

INFORMATION
ANALYSIS
DIRECTORATE



Northern Ireland Waiting Time Statistics: Diagnostic Waiting Times Quarter Ending March 2022

Reader Information

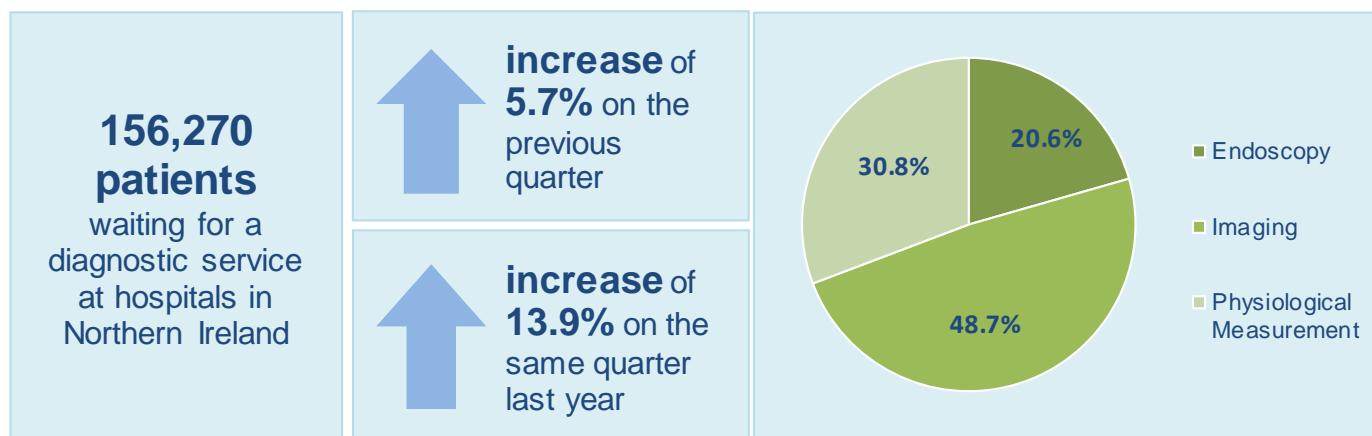
- Purpose:** This statistical release presents information on waiting times and reporting times for diagnostic services in Northern Ireland and reports on the performance of the Health and Social Care (HSC) Trusts against the draft 2021/22 Ministerial waiting time target and the draft 2021/22 Ministerial 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 31st March 2022. 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>
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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.

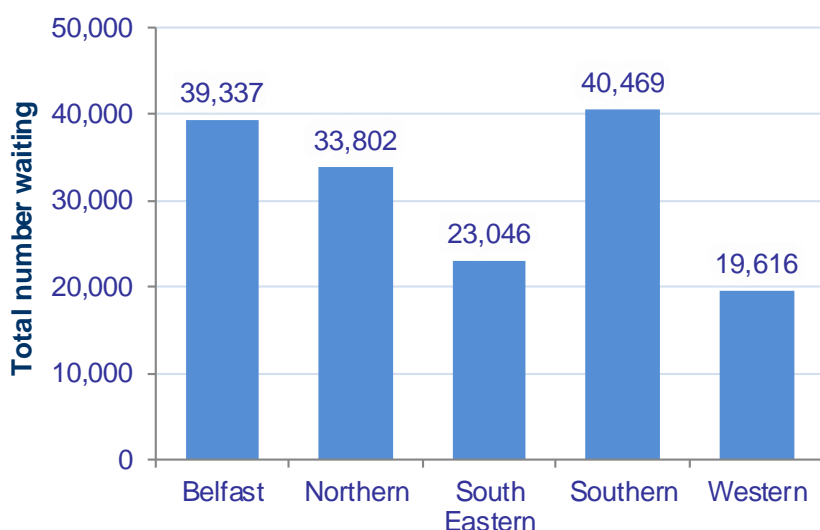
Total number of patients waiting at 31st March 2022



Source: SDR1

At 31st March 2022, a total of 156,270 patients were waiting for a diagnostic test, 5.7% (8,392) more than at 31st December 2021 (147,878), and 13.9% (19,035) more than at 31st March 2021 (137,235) (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 of all patients waiting for diagnostic tests were in each of the Southern (25.9%) and Belfast (25.2%) HSC Trusts, with a further 21.6% in the Northern HSC Trust, 14.7% in the South Eastern HSC Trust and 12.6% in the Western HSC Trust (Table 2).

Source: SDR1

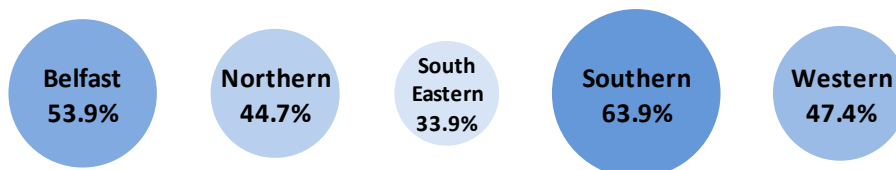
Around half (53.3%, 83,270) of the 156,270 patients were waiting for a diagnostic test within one of the following seven diagnostic services: Magnetic Resonance Imaging; Non-Obstetric Ultrasound; Echocardiography; Plain Film Xrays; Gastroscopy and Computerised Tomography. (Table 3).

Patients waiting more than 9 weeks at 31st March 2022

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

50.7%
of patients were waiting longer than 9 weeks



Percentage waiting over 9 weeks

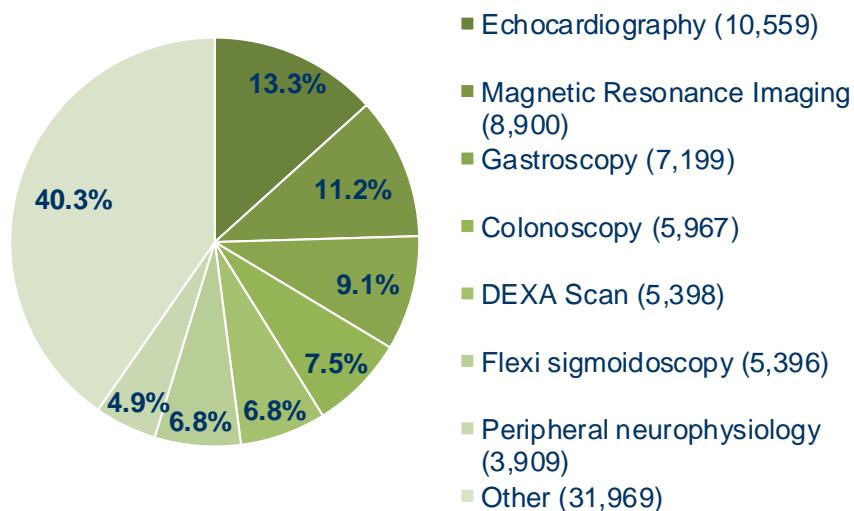
Source: SRD1

At 31st March 2022, 50.7% (79,297) of patients were waiting more than 9 weeks for a diagnostic test, compared with 56.6% (83,643) at 31st December 2021 and 56.7% (77,844) at 31st March 2021 (Table 1).

The 9 week element of the target was not achieved by any individual HSC Trust nor Northern Ireland as a whole. 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, almost two thirds (63.9%, 25,861) of patients were waiting longer than 9 weeks, 53.9% (21,212) in the Belfast HSC Trust, 47.4% (9,298) in the Western HSC Trust, 44.7% (15,122) in the Northern HSC Trust and 33.9% (7,804) in the South Eastern HSC Trust (Table 2).

Patients waiting over 9 weeks by diagnostic service



Of the 79,297 patients waiting over 9 weeks, around three fifths (59.7%, 47,328) were waiting for one of the following diagnostic tests: Echocardiography; Magnetic Resonance Imaging; Gastroscopy; Colonoscopy; DEXA Scan; Flexi Sigmoidoscopy and Peripheral Neurophysiology.

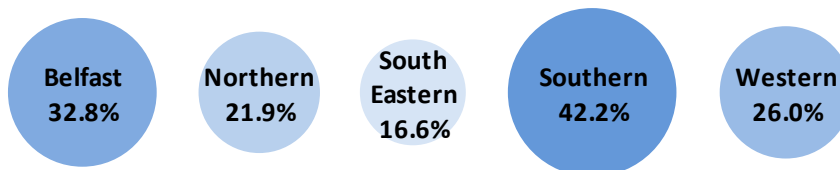
Source: SDR1

Patients waiting more than 26 weeks at 31st March 2022

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

29.6% of patients were waiting longer than 26 weeks



Percentage waiting over 26 weeks

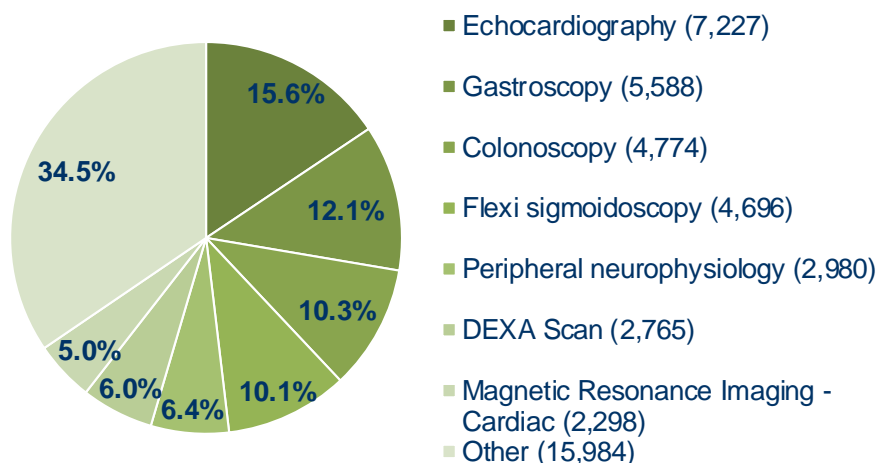
Source: SDR1

At 31st March 2022, 29.6% (46,312) of patients were waiting more than 26 weeks for a diagnostic test compared with 33.6% (49,632) at 31st December 2021 and 37.4% (51,259) at 31st March 2021 (Table 1).

The 26 week element of the target was not achieved by any individual HSC Trust nor Northern Ireland as a whole (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 two fifths (42.2%, 17,070) were waiting longer than 26 weeks, 32.8% (12,913) in the Belfast HSC Trust, 26.0% (5,097) in the Western HSC Trust, 21.9% (7,396) in the Northern HSC Trust and 16.6% (3,836) in the South Eastern HSC Trust (Table 2).

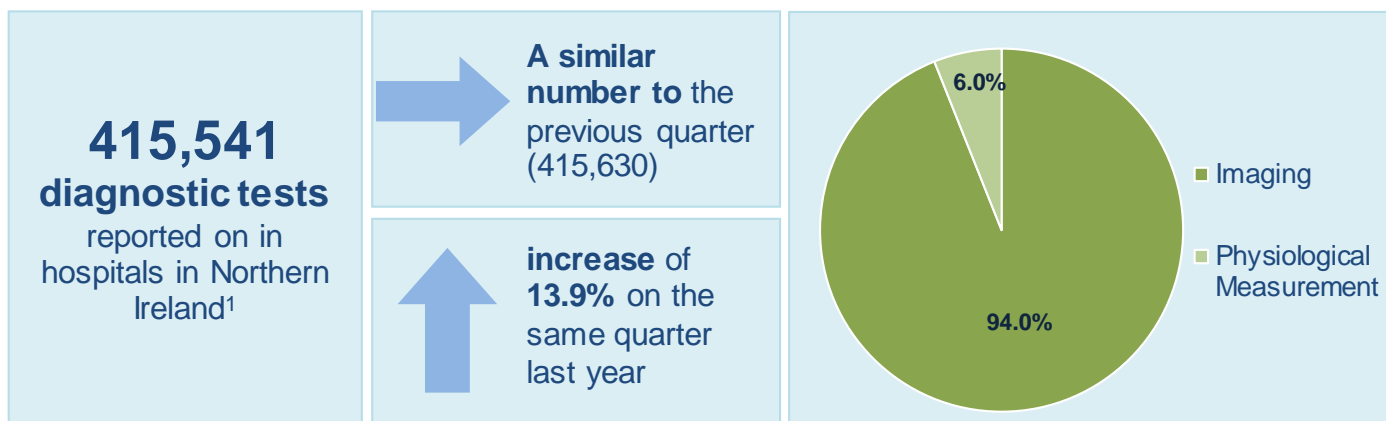
Patients waiting over 26 weeks by diagnostic service



Around three fifths (65.5%, 30,328) of the 46,312 patients waiting more than 26 weeks were waiting for one of the following diagnostic tests: Echocardiography; Gastroscopy; Colonoscopy; Flexi Sigmoidoscopy; Peripheral Neurophysiology; DEXA Scan and Magnetic Resonance Imaging (Cardiac).

Source: SDR1

Total number of diagnostic tests reported on during quarter ending March 2022

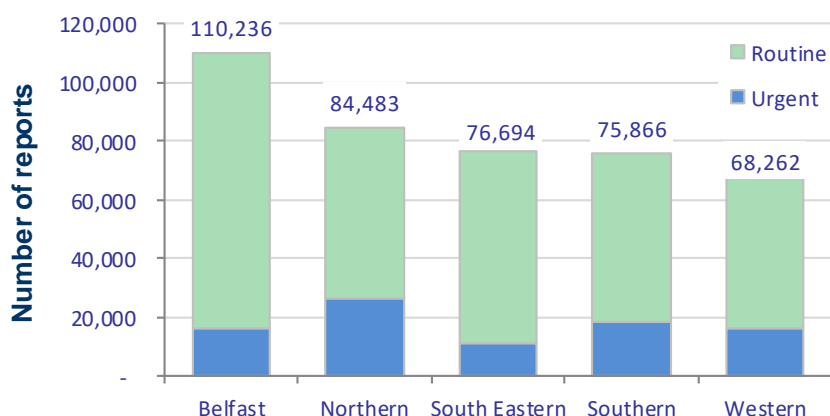


Source: DRTT Return

A total of 415,541 diagnostic tests were reported on and dispatched to the referring clinician at hospitals in Northern Ireland during the quarter ending March 2022, a similar number to the quarter ending December 2021 (415,630), and 13.9% (50,751) more than the quarter ending March 2021 (364,790) (Table 4).¹

Of the 415,541 reported diagnostic tests, 94.0% (390,454) were reporting on an Imaging test and 6.0% (25,087) were reporting on a Physiological Measurement test² (Table 4).

Over one fifth (21.1%, 87,549) of the diagnostic tests reported on during quarter ending March 2022 were urgent diagnostic tests, with the remaining 78.9% (327,992) being routine diagnostic tests (Table 4).



More than a quarter (26.5%) of diagnostic tests were reported and dispatched in the Belfast HSC Trust, with a further 20.3% in the Northern HSC Trust, 18.5% in the South Eastern HSC Trust, 18.3% in the Southern HSC Trust and 16.4% in the Western HSC Trust¹.

Source: DRTT Return

¹ Detailed reporting times of urgent and 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 March 2022

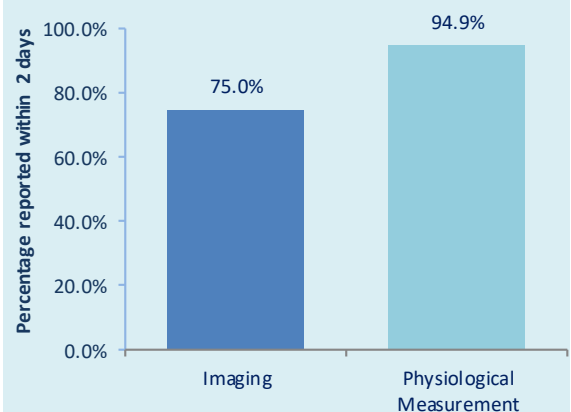
By March 2022, all urgent diagnostic tests should be reported on within 2 days of the test being undertaken.

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

↓ decrease of **0.8 percentage points** on the previous quarter

76.9% of urgent diagnostic tests reported on within 2 days

↓ decrease of **7.4 percentage points** on the same quarter last year

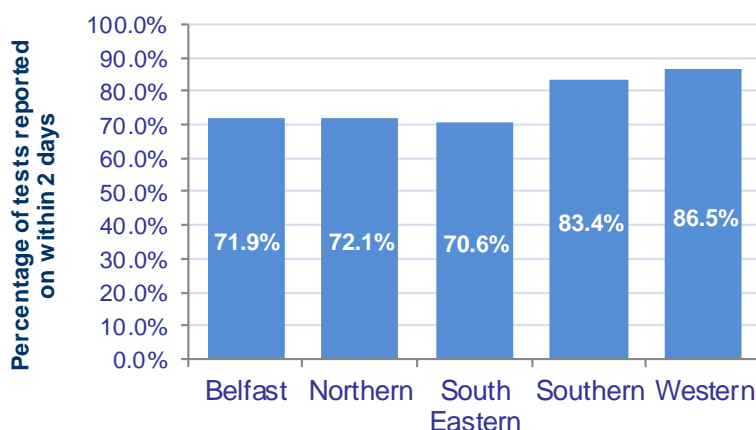


Source: DRTT Return

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

Of the 87,549 urgent diagnostic tests reported on during quarter ending March 2022, 76.9% (67,305) were reported on within 2 days, compared with 77.7% (67,798) during the quarter ending December 2021 and 84.3% (65,413) during the quarter ending March 2021 (Table 5).

Of the 87,549 urgent diagnostic tests, 79,175 were imaging reports and 8,374 were physiological measurement reports. A total of 75.0% of urgent imaging tests were reported on within 2 days compared with 94.9% of urgent physiological measurement tests (Table 6).



During the quarter ending March 2022, the 2 day target was not achieved by any HSC Trust. The Western Trust reported on 86.5% 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 – 31st March 2022¹

Diagnostic Category		Current Quarter (March 2022)	Previous Quarter (December 2021)	Same Quarter Last Year (March 2021)
Imaging	Total Patients Waiting	76,069	67,742	58,294
	Number waiting over 9 weeks	25,863	26,778	20,353
	<i>Percentage waiting over 9 weeks</i>	34.0%	39.5%	34.9%
	Number waiting over 26 weeks	10,242	10,950	10,011
Physiological Measurement	Total Patients Waiting	48,063	48,725	48,265
	Number waiting over 9 weeks	29,264	32,649	33,897
	<i>Percentage waiting over 9 weeks</i>	60.9%	67.0%	70.2%
	Number waiting over 26 weeks	16,748	19,359	23,223
Endoscopy	Total Patients Waiting	32,138	31,411	30,676
	Number waiting over 9 weeks	24,170	24,216	23,594
	<i>Percentage waiting over 9 weeks</i>	75.2%	77.1%	76.9%
	Number waiting over 26 weeks	19,322	19,323	18,025
Total	Total Patients Waiting	156,270	147,878	137,235
	Number waiting over 9 weeks	79,297	83,643	77,844
	<i>Percentage waiting over 9 weeks</i>	50.7%	56.6%	56.7%
	Number waiting over 26 weeks	46,312	49,632	51,259

Source: SDR1

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

Table 2: Number of patients waiting for a diagnostic service, by HSC Trust – 31st March 2022¹

HSC Trust	Patients Waiting for Diagnostic Service by Weeks Waiting						Total Waiting
	0 - 6	>6 - 9	>9 - 13	>13 - 21	>21-26	>26	
Belfast	14,460	3,665	2,956	3,798	1,545	12,913	39,337
Northern	15,688	2,992	2,603	3,400	1,723	7,396	33,802
South Eastern	12,654	2,588	1,695	1,583	690	3,836	23,046
Southern	11,168	3,440	2,517	4,131	2,143	17,070	40,469
Western	8,164	2,154	1,826	1,872	503	5,097	19,616
Total	62,134	14,839	11,597	14,784	6,604	46,312	156,270

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 – 31st March 2022¹

Diagnostic Test	Patients Waiting for Diagnostic Service by Weeks Waiting						Total Waiting
	0 - 6	>6 - 9	>9 - 13	>13 - 21	>21-26	>26	
Magnetic Resonance Imaging	7,456	2,582	2,395	3,228	1,179	2,098	18,938
Non-obstetric ultrasound	11,885	2,343	1,175	568	142	149	16,262
Echocardiography	3,042	1,005	901	1,509	922	7,227	14,606
Plain Film Xrays	13,230	815	65	51	4	0	14,165
Gastroscopy	2,192	514	509	678	424	5,588	9,905
Computerised Tomography	5,318	1,197	976	967	351	585	9,394
Colonoscopy	2,016	459	336	564	293	4,774	8,442
DEXA Scan	1,952	887	888	1,306	439	2,765	8,237
Pure tone audiometry	2,692	1,059	952	1,317	787	665	7,472
Flexi sigmoidoscopy	544	218	184	307	209	4,696	6,158
Ambulatory ECG monitoring (24 hr holter)	1,451	513	525	684	261	2,025	5,459
Peripheral neurophysiology	495	257	262	428	239	2,980	4,661
Radio-Nuclide Imaging	784	256	159	346	198	1,478	3,221
Magnetic Resonance Imaging - Cardiac	191	134	82	246	119	2,298	3,070
Spirometry inc.flow volume curves	1,334	331	286	261	72	556	2,840
Barium Studies/Fluoroscopy	673	199	258	288	165	860	2,443
Cystoscopy	882	270	215	257	71	592	2,287
Transfer Factor	931	267	205	199	48	347	1,997
Sleep studies	975	194	87	174	47	368	1,845
Other	4,091	1,339	1,137	1,406	634	6,261	14,868
All diagnostic tests	62,134	14,839	11,597	14,784	6,604	46,312	156,270

Source: SDR1

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

Table 4: Number of diagnostic tests reported and dispatched by priority of report – QE March 2022²

Priority of Report	Diagnostic Category	Current Quarter (Mar 2022)	Previous Quarter (Dec 2021)	Same Quarter Last Year (Mar 2021)
Urgent	Imaging	79,175	78,565	68,875
	Physiological Measurement	8,374	8,721	8,761
Routine	Imaging	311,279	310,803	273,431
	Physiological Measurement	16,713	17,541	13,723
Total	Imaging	390,454	389,368	342,306
	Physiological Measurement	25,087	26,262	22,484

Source: DRTT Return

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

Table 5: Number of urgent diagnostic tests reported and dispatched – QE March 2022²

Urgent Diagnostic Tests	Current Quarter (Mar 2022)	Previous Quarter (Dec 2021)	Same Quarter Last Year (Mar 2021)
Total reported	87,549	87,286	77,636
Number reported within 2 days	67,305	67,798	65,413
<i>% reported on within 2 days</i>	76.9%	77.7%	84.3%

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 March 2022²

Diagnostic Category	Length of time reporting in days				Total Reported
	0 - 2 days	>2 - 14 days	>14 - 28 days	>28 days	
Imaging	59,360	15,534	3,471	810	79,175
Physiological Measurement	7,945	277	79	73	8,374
Total	67,305	15,811	3,550	883	87,549

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 March 2022²

HSC Trust	Length of time reporting in days				Total Reported
	0 - 2 days	>2 - 14 days	>14 - 28 days	>28 days	
Belfast	11,632	2,807	1,085	652	16,176
Northern	18,736	5,305	1,914	46	26,001
South Eastern	7,733	3,000	203	19	10,955
Southern	15,438	2,717	258	93	18,506
Western	13,766	1,982	90	73	15,911
Total	67,305	15,811	3,550	883	87,549

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-2022>
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 Strategic Planning and Performance Group in the Department of Health 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 SDR1 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-2022>
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 June 2022 will be released on Thursday 25th August 2022.

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>