

INFORMATION
ANALYSIS
DIRECTORATE



Northern Ireland

Waiting Time Statistics:

Diagnostic Waiting Times

Quarter Ending December 2017



Department of
Health

An Roinn Sláinte

Máinnystrie O Poustie

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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 2017/18 Ministerial waiting time target and the draft 2017/18 Ministerial diagnostic reporting turnaround target:

“By March 2018, 75% of patients should wait no longer than 9 weeks for a diagnostic test, with no patient waiting longer than 26 weeks”.

“From April 2017, 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 December 2017. Data are presented by HSC Trust, diagnostic category, diagnostic test, and time band. Further information on routine diagnostic reporting times are available in the accompanying CSV file.

Statistical Quality: The ‘*Diagnostic Waiting Times Publication – Supporting Documentation*’ booklet details the technical guidance, definitions, as well as notes on how to use the data contained within this statistical release. This booklet is available to view or download from the following link:

<https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/publications/northern-ireland-waiting-time-statistics-diagnostic-waiting-times-december-2017>

Internet: <https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/articles/diagnostic-waiting-times>

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Target audience: Department of Health (DoH), Chief Executives of the HSC Board and Trusts in Northern Ireland, health care professionals, academics, and Health & Social Care stakeholders, the media and general public.

Price: Free

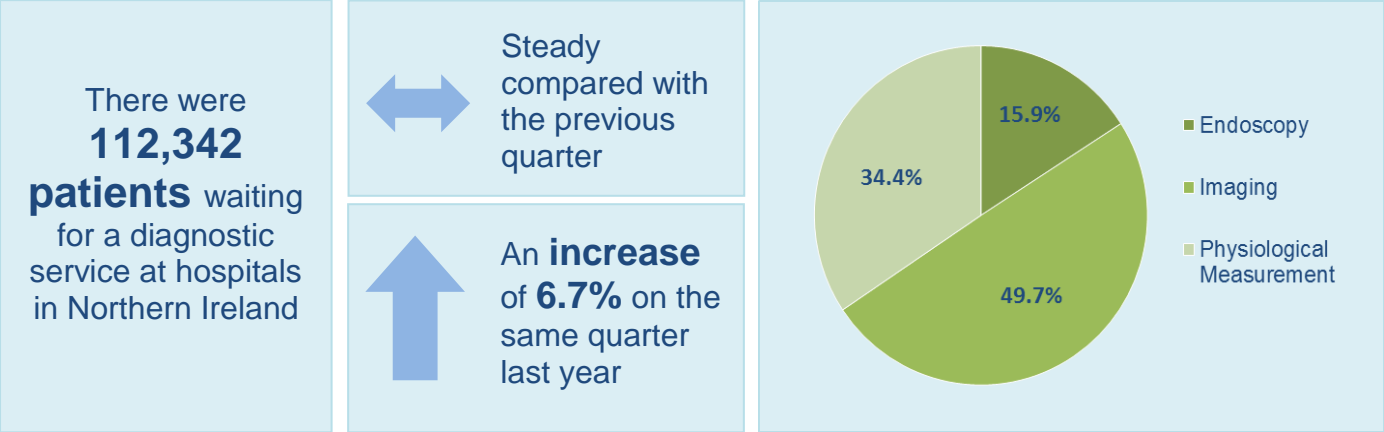
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By March 2018, 75% of patients should wait no longer than 9 weeks for a diagnostic test, with no patient waiting longer than 26 weeks.

Total number of patients waiting at 31st December 2017



Source: SDR1 Part 1&2

At 31st December 2017, a total of 112,342 patients were waiting for a diagnostic test, 179 less than at 30th September 2017 (112,521), and 6.7% (7,040) more than at 31st December 2016 (105,302) (Table 1).

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

Just over a third (34.0%) were waiting for diagnostic tests in the Belfast HSC Trust, with a further 24.1% in the Northern HSC Trust, 19.5% in the Southern HSC Trust, 13.1% in the South Eastern HSC Trust and 9.3% in the Western HSC Trust (Table 2).



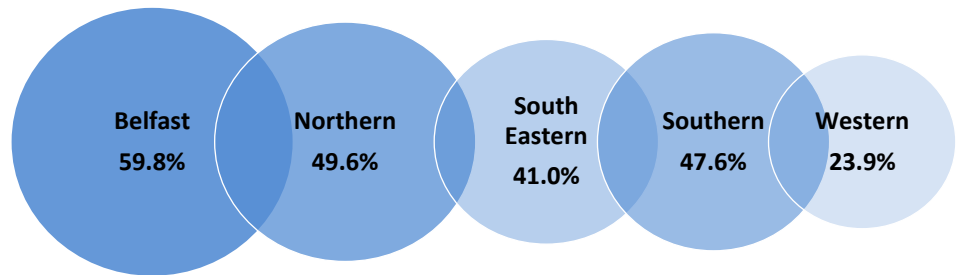
Over two-thirds (67.5%, 75,832) of the 112,342 patients were waiting for a diagnostic test within one of the following seven diagnostic services: Non-obstetric Ultrasound; Magnetic Resonance Imaging; Echocardiography; Computerised Tomography; Peripheral Neurophysiology; Gastroscopy; and DEXA scans (Table 3).

Source: SDR1 Part 1&2

Patients waiting more than 9 weeks at 31st December 2017

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

49.2%
of patients were waiting longer than 9 weeks



Patients waiting over 9 weeks

Source: SRD1 Part 1&2

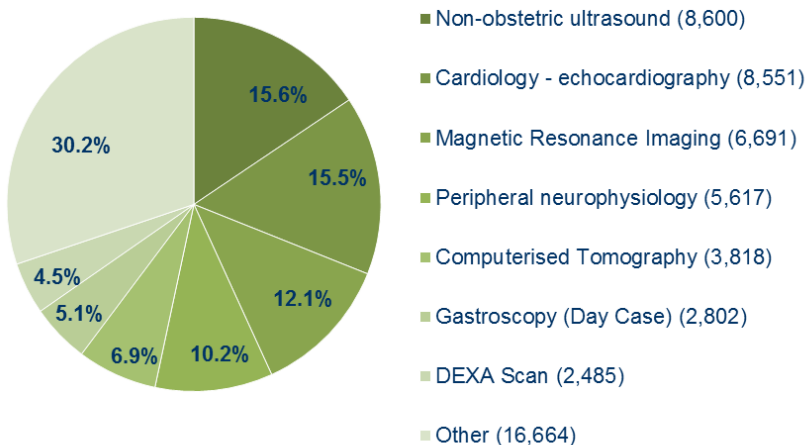
Achievement of the 9 week target requires that less than 25% of patients should be waiting over 9 weeks for a diagnostic test.

At 31st December 2017, 49.2% (55,228) of patients were waiting more than 9 weeks for a diagnostic test, compared with 49.2% (55,340) at 30th September 2017 and 43.7% (45,997) at 31st December 2016 (Table 1).

At 31st December 2017, the 9 week element of the target was not achieved by Northern Ireland as a whole; however it was achieved by Western HSC Trust (Table 2). Data users should be aware that many diagnostic services are not provided at every HSC Trust (see explanatory note 10).

Over half (59.8%, 22,829) of patients were waiting longer than 9 weeks in Belfast HSC Trust at 31st December 2017, 49.6% (13,443) in the Northern HSC Trust, 47.6% (10,428) in the Southern HSC Trust, 41.0% (6,014) in the South Eastern HSC Trust and 23.9% (2,514) in the Western HSC Trust (Table 2).

Patients waiting over 9 weeks by diagnostic service



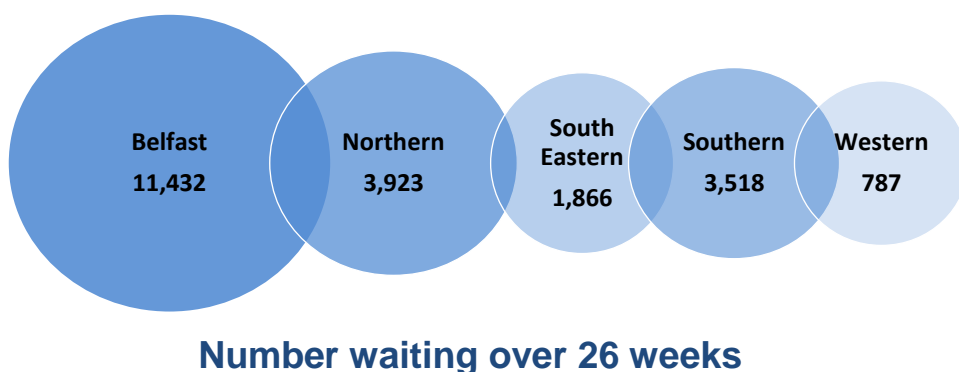
Source: SDR1 Part1&2

Over two thirds (69.8%, 38,564) of the 55,228 patients waiting more than 9 weeks were waiting for one of the following diagnostic tests: Non-Obstetric Ultrasound; Echocardiography; Magnetic Resonance Imaging; Peripheral Neurophysiology; Computerised Tomography; Gastroscopy and DEXA Scan (Table 3).

Patients waiting more than 26 weeks at 31st December 2017

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

21,526
patients
were waiting longer
than 26 weeks



Number waiting over 26 weeks

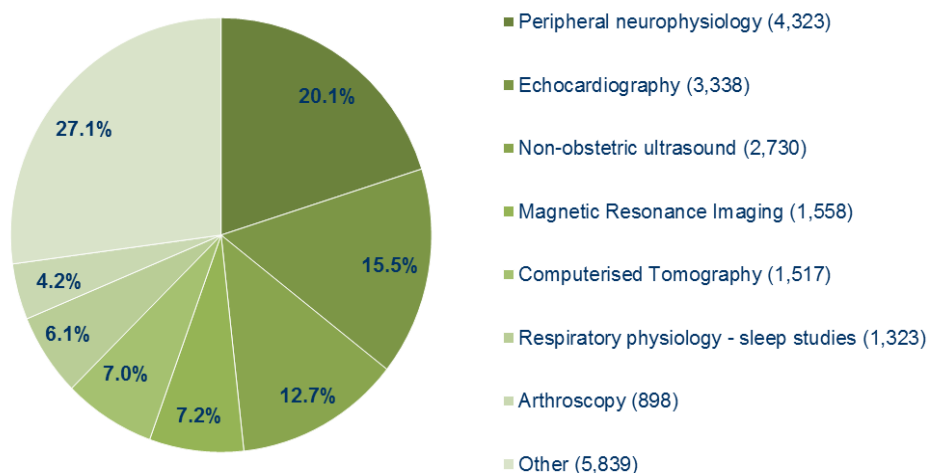
Source: SDR1 Part1&2

At 31st December 2017, 19.2% (21,526) of patients were waiting more than 26 weeks for a diagnostic test compared with 16.6% (18,697) at 30th September 2017 and 10.5% (11,012) at 31st December 2016 (Table 1).

At 31st December 2017, 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 many diagnostic services are not provided at every HSC Trust (see explanatory note 10).

Three out of ten (30.0%, 11,432) patients in the Belfast HSC Trust were waiting longer than 26 weeks at 31st December 2017, 16.1% (3,518) in the Southern HSC Trust, 14.5% (3,923) in the Northern HSC Trust, 12.7% (1,866) in the South Eastern HSC Trust and 7.5% (787) in the Western HSC Trust (Table 2).

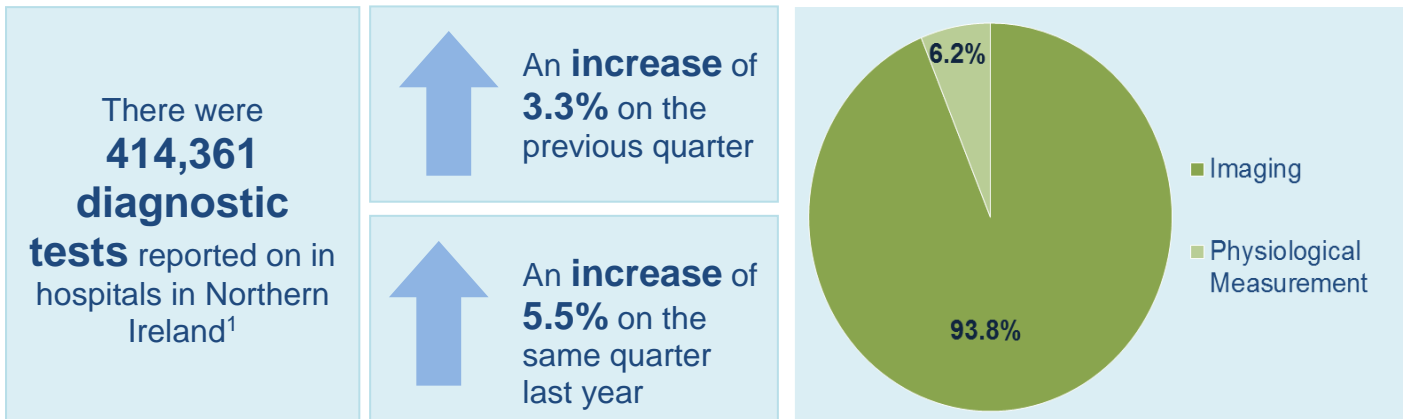
Patients waiting over 26 weeks by diagnostic service



Source: SDR1 Part1&2

Just under three quarters (72.9%, 15,687) of the 21,526 patients waiting more than 26 weeks were waiting for one of the following diagnostic tests: Peripheral Neurophysiology; Echocardiology; Non-obstetric Ultrasound; Magnetic Resonance Imaging; Computerised Tomography; Respiratory physiology sleep studies and Arthroscopy (Table 3).

Total number of diagnostic tests reported on during quarter ending December 2017

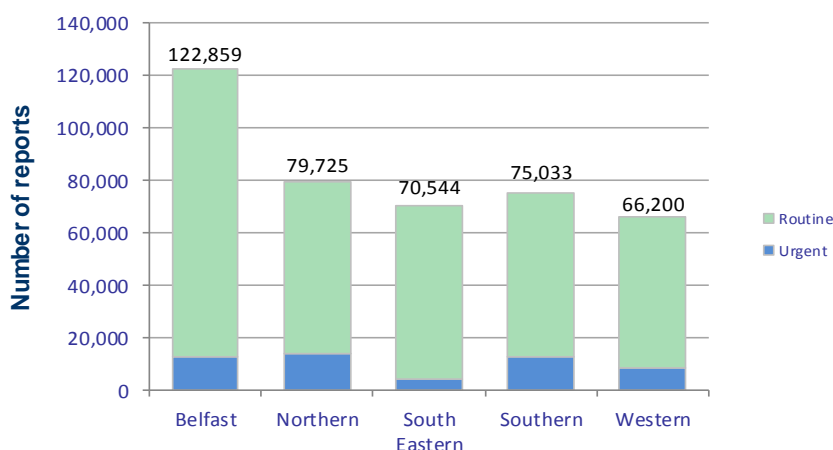


Source: DRTT Return

A total of 414,361 diagnostic tests¹ were reported on and dispatched to the referring clinician at hospitals in Northern Ireland during the quarter ending December 2017, 3.3% (13,136) more than the quarter ending September 2017 (401,225), and 5.5% (21,733) more than the quarter ending December 2016 (392,628) (Table 4).

Of the 414,361 reported diagnostic tests, 93.8% (388,584) were reporting on an Imaging test and 6.2% (25,777) were reporting on a Physiological Measurement test² (Table 4).

Approximately one out of eight (12.6%, 52,109) of the diagnostic tests reported on during quarter ending December 2017 were urgent diagnostic tests, with the remaining 87.4% (362,252) being routine diagnostic tests³ (Table 4).



Source: DRTT Return

Over one quarter (29.7%) of diagnostic tests were reported and dispatched in the Belfast HSC Trust¹, with a further 19.2% in the Northern HSC Trust, 18.1% in the Southern HSC Trust, 17.0% in the South Eastern HSC Trust and 16.0% in the Western HSC Trust.

¹ Figures for Belfast HSC Trust for the quarter ending December 2017 are unvalidated. Also, due to ongoing mapping issues following the installation of a new information system within the Royal Victoria hospital in Belfast HSC Trust, it is not currently possible to report on the total number of urgent Computerised Tomography diagnostic reporting turnaround times.

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.

³ Reporting times of routine diagnostic tests are available in the accompanying CSV file.

From April 2017, all urgent diagnostic tests should be reported on within 2 days of the test being undertaken.

Urgent diagnostic tests reported on within 2 days during quarter ending December 2017

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

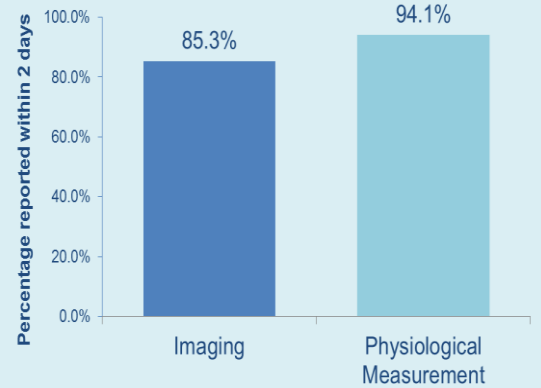
86.2% of urgent diagnostic tests reported on within 2 days



A decrease of **0.1 percentage points** on the previous quarter



An increase of **0.2 percentage points** on the same quarter last year

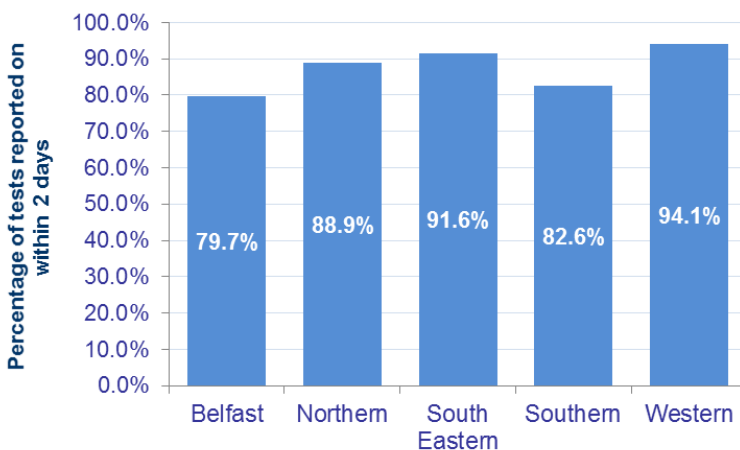


Source: DRTT Return

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

Of the 52,109 urgent diagnostic tests reported on during quarter ending December 2017, 86.2% (44,902) were reported on within 2 days, compared with 86.3% (42,974) during the quarter ending September 2017 and 86.0% (41,788) during the quarter ending December 2016 (Table 5).

Of the 52,109 urgent diagnostic tests reported on during the quarter ending December 2017, 47,123 were imaging reports and 4,986 were physiological measurement reports. A total of 85.3% of urgent imaging tests were reported on within 2 days compared with 94.1% of urgent physiological measurement tests (Table 6).



Source: DRTT Return

During quarter ending December 2017, the 2 day target was not achieved by any HSC Trust, although the Western and South Eastern Trusts reported on 94.1% and 91.6% respectively of urgent diagnostic tests (Table 7).

Appendix 1: Tables

Table 1: Number of patients waiting for a diagnostic service by diagnostic category – 31st December 2017¹

Diagnostic Category		Current Quarter (31st Dec 2017)	Previous Quarter (30 th Sept 2017)	Same Quarter Last Year (31st Dec 2016)
Imaging	Total Patients Waiting	55,830	59,503	53,863
	Number waiting over 9 weeks	21,861	24,833	18,410
	<i>Percentage waiting over 9 weeks</i>	39.2%	41.7%	34.2%
	Number waiting over 26 weeks	6,716	5,793	2,545
Physiological Measurement	Total Patients Waiting	38,648	35,444	34,417
	Number waiting over 9 weeks	23,607	20,945	18,960
	<i>Percentage waiting over 9 weeks</i>	61.1%	59.1%	55.1%
	Number waiting over 26 weeks	10,877	9,024	5,128
Endoscopy	Total Patients Waiting	17,864	17,574	17,022
	Number waiting over 9 weeks	9,760	9,562	8,627
	<i>Percentage waiting over 9 weeks</i>	54.6%	54.4%	50.7%
	Number waiting over 26 weeks	3,933	3,880	3,339
Total	Total Patients Waiting	112,342	112,521	105,302
	Number waiting over 9 weeks	55,228	55,340	45,997
	<i>Percentage waiting over 9 weeks</i>	49.2%	49.2%	43.7%
	Number waiting over 26 weeks	21,526	18,697	11,012

Source: SDR1 Part 1 & 2 Returns

¹Refer to Explanatory Notes 1–16 & 24-27

^R Figures have been revised

Table 2: Number of patients waiting for a diagnostic service, by HSC Trust – 31st December 2017¹

HSC Trust	Patients Waiting for Diagnostic Service by Weeks Waiting						Total Waiting
	0 - 6	>6 - 9	>9 - 13	>13 - 21	>21-26	>26	
Belfast	11,764	3,577	3,943	4,884	2,570	11,432	38,170
Northern	10,489	3,175	3,363	4,202	1,955	3,923	27,107
South Eastern	6,875	1,786	1,618	1,909	621	1,866	14,675
Southern	8,836	2,623	2,239	3,187	1,484	3,518	21,887
Western	6,681	1,308	824	684	219	787	10,503
Total	44,645	12,469	11,987	14,866	6,849	21,526	112,342

Source: SDR1 Part 1 & 2 Returns

¹Refer to Explanatory Notes 1–16 & 24-27

Table 3: Number of patients waiting for a diagnostic service by type of service and weeks waiting – 31st December 2017¹

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	11,189	3,211	2,470	2,346	1,054	2,730	23,000
Magnetic Resonance Imaging	5,658	1,799	1,748	2,476	909	1,558	14,148
Cardiology - echocardiography	3,047	1,050	1,439	2,255	1,519	3,338	12,648
Computerised Tomography	4,720	861	872	1,158	271	1,517	9,399
Neurophysiology - peripheral neurophysiology	528	265	351	606	337	4,323	6,410
Gastroscopy (Day Case)	2,204	651	705	903	310	884	5,657
DEXA Scan	1,459	626	572	693	373	847	4,570
Colonoscopy (Day Case)	1,629	470	519	667	257	684	4,226
Ambulatory ECG monitoring (24 hr holter)	1,620	584	426	684	388	416	4,118
Audiology - pure tone audiometry	1,680	675	546	601	269	274	4,045
Respiratory physiology - sleep studies	883	278	350	437	206	1,323	3,477
Plain Film Xrays	2,773	86	7	1	0	0	2,867
Flexi sigmoidoscopy (Day Case)	728	265	379	417	160	425	2,374
Cystoscopy (Day Case)	855	294	288	234	68	354	2,093
Arthroscopy	77	84	111	163	68	898	1,401
Cardiology - perfusion studies	258	136	169	173	224	351	1,311
Patient Activated Ambulatory Function	314	90	143	160	107	272	1,086
Ambulatory BP	524	80	90	116	43	21	874
Fluroscopy	595	114	43	28	4	22	806
Other	3,904	850	759	748	282	1,289	7,832
All diagnostic tests	44,645	12,469	11,987	14,866	6,849	21,526	112,342

Source: SDR1 Part 1 & 2 Returns

¹Refer to Explanatory Notes 1–16 & 24-27

Table 4: Number of diagnostic tests reported and dispatched by priority of report – QE December 2017²

Priority of Report	Diagnostic Category	QE Dec 2017	QE Sept 2017	QE Dec 2016
Urgent	Imaging	47,123	44,842	43,816
	Physiological Measurement	4,986	4,938	4,777
Routine	Imaging	341,461	333,193	325,848
	Physiological Measurement	20,791	18,252	18,187
Total	Imaging	388,584	378,035	369,664
	Physiological Measurement	25,777	23,190	22,964

Source: DRTT Return

²Refer to Explanatory Notes 1-2, 4-5 & 17–27

^R Figures have been revised

Table 5: Number of urgent diagnostic tests reported and dispatched – QE December 2017²

Urgent Diagnostic Tests	QE Dec 2017	QE Sept 2017	QE Dec 2016
Total reported	52,109	49,780	48,593
Number reported within 2 days	44,902	42,974	41,788
% reported on <i>within 2 days</i>	86.2%	86.3%	86.0%

Source: DRTT Return

²Refer to Explanatory Notes 1-2, 4-5 & 17-27

^R Figures have been revised

Table 6: Number of urgent diagnostic tests reported and dispatched by diagnostic category and time in days– QE December 2017²

Diagnostic Category	Length of time reporting in days				Total Reported
	0 - 2 days	>2 - 14 days	>14 - 28 days	>28 days	
Imaging	40,211	6,243	450	219	47,123
Physiological Measurement	4,691	285	8	2	4,986
Total	44,902	6,528	458	221	52,109

Source: DRTT Return

²Refer to Explanatory Notes 1-2, 4-5 & 17-27

Table 7: Number of urgent diagnostic tests reported and dispatched by HSC Trust and time in days – QE December 2017²

HSC Trust	Length of time reporting in days				Total Reported
	0 - 2 days	>2 - 14 days	>14 - 28 days	>28 days	
Belfast	10,263	2,085	330	206	12,884
Northern	12,148	1,490	27	3	13,668
South Eastern	3,964	351	11	1	4,327
Southern	10,470	2,112	78	8	12,668
Western	8,057	490	12	3	8,562
Total	44,902	6,528	458	221	52,109

Source: DRTT Return

²Refer to Explanatory Notes 1-2, 4-5 & 17-27

Appendix 2: Explanatory Notes

1. The sources for the data contained in this release are the quarterly Departmental Returns SDR1 (Parts 1 & 2) and the DRTT Return. The source for the diagnostic waiting time data for 16 selected diagnostic services is the Departmental Return SDR1 Part 1 (See explanatory note 2). The waiting time information for all other diagnostic services is 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, definitions, as well as notes on how to use the data contained within this statistical release. This booklet is available to view or download from the following link: <https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/publications/northern-ireland-waiting-time-statistics-diagnostic-waiting-times-december-2017>
3. The 16 selected diagnostic 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; Urodynamics Pressures and Flows; Colonoscopy; Flexi Sigmoidoscopy; Cystoscopy and Gastroscopy.
4. 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/articles/diagnostic-waiting-times>
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 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 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. Waiting time statistics for day case endoscopies also include patients waiting for these services that are managed as inpatient admissions. As patients waiting for day case endoscopies are included within both inpatient and diagnostic waiting times figures should not be added together.
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 2017/18 Ministerial diagnostic waiting time target, states that, by March 2018, 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 (greater than 6 weeks but waiting no longer than 9 weeks) week time band.
16. Patients waiting 'longer than 9 weeks' for a diagnostic service includes all patients in the >9 - 13, >13 - 21, >21 - 26 and >26 week time bands. All patients waiting 'over 26 weeks' included everyone in the >26 week time band.
17. A response to DRTT validations for Belfast HSC Trust was not received in time for publication. Any amendments will be reflected in the next quarterly bulletin.
18. 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.
19. 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.
20. 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.

21. Due to mapping issues following the installation of a new information system within the Royal Victoria hospital in Belfast HSC Trust, it is not currently possible to report on the total number of urgent Computerised Tomography diagnostic reporting turnaround times.
22. The draft 2017/18 Ministerial diagnostic reporting turnaround target, states that, from April 2017, all urgent diagnostic tests should be reported on within two days of the test being undertaken.
23. Further information on routine diagnostic reporting times are available in the accompanying CSV file at: <https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/articles/diagnostic-waiting-times>
24. 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.
25. 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.
26. The information contained within this publication is not National Statistics.
27. Figures relating to diagnostic waiting times and diagnostic reporting turnaround times for the quarter ending 31st March 2018 will be released on Thursday 31st May 2018.

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

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