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DIRECTORATE



Northern Ireland Waiting Time Statistics: Diagnostic Waiting Times Quarter Ending June 2021

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 2021/22 Ministerial waiting time target and the draft 2021/22 Ministerial diagnostic reporting turnaround target:

“By March 2022, 75% of patients should wait no longer than 9 weeks for a diagnostic test, with no patient waiting longer than 26 weeks”.

“By March 2022, 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 2021. 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 may not have 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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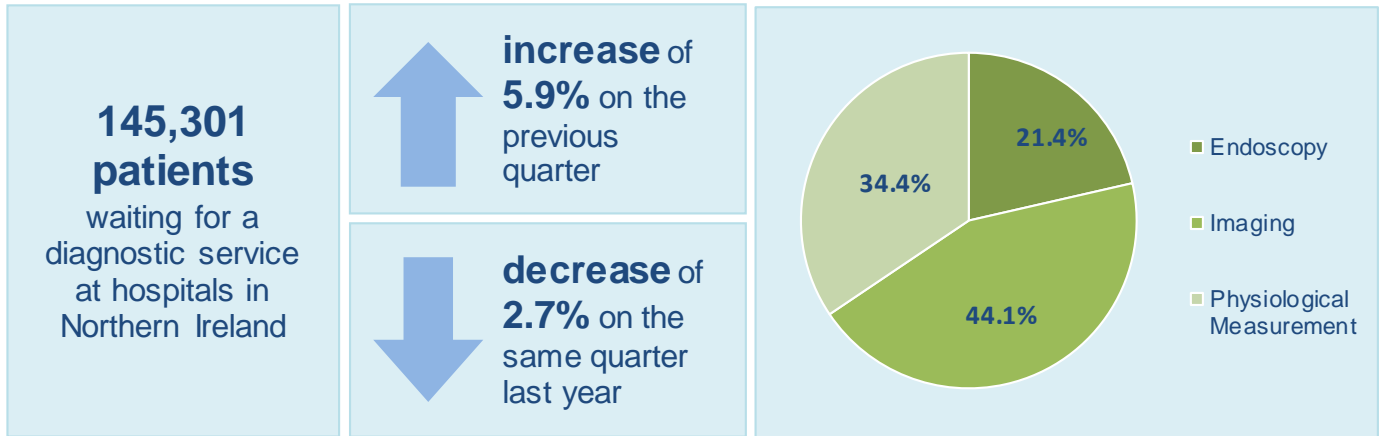
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By March 2022, 75% of patients should wait no longer than 9 weeks for a diagnostic test, with no patient waiting longer than 26 weeks.

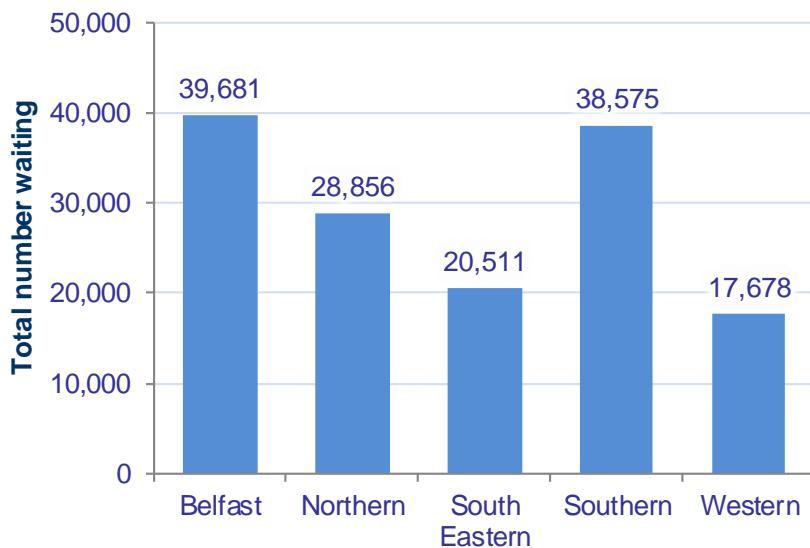
Total number of patients waiting at 30th June 2021



Source: SDR1

At 30th June 2021, a total of 145,301 patients were waiting for a diagnostic test, 5.9% (8,066) more than at 31st March 2021 (137,235), and 2.7% (4,102) fewer than at 30th June 2020 (149,403) (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 half of all patients waiting for diagnostic tests were in the Belfast (27.3%) and Southern (26.5%) HSC Trusts, with a further 19.9% in the Northern HSC Trust, 14.1% in the South Eastern HSC Trust and 12.2% in the Western HSC Trust (Table 2).

Source: SDR1

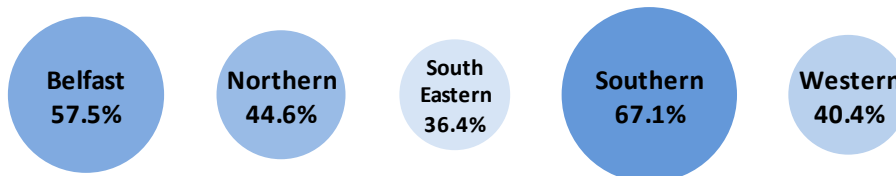
More than half (51.4%, 74,702) of the 145,301 patients were waiting for a diagnostic test within one of the following diagnostic services: Non-Obstetric Ultrasound; Echocardiography; Magnetic Resonance Imaging; Plain Film X-Rays; Gastroscopy and DEXA Scan. (Table 3).

Patients waiting more than 9 weeks at 30th June 2021

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 any HSC Trust

52.4%
of patients were waiting longer than 9 weeks



Percentage waiting over 9 weeks

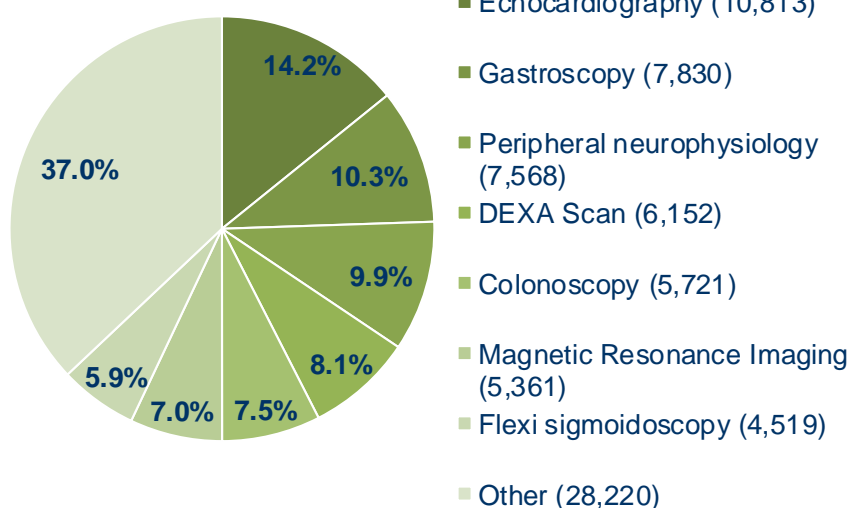
Source: SRD1

At 30th June 2021, 52.4% (76,184) of patients were waiting more than 9 weeks for a diagnostic test, compared with 56.7% (77,844) at 31st March 2021 and 73.8% (110,225) at 30th June 2020 (Table 1).

The 9 week element of the target was not achieved by Northern Ireland as a whole, nor 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, two thirds (67.1%, 25,895) of patients were waiting longer than 9 weeks, 57.5% (22,830) in the Belfast HSC Trust, 44.6% (12,858) in the Northern HSC Trust, 40.4% (7,137) in the Western HSC Trust and 36.4% (7,464) in the South Eastern HSC Trust (Table 2).

Patients waiting over 9 weeks by diagnostic service



Of the 76,184 patients waiting over 9 weeks, almost two thirds (63.0%, 47,964) were waiting for one of the following diagnostic tests: Echocardiography; Gastroscopy; Peripheral Neurophysiology; DEXA Scan; Colonoscopy; Magnetic Resonance Imaging and Flexi Sigmoidoscopy. (Table 3).

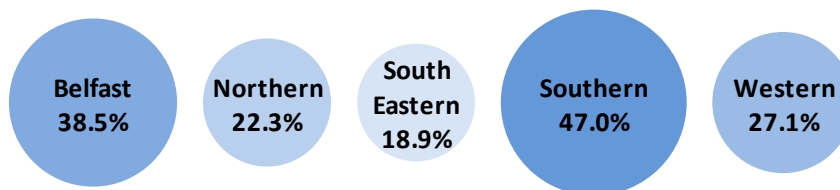
Source: SDR1

Patients waiting more than 26 weeks at 30th June 2021

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 any HSC Trust

33.4%
of patients were waiting longer than 26 weeks



Percentage waiting over 26 weeks

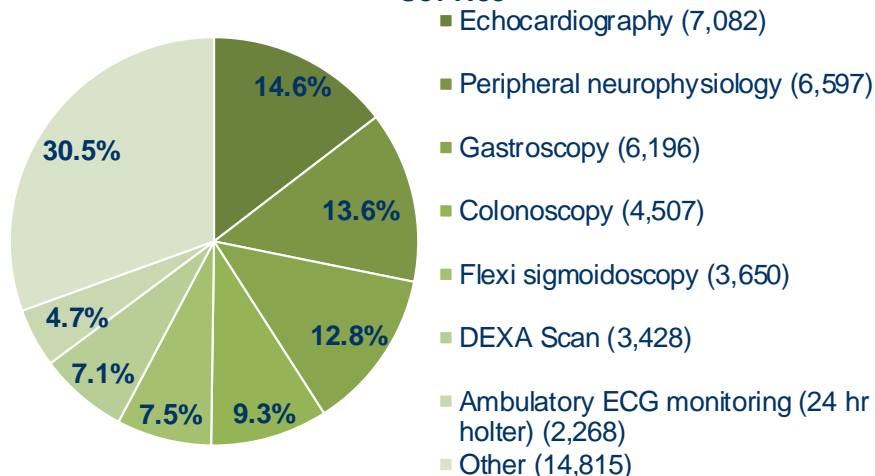
Source: SDR1

At 30th June 2021, 33.4% (48,543) of patients were waiting more than 26 weeks for a diagnostic test compared with 37.4% (51,259) at 31st March 2021 and 35.1% (52,393) at 30th June 2020 (Table 1).

The 26 week element of the target was not achieved by Northern Ireland as a whole nor 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, almost half (47.0%, 18,148) were waiting longer than 26 weeks, 38.5% (15,281) in the Belfast HSC Trust, 27.1% (4,799) in the Western HSC Trust, 22.3% (6,445) in the Northern HSC Trust and 18.9% (3,870) in the South Eastern HSC Trust (Table 2).

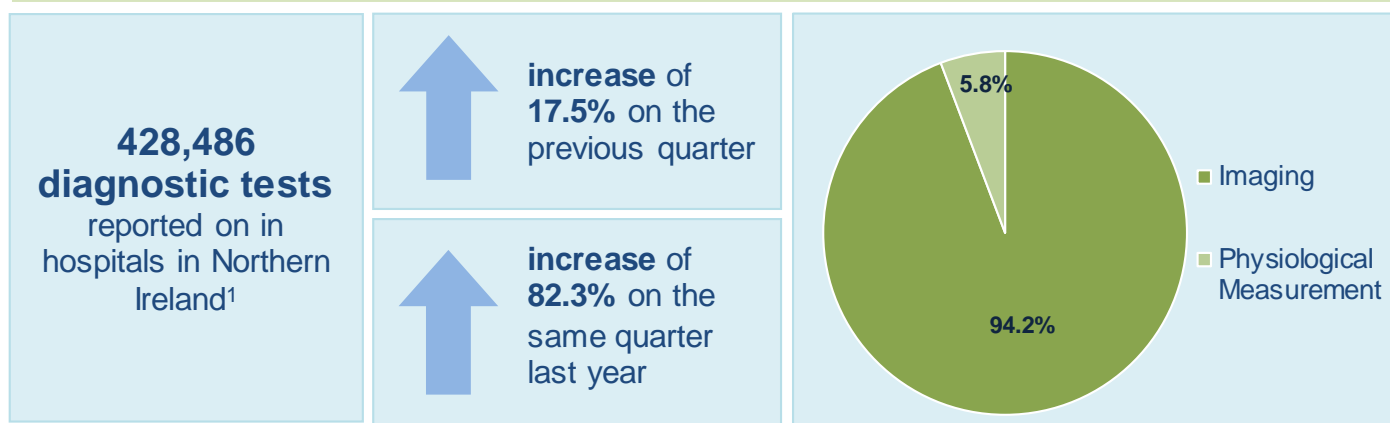
Patients waiting over 26 weeks by diagnostic service



Around two-thirds (69.5%, 33,728) of the 48,543 patients waiting more than 26 weeks were waiting for one of the following diagnostic tests: Echocardiography; Peripheral Neurophysiology; Gastroscopy; Colonoscopy; Flexi Sigmoidoscopy; DEXA Scan and Ambulatory ECG Monitoring (24 Hr Holter). (Table 3).

Source: SDR1

Total number of diagnostic tests reported on during quarter ending June 2021

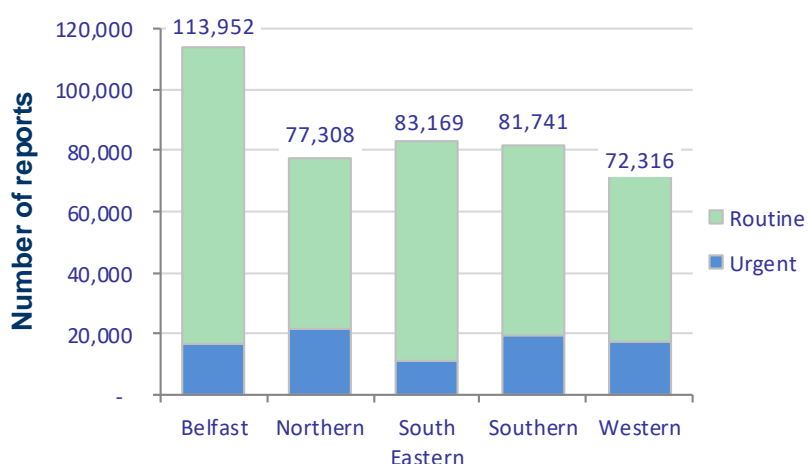


Source: DRTT Return

A total of 428,486 diagnostic tests were reported on and dispatched to the referring clinician at hospitals in Northern Ireland during the quarter ending June 2021, 17.5% (63,696) more than the quarter ending March 2021 (364,790), and 82.3% (193,467) more than the quarter ending June 2020 (235,019) (Table 4).¹

Of the 428,486 reported diagnostic tests, 94.2% (403,813) were reporting on an Imaging test and 5.8% (24,673) were reporting on a Physiological Measurement test² (Table 4).

A fifth (20.0%, 85,629) of the diagnostic tests reported on during quarter ending June 2021 were urgent diagnostic tests, with the remaining 80.0% (342,857) being routine diagnostic tests (Table 4).



More than a quarter (26.6%) of diagnostic tests were reported and dispatched in the Belfast HSC Trust, with a further 19.4% in the South Eastern HSC Trust, 19.1% in the Southern HSC Trust, 18.0% in the Northern HSC Trust and 16.9% in the Western HSC Trust¹.

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 2021

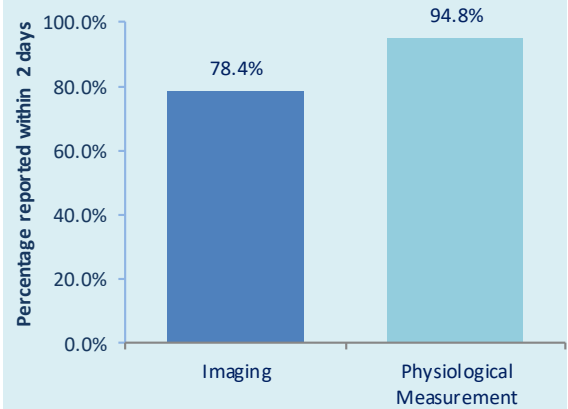
By March 2022, all urgent diagnostic tests should be reported on within 2 days of the test being undertaken.

This element was **not achieved** by any HSC Trust

↓ decrease of **4.1 percentage points** on the previous quarter

80.2% of urgent diagnostic tests reported on within 2 days

↓ decrease of **12.0 percentage points** on the same quarter last year

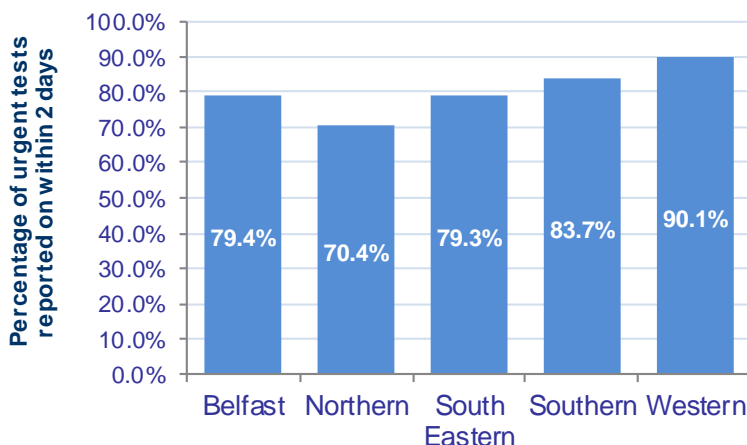


Source: DRTT Return

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

Of the 85,629 urgent diagnostic tests reported on during quarter ending June 2021, 80.2% (68,653) were reported on within 2 days, compared with 84.3% (65,413) during the quarter ending March 2021 and 92.2% (45,613) during the quarter ending June 2020 (Table 5).

Of the 85,629 urgent diagnostic tests, 76,136 were imaging reports and 9,493 were physiological measurement reports. A total of 78.4% of urgent imaging tests were reported on within 2 days compared with 94.8% of urgent physiological measurement tests (Table 6).



During the quarter ending June 2021, the 2 day target was not achieved by any HSC Trust. The Western Trust reported on 90.1% 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 2021¹

Diagnostic Category		Current Quarter (June 2021)	Previous Quarter (March 2021)	Same Quarter Last Year (June 2020)
Imaging	Total Patients Waiting	64,139	58,294	71,984
	Number waiting over 9 weeks	20,048	20,353	45,952
	<i>Percentage waiting over 9 weeks</i>	31.3%	34.9%	63.8%
	Number waiting over 26 weeks	8,709	10,011	16,746
Physiological Measurement	Total Patients Waiting	50,028	48,265	51,710
	Number waiting over 9 weeks	32,647	33,897	43,183
	<i>Percentage waiting over 9 weeks</i>	65.3%	70.2%	83.5%
	Number waiting over 26 weeks	21,161	23,223	23,313
Endoscopy	Total Patients Waiting	31,134	30,676	25,709
	Number waiting over 9 weeks	23,489	23,594	21,090
	<i>Percentage waiting over 9 weeks</i>	75.4%	76.9%	82.0%
	Number waiting over 26 weeks	18,673	18,025	12,334
Total	Total Patients Waiting	145,301	137,235	149,403
	Number waiting over 9 weeks	76,184	77,844	110,225
	<i>Percentage waiting over 9 weeks</i>	52.4%	56.7%	73.8%
	Number waiting over 26 weeks	48,543	51,259	52,393

Source: SDR1

¹Refer to Explanatory Notes 1–16 & 22-25

Table 2: Number of patients waiting for a diagnostic service, by HSC Trust – 30th June 2021¹

HSC Trust	Patients Waiting for Diagnostic Service by Weeks Waiting						Total Waiting
	0 - 6	>6 - 9	>9 - 13	>13 - 21	>21-26	>26	
Belfast	13,373	3,478	2,642	3,605	1,302	15,281	39,681
Northern	13,598	2,400	2,202	3,078	1,133	6,445	28,856
South Eastern	11,216	1,831	1,335	1,668	591	3,870	20,511
Southern	9,916	2,764	2,487	3,790	1,470	18,148	38,575
Western	8,723	1,818	920	1,052	366	4,799	17,678
Total	56,826	12,291	9,586	13,193	4,862	48,543	145,301

Source: SDR1

¹Refer to Explanatory Notes 1–16 & 22-25

Table 3: Number of patients waiting for a diagnostic service by type of service and weeks waiting – 30th June 2021¹

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	11,128	2,203	895	628	131	314	15,299
Echocardiography	3,114	1,034	1,135	1,760	836	7,082	14,961
Magnetic Resonance Imaging	6,574	1,827	1,469	2,023	544	1,325	13,762
Plain Film Xrays	10,623	294	16	4	6	2	10,945
Gastroscopy	2,281	549	482	754	398	6,196	10,660
DEXA Scan	2,086	837	853	1,391	480	3,428	9,075
Peripheral neurophysiology	496	198	292	490	189	6,597	8,262
Colonoscopy	1,691	373	355	570	289	4,507	7,785
Computerised Tomography	5,227	701	449	279	34	289	6,979
Pure tone audiometry	2,229	1,056	778	1,175	376	793	6,407
Flexi sigmoidoscopy	653	231	229	453	187	3,650	5,403
Ambulatory ECG monitoring (24 hr holter)	1,330	392	456	441	114	2,268	5,001
Spirometry inc.flow volume curves	1,442	389	270	358	53	752	3,264
Magnetic Resonance Imaging - Cardiac	264	100	169	287	143	1,825	2,788
Radio-Nuclide Imaging	904	209	188	463	283	621	2,668
Cystoscopy	833	242	190	254	71	987	2,577
Barium Studies/Fluoroscopy	669	195	157	279	129	896	2,325
Transfer Factor	1,082	275	207	265	47	408	2,284
Arthroscopy	56	37	41	60	55	1,330	1,579
Other	4,144	1,149	955	1,259	497	5,273	13,277
All diagnostic tests	56,826	12,291	9,586	13,193	4,862	48,543	145,301

Source: SDR1

¹Refer to Explanatory Notes 1–16 & 22-25

Table 4: Number of diagnostic tests reported and dispatched by priority of report – QE June 2021²

Priority of Report	Diagnostic Category	Current Quarter (Jun 2021)	Previous Quarter (Mar 2021)	Same Quarter Last Year (Jun 2020)
Urgent	Imaging	76,136	68,875	44,363
	Physiological Measurement	9,493	8,761	5,089
Routine	Imaging	327,677	273,431	180,885
	Physiological Measurement	15,180	13,723	4,682
Total	Imaging	403,813	342,306	225,248
	Physiological Measurement	24,673	22,484	9,771

Source: DRTT Return

²Refer to Explanatory Notes 1-5 & 17-25

Table 5: Number of urgent diagnostic tests reported and dispatched – QE June 2021²

Urgent Diagnostic Tests	Current Quarter (Jun 2021)	Previous Quarter (Mar 2021)	Same Quarter Last Year (Jun 2020)
Total reported	85,629	77,636	49,452
Number reported within 2 days	68,653	65,413	45,613
<i>% reported on within 2 days</i>	<i>80.2%</i>	<i>84.3%</i>	<i>92.2%</i>

Source: DRTT Return

²Refer to Explanatory Notes 1-5 & 17-25

Table 6: Number of urgent diagnostic tests reported and dispatched by diagnostic category and time in days– QE June 2021²

Diagnostic Category	Length of time reporting in days				Total Reported
	0 - 2 days	>2 - 14 days	>14 - 28 days	>28 days	
Imaging	59,656	14,666	1,214	600	76,136
Physiological Measurement	8,997	371	58	67	9,493
Total	68,653	15,037	1,272	667	85,629

Source: DRTT Return

²Refer to Explanatory Notes 1-5 & 17-25

Table 7: Number of urgent diagnostic tests reported and dispatched by HSC Trust and time in days – QE June 2021²

HSC Trust	Length of time reporting in days				Total Reported
	0 - 2 days	>2 - 14 days	>14 - 28 days	>28 days	
Belfast	12,985	2,788	328	262	16,363
Northern	15,331	5,656	549	238	21,774
South Eastern	8,866	2,161	144	10	11,181
Southern	16,098	2,857	186	101	19,242
Western	15,373	1,575	65	56	17,069
Total	68,653	15,037	1,272	667	85,629

Source: DRTT Return

²Refer to Explanatory Notes 1-5 & 17-25

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 SDR. 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-March-2021>
4. 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.
5. 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.
6. 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.
7. Due to technical issues, data for cardiology physiological measurement diagnostic tests from the Royal Belfast Hospital for Sick Children have not been available since February 2020. The impact of this on the statistics in this report is minimal. At February 2020, there were 321 patients waiting for this service, this was approximately 7% of the total waiting for Belfast HSC Trust's cardiology service.

8. 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.
9. 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.
10. 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.
11. 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.
12. A number of the diagnostic services, particularly endoscopies, reported on the SDR 1 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.
13. 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.

14. The draft 2021/22 Ministerial diagnostic waiting time target, states that, by March 2022, 75% of patients should wait no longer than 9 weeks for a diagnostic test, with no patient waiting longer than 26 weeks.
15. 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.
16. 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.
17. 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.
18. 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.
19. 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.
20. The draft 2021/22 Ministerial diagnostic reporting turnaround target, states that, by March 2022, all urgent diagnostic tests should be reported on within two days of the test being undertaken.
21. 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-March-2021>
22. 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.

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 2021 will be released on Thursday 25th November 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

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