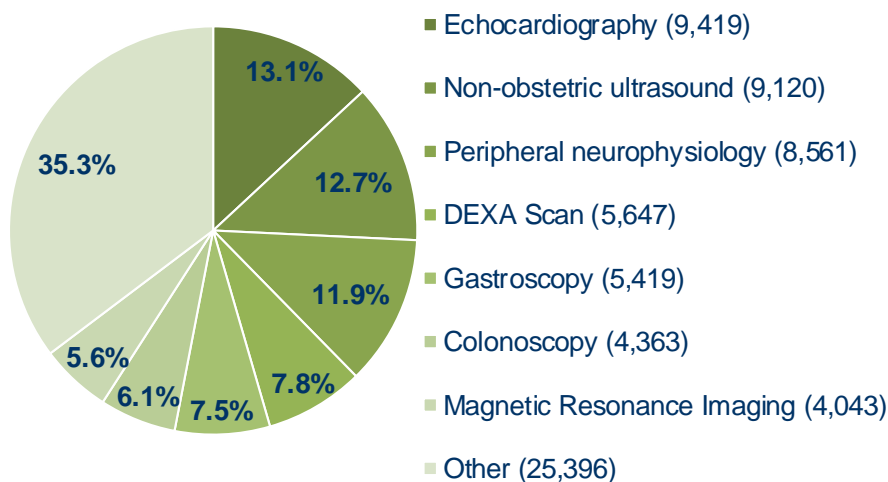
Source: SDR1

At 30th September 2020, 44.8% (71,968) of patients were waiting more than 26 weeks for a diagnostic test compared with 35.1% (52,393) at 30th June 2020 and 30.3% (42,546) at 30th September 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, more than half (56.6%, 22,612) were waiting longer than 26 weeks, 53.0% (23,101) in the Belfast HSC Trust, 44.9% (11,083) in the South Eastern HSC Trust, 29.3% (5,618) in the Western HSC Trust and 28.8% (9,554) in the Northern HSC Trust (Table 2).

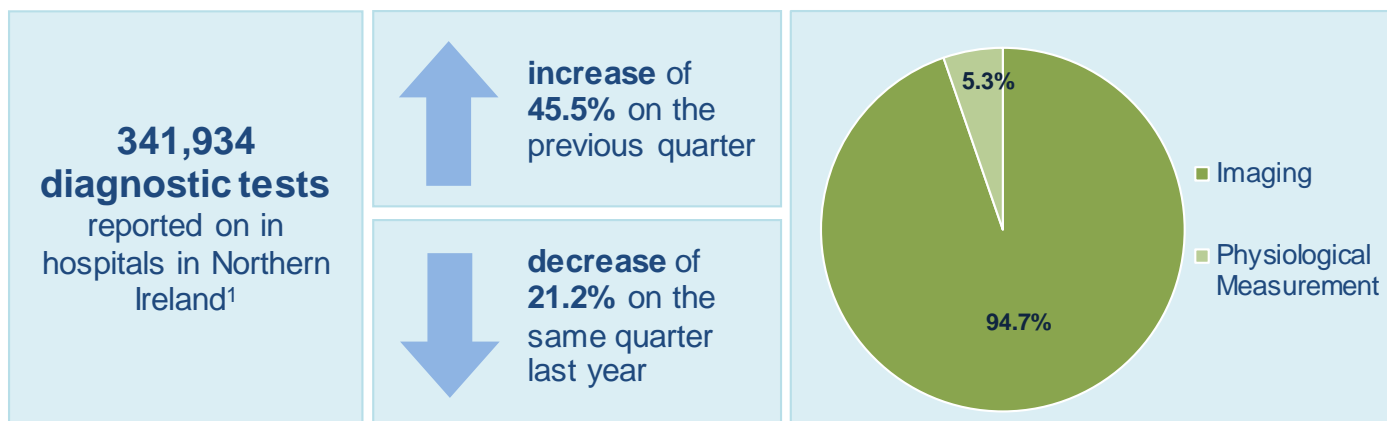
Patients waiting over 26 weeks by diagnostic service



Source: SDR1

Almost two-thirds (64.7%, 46,572) of the 71,968 patients waiting more than 26 weeks were waiting for one of the following diagnostic tests: Echocardiography; Non-Obstetric Ultrasound; Peripheral Neurophysiology; DEXA Scan; Gastroscopy; Colonoscopy and Magnetic Resonance Imaging. (Table 3).

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

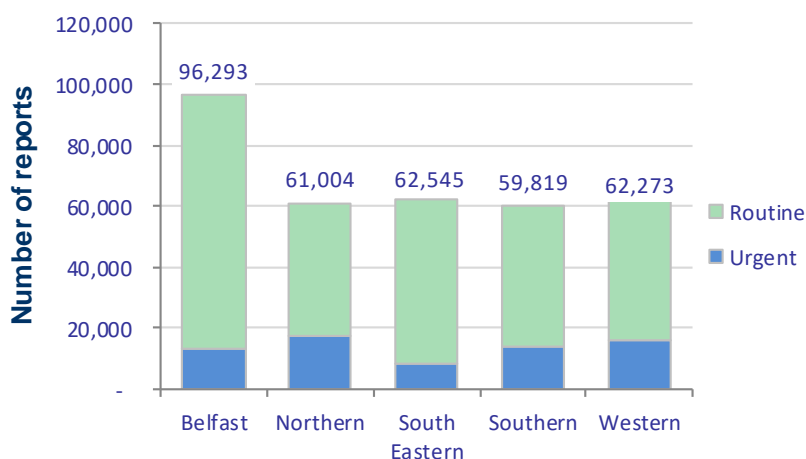


Source: DRTT Return

A total of 341,934 diagnostic tests were reported on and dispatched to the referring clinician at hospitals in Northern Ireland during the quarter ending September 2020, 45.5% (106,915) more than the quarter ending June 2020 (235,019), and 21.2% (92,073) fewer than the quarter ending September 2019 (434,007) (Table 4).

Of the 341,934 reported diagnostic tests, 94.7% (323,844) were reporting on an Imaging test and 5.3% (18,090) were reporting on a Physiological Measurement test (Table 4).

Approximately a fifth (20.2%, 69,134) of the diagnostic tests reported on during quarter ending September 2020 were urgent diagnostic tests, with the remaining 79.8% (272,800) being routine diagnostic tests¹ (Table 4).



More than a quarter (28.2%) of diagnostic tests were reported and dispatched in the Belfast HSC Trust, with a further 18.3% in the South Eastern HSC Trust, 18.2% in the Western HSC Trust, 17.8% in the Northern HSC Trust and 17.5% 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 September 2020

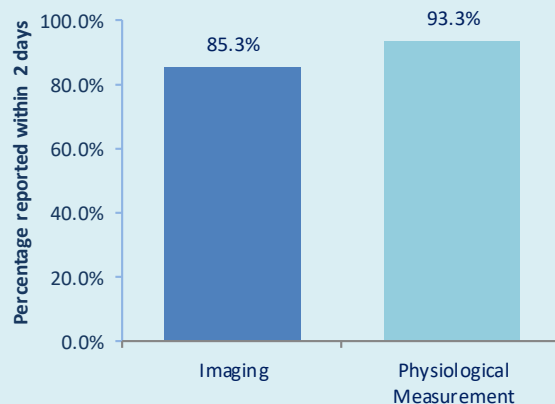
By March 2021, all urgent diagnostic tests should be reported on within 2 days of the test being undertaken.

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

↓ decrease of **6.1 percentage points** on the previous quarter

86.2% of urgent diagnostic tests reported on within 2 days

↑ Increase of **1.1 percentage points** on the same quarter last year

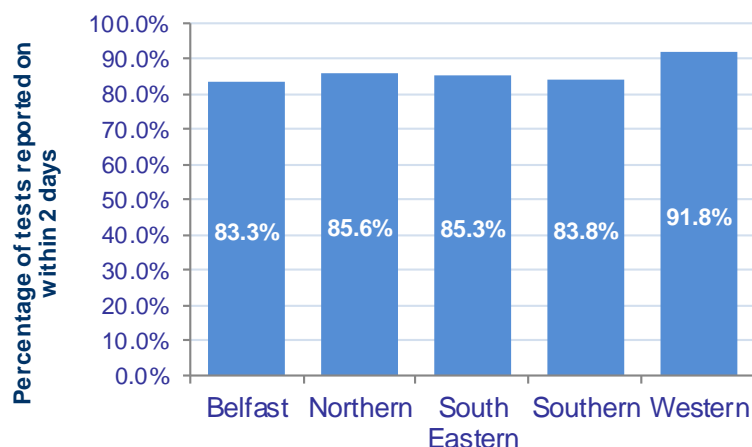


Source: DRTT Return

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

Of the 69,134 urgent diagnostic tests reported on during quarter ending September 2020, 86.2% (59,577) were reported on within 2 days, compared with 92.2% (45,613) during the quarter ending June 2020 and 85.1% (53,098) during the quarter ending September 2019 (Table 5).

Of the 69,134 urgent diagnostic tests, 61,465 were imaging reports and 7,669 were physiological measurement reports. A total of 85.3% of urgent imaging tests were reported on within 2 days compared with 93.3% of urgent physiological measurement tests (Table 6).



During the quarter ending September 2020, the 2 day target was not achieved by any HSC Trust, although the Western Trust reported on 91.8% 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 September 2020¹

Diagnostic Category		Current Quarter (September 2020)	Previous Quarter (June 2020)	Same Quarter Last Year (September 2019)
Imaging	Total Patients Waiting	79,847	71,984	70,165
	Number waiting over 9 weeks	42,686	45,952	34,467
	<i>Percentage waiting over 9 weeks</i>	53.5%	63.8%	49.1%
	Number waiting over 26 weeks	24,943	16,746	16,999
Physiological Measurement	Total Patients Waiting	53,304	51,710	49,443
	Number waiting over 9 weeks	41,330	43,183	33,234
	<i>Percentage waiting over 9 weeks</i>	77.5%	83.5%	67.2%
	Number waiting over 26 weeks	30,116	23,313	19,358
Endoscopy	Total Patients Waiting	27,512	25,709	20,629
	Number waiting over 9 weeks	21,069	21,090	12,141
	<i>Percentage waiting over 9 weeks</i>	76.6%	82.0%	58.9%
	Number waiting over 26 weeks	16,909	12,334	6,189
Total	Total Patients Waiting	160,663	149,403	140,237
	Number waiting over 9 weeks	105,085	110,225	79,842
	<i>Percentage waiting over 9 weeks</i>	65.4%	73.8%	56.9%
	Number waiting over 26 weeks	71,968	52,393	42,546

Source: SDR1

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

Table 2: Number of patients waiting for a diagnostic service, by HSC Trust – 30th September 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	10,550	2,319	2,512	3,661	1,461	23,101	43,604
Northern	10,810	3,357	3,325	4,798	1,377	9,554	33,221
South Eastern	7,972	1,317	1,472	2,018	828	11,083	24,690
Southern	7,679	2,351	2,106	3,174	2,052	22,612	39,974
Western	7,608	1,615	1,704	1,981	648	5,618	19,174
Total	44,619	10,959	11,119	15,632	6,366	71,968	160,663

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 September 2020¹

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	9,133	2,103	1,999	2,985	885	9,120	26,225
Echocardiography	1,819	752	894	1,544	694	9,419	15,122
Magnetic Resonance Imaging	5,154	1,296	1,419	2,221	607	4,043	14,740
Plain Film Xrays	8,900	1,319	887	1,258	66	24	12,454
DEXA Scan	1,552	735	789	1,056	464	5,647	10,243
Computerised Tomography	4,341	758	671	872	353	3,206	10,201
Peripheral neurophysiology	274	137	191	319	173	8,561	9,655
Gastroscopy	1,982	490	575	695	351	5,419	9,512
Pure tone audiometry	1,303	499	673	863	1,288	3,514	8,140
Colonoscopy	1,389	370	339	483	224	4,363	7,168
Ambulatory ECG monitoring (24 hr holter)	1,215	410	371	379	92	2,186	4,653
Flexi sigmoidoscopy	556	210	221	330	137	3,018	4,472
Magnetic Resonance Imaging - Cardiac Barium	241	99	118	228	156	1,474	2,316
Studies/Fluoroscopy	555	145	162	194	67	1,075	2,198
Spirometry inc.flow volume curves	681	195	227	267	101	504	1,975
Cystoscopy	667	168	133	149	57	765	1,939
Sleep studies	571	183	180	168	63	670	1,835
Transfer Factor	504	140	183	193	81	403	1,504
Arthroscopy	45	16	25	37	7	1,361	1,491
Other	3,737	934	1,062	1,391	500	7,196	14,820
All diagnostic tests	44,619	10,959	11,119	15,632	6,366	71,968	160,663

Source: SDR1

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

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

Priority of Report	Diagnostic Category	Current Quarter (Sep 2020)	Previous Quarter (Jun 2020)	Same Quarter Last Year (Sep 2019)
Urgent	Imaging	61,465	44,363	56,430
	Physiological Measurement	7,669	5,089	5,987
Routine	Imaging	262,379	180,885	351,907
	Physiological Measurement	10,421	4,682	19,683
Total	Imaging	323,844	225,248	408,337
	Physiological Measurement	18,090	9,771	25,670

Source: DRTT Return

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

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

Urgent Diagnostic Tests	Current Quarter (Sep 2020)	Previous Quarter (Jun 2020)	Same Quarter Last Year (Sep 2019)
Total reported	69,134	49,452	62,417
Number reported within 2 days	59,577	45,613	53,098
<i>% reported on within 2 days</i>	<i>86.2%</i>	<i>92.2%</i>	<i>85.1%</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 September 2020²

Diagnostic Category	Length of time reporting in days				Total Reported
	0 - 2 days	>2 - 14 days	>14 - 28 days	>28 days	
Imaging	52,421	7,932	797	315	61,465
Physiological Measurement	7,156	419	70	24	7,669
Total	59,577	8,351	867	339	69,134

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 September 2020²

HSC Trust	Length of time reporting in days				Total Reported
	0 - 2 days	>2 - 14 days	>14 - 28 days	>28 days	
Belfast	11,187	1,719	319	205	13,430
Northern	15,156	2,459	71	19	17,705
South Eastern	6,870	1,107	67	10	8,054
Southern	11,859	1,861	345	87	14,152
Western	14,505	1,205	65	18	15,793
Total	59,577	8,351	867	339	69,134

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-September-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-September-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 31st December 2020 will be released on Thursday 25th February 2021.

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>