

INFORMATION  
ANALYSIS  
DIRECTORATE



# Northern Ireland Waiting Time Statistics: Outpatient Waiting Times Quarter Ending December 2018



Department of  
**Health**  
An Roinn Sláinte  
Máinnystrie O Poustie  
[www.health-ni.gov.uk](http://www.health-ni.gov.uk)

# Reader Information

---

**Purpose:** This statistical release presents information on waiting times for a first consultant-led outpatient appointment in Northern Ireland and reports on the performance of the Health and Social Care (HSC) Trusts against the 2018/19 Ministerial waiting time target, which states that:

*“By March 2019, 50% of patients should wait no longer than 9 weeks for a first outpatient appointment; with no patient waiting longer than 52 weeks.”*

This statistical release details information on the number of patients waiting, and length of time waiting, for a first consultant-led outpatient appointment in HSC Trusts at 31<sup>st</sup> December 2018. It also includes activity for a first consultant-led outpatient appointment commissioned by the Health Service during the quarter ending December 2018. Data are presented by HSC Trust, specialty and time band. Information on Integrated Clinical Assessment and Treatment Services (ICATS) waiting times are available in the accompanying CSV file.

**Statistical Quality:** The ‘*Outpatient 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/outpatient-waiting-times-supporting-documentation>

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

**Authors:** Jennifer Finlay, Mary Farrelly, Siobhán Morgan

**Publication Date:** Thursday 28<sup>th</sup> February 2019

**Reporting Period:** 1<sup>st</sup> October 2018 – 31<sup>st</sup> December 2018

**Issued by:** Hospital Information Branch  
Information & Analysis Directorate  
Department of Health  
Stormont Estate, Belfast, BT4 3SQ

**Contact Information and further copies:** [statistics@health-ni.gov.uk](mailto:statistics@health-ni.gov.uk)

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

**Price:** Free

**Copyright:** This publication is Crown copyright and may be reproduced free of charge in any format or medium. Any material used must be acknowledged, and the title of the publication specified.

## Contents

Total number of patients waiting for a first consultant-led outpatient appointment .....	4
Patients waiting longer than 9 weeks for a first consultant-led outpatient appointment.....	5
Patients waiting longer than 52 weeks for a first consultant-led outpatient appointment.....	6
Completed waits for a first consultant-led outpatient appointment commissioned by the Health Service.....	7
Appendix 1: Tables.....	8
Appendix 2: Explanatory Notes.....	11

**By March 2019, 50% of patients should wait no longer than 9 weeks for a first outpatient appointment, and no patient should wait longer than 52 weeks.**

## Total number of patients waiting at 31<sup>st</sup> December 2018

There were  
**281,705 patients**  
waiting for a first outpatient  
appointment in Northern  
Ireland



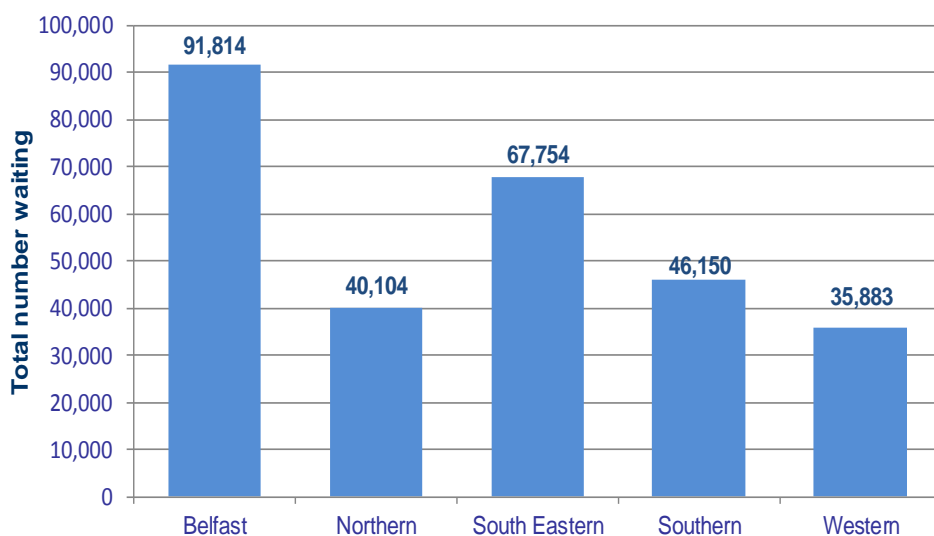
A **decrease** of **0.6%** on  
the previous quarter



An **increase** of **3.7%** on  
the same quarter last year

Source: CH3 Return

At 31<sup>st</sup> December 2018, a total of 281,705 patients were waiting for a first consultant-led outpatient appointment, 0.6% (1,792) less than at 30<sup>th</sup> September 2018 (283,497) and 3.7% (10,152) more than at 31<sup>st</sup> December 2017 (271,553) (Table 1).



Source: CH3 Return

A number of outpatient services may not be provided at a patient's local HSC Trust, and instead are provided at a single regional centre for Northern Ireland. As patients are reported against the HSC Trust responsible for the service to which they have been referred, users should be cautious in how they use these data (see explanatory note 9).

Just under one third (32.6%) of those waiting for a first consultant-led outpatient appointment were in the Belfast HSC Trust, with a further 24.1% in the South Eastern HSC Trust, 16.4% in the Southern HSC Trust, 14.2% in the Northern HSC Trust and 12.7% in the Western HSC Trust (Table 2a).

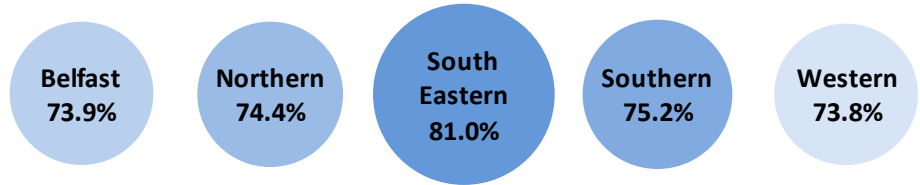
Three fifths (60.4%, 170,074) of the 281,705 patients were waiting for a first outpatient appointment in one of the following specialties: Ear, Nose and Throat (ENT) (35,748); General Surgery (28,227); Trauma and Orthopaedic (T&O) Surgery (26,971); Ophthalmology (24,613); Dermatology (19,681); Neurology (18,801) and Gynaecology (16,033) (Table 3a).

# Patients waiting more than 9 weeks at 31<sup>st</sup> December 2018

By March 2019, 50% of patients should wait no longer than 9 weeks for a first outpatient appointment

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

**75.9%**  
of patients  
were waiting longer  
than 9 weeks



## Percentage waiting over 9 weeks

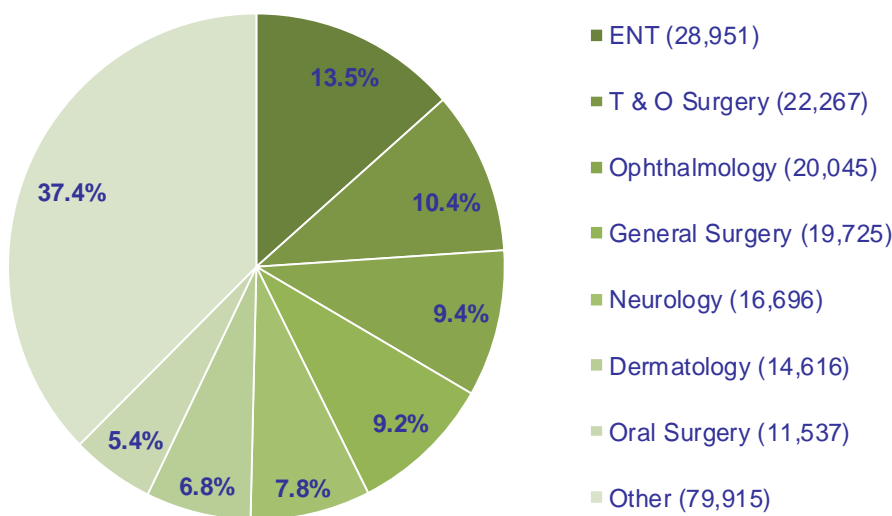
Source: CH3 Return

Achievement of the 9 week target requires that less than 50% of patients should be waiting over 9 weeks for a first consultant-led outpatient appointment.

Over three quarters (75.9%, 213,752) of patients were waiting more than 9 weeks for a first consultant-led outpatient appointment at 31<sup>st</sup> December 2018, compared with 75.1% (212,985) at 30<sup>th</sup> September 2018 and 76.2% (206,983) at 31<sup>st</sup> December 2017 (Table 1).

At 31<sup>st</sup> December 2018, the 9 week element of the target was not achieved by Northern Ireland as a whole or by any individual HSC Trust (Table 2a). Data users should be aware that not all outpatient services are provided at every HSC Trust (see explanatory note 9).

## Patients waiting more than 9 weeks by speciality



Source: CH3 Return

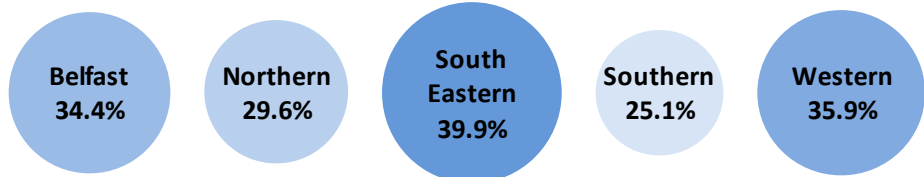
More than three-fifths (62.6%, 133,837) of the 213,752 patients waiting more than 9 weeks for a first consultant-led outpatient appointment at 31<sup>st</sup> December 2018 were waiting for one of the following specialties: Ear, Nose and Throat (ENT); Trauma and Orthopaedic (T&O) Surgery; Ophthalmology; General Surgery; Neurology; Dermatology and Oral Surgery (Table 3a).

## Patients waiting more than 52 weeks at 31<sup>st</sup> December 2018

By March 2019, no patient should wait longer than 52 weeks for a first outpatient appointment

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

**94,953**  
patients  
were waiting longer  
than 52 weeks



### Percentage waiting over 52 weeks

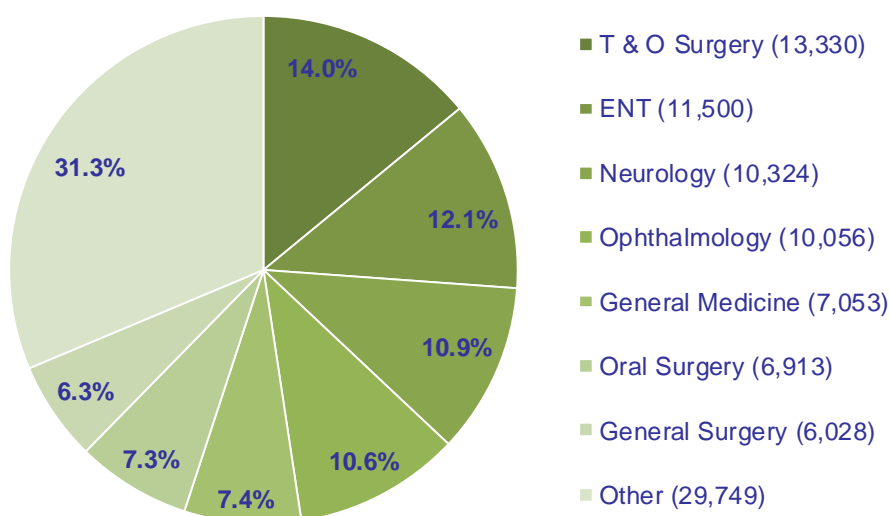
Source: CH3 Return

At 31<sup>st</sup> December 2018, 33.7% (94,953) of patients were waiting more than 52 weeks for a first consultant-led outpatient appointment, compared with 33.2% (94,222) at 30<sup>th</sup> September 2018, and 29.7% (80,651) at 31<sup>st</sup> December 2017 (Table 1).

At 31<sup>st</sup> December 2018, the 52 week element of the target was not achieved by Northern Ireland as a whole or by any individual HSC Trust (Table 2a). Data users should be aware that some outpatient services are not provided at every HSC Trust (see explanatory note 9).

Almost two fifths (39.9%, 27,064) of patients in the South Eastern HSC Trust were waiting longer than 52 weeks at 31<sup>st</sup> December 2018, 35.9% (12,884) in the Western HSC Trust, 34.4% (31,556) in the Belfast HSC Trust, 29.6% (11,879) in the Northern HSC Trust and 25.1% (11,570) in the Southern HSC Trust (Table 2a).

### Patients waiting more than 52 weeks by specialty



A total of 68.7% (65,204) of the 94,953 patients waiting more than 52 weeks for a first consultant-led outpatient appointment were in one of the following specialties: Trauma and Orthopaedic (T&O) Surgery; Ear, Nose and Throat (ENT); Neurology; Ophthalmology; General Medicine; Oral Surgery and General Surgery (Table 3a).

Source: CH3 Return

## Completed waits for a first outpatient appointment commissioned by the Health Service during quarter ending December 2018

There were  
**125,104**  
first outpatient  
attendances  
commissioned by the Health  
Service

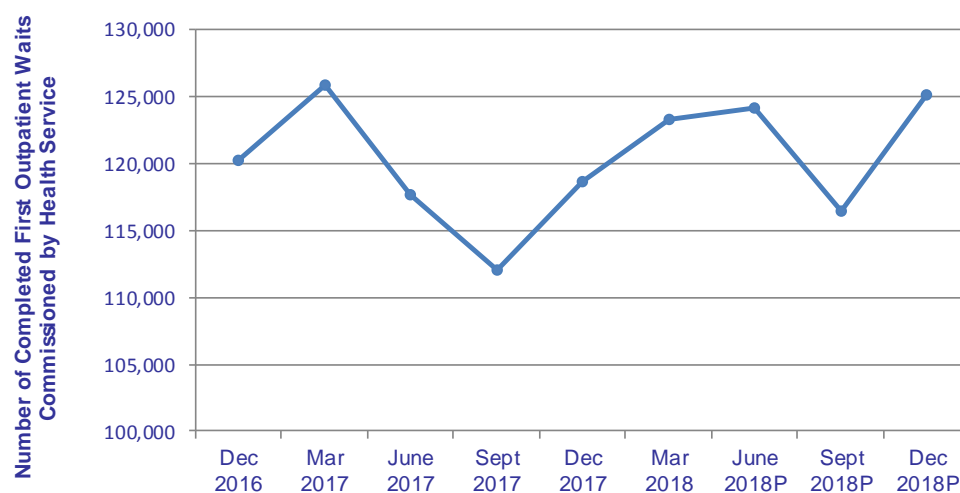
  
An **increase** of **7.4%** on  
the previous quarter

  
An **increase** of **5.4%** on  
the same quarter last year

Source: QOAR and IS1 Part 1 Returns

There were 122,839 attendances for a first consultant-led outpatient appointment in Health Service hospitals in Northern Ireland during the quarter ending December 2018. This was 7.0% (8,033) more than during the quarter ending September 2018 (114,806), and 4.3% (5,019) more than during the quarter ending December 2017 (117,820) (Table 4).

During the quarter ending December 2018, 2,265 Health Service patients attended a first outpatient appointment within the Independent Sector. This was 36.2% (602) more than the number who attended during the quarter ending September 2018 (1,663), and more than double the number who attended in the same quarter last year (880) (Table 4).



Source: QOAR and IS1 Part 1 Returns  
P Data is provisional

When the number of attendances commissioned by the Health Service within the Independent Sector during the quarter ending December 2018 (2,265) is combined with that for outpatients attending a first outpatient appointment in Health Service hospitals during the

same period (122,839), provisional figures indicate that (125,104) outpatients attended a first appointment in Northern Ireland commissioned by the Health Service (Table 4). This is an increase of 7.4% (8,635) on the number seen during the quarter ending September 2018 (116,469), and 5.4% (6,404) more than during the quarter ending December 2017 (118,700).



## Appendix 1: Tables

**Table 1: Quarterly outpatient waiting lists – 31<sup>st</sup> December 2018<sup>1</sup>**

First Consultant-Led Outpatient Appointment	Current Quarter (31 <sup>st</sup> Dec 2018)	Previous Quarter (30 <sup>th</sup> Sept 2018)	Same Quarter Last Year (31 <sup>st</sup> Dec 2017)
Total Patients Waiting	281,705	283,497	271,553
Number waiting over 9 weeks	213,752	212,985	206,983
<i>Percentage waiting over 9 weeks</i>	75.9%	75.1%	76.2%
Number waiting over 52 weeks	94,953	94,222	80,651

Source: CH3 Return

<sup>1</sup>Refer to Explanatory Notes 1–10 & 13-14

**Table 2a: Number of patients waiting for a first consultant-led outpatient appointment by HSC Trust and weeks waiting – 31<sup>st</sup> December 2018<sup>1</sup>**

HSC Trust	Patients waiting for a first consultant-led outpatient appointment, by weeks waiting							Total Waiting
	0 - 6	>6 - 9	>9 - 12	>12 - 15	>15 - 18	>18 - 52	>52	
Belfast	17,668	6,286	5,021	4,119	3,169	23,995	31,556	91,814
Northern	7,444	2,831	2,414	2,026	1,653	11,857	11,879	40,104
South Eastern	9,544	3,334	2,952	2,576	2,190	20,094	27,064	67,754
Southern	8,291	3,137	2,711	2,242	1,878	16,321	11,570	46,150
Western	7,052	2,366	2,120	1,693	1,322	8,446	12,884	35,883
<b>Total</b>	<b>49,999</b>	<b>17,954</b>	<b>15,218</b>	<b>12,656</b>	<b>10,212</b>	<b>80,713</b>	<b>94,953</b>	<b>281,705</b>

Source: CH3 Return

<sup>1</sup>Refer to Explanatory Notes 1–10 & 13-14

**Table 2b: Percentage of patients waiting for a first consultant-led outpatient appointment by HSC Trust and weeks waiting – 31<sup>st</sup> December 2018<sup>1</sup>**

HSC Trust	Patients waiting for a first consultant-led outpatient appointment, by weeks waiting						
	0 - 6	>6 - 9	>9 - 12	>12 - 15	>15 - 18	>18 - 52	>52
Belfast	19.2%	6.8%	5.5%	4.5%	3.5%	26.1%	34.4%
Northern	18.6%	7.1%	6.0%	5.1%	4.1%	29.6%	29.6%
South Eastern	14.1%	4.9%	4.4%	3.8%	3.2%	29.7%	39.9%
Southern	18.0%	6.8%	5.9%	4.9%	4.1%	35.4%	25.1%
Western	19.7%	6.6%	5.9%	4.7%	3.7%	23.5%	35.9%
<b>Total</b>	<b>17.7%</b>	<b>6.4%</b>	<b>5.4%</b>	<b>4.5%</b>	<b>3.6%</b>	<b>28.7%</b>	<b>33.7%</b>

Source: CH3 Return

<sup>1</sup>Refer to Explanatory Notes 1–10 & 13-14



**Table 3a: Number of patients waiting for a first consultant-led outpatient appointment by weeks waiting and specialty – 31<sup>st</sup> December 2018<sup>1</sup>**

Specialty	Patients waiting for a first consultant-led outpatient appointment, by weeks waiting							Total Waiting
	0 - 6	>6 - 9	>9 - 12	>12 - 15	>15 - 18	>18 - 52	>52	
ENT	4,772	2,025	1,795	1,625	1,368	12,663	11,500	<b>35,748</b>
General Surgery	6,269	2,233	1,932	1,527	1,297	8,941	6,028	<b>28,227</b>
T & O Surgery	3,469	1,235	912	866	665	6,494	13,330	<b>26,971</b>
Ophthalmology	3,268	1,300	1,213	1,071	847	6,858	10,056	<b>24,613</b>
Dermatology	3,784	1,281	1,046	1,007	888	6,186	5,489	<b>19,681</b>
Neurology	1,471	634	663	524	452	4,733	10,324	<b>18,801</b>
Gynaecology	4,590	1,243	959	711	577	3,688	4,265	<b>16,033</b>
General Medicine	2,022	684	500	417	317	2,775	7,053	<b>13,768</b>
Oral Surgery	1,092	459	354	373	361	3,536	6,913	<b>13,088</b>
Rheumatology	1,437	602	583	489	385	3,619	5,684	<b>12,799</b>
Paediatrics	3,120	1,261	1,151	807	618	3,268	2,199	<b>12,424</b>
Cardiology	3,489	1,270	1,014	698	430	2,603	263	<b>9,767</b>
Thoracic Medicine	1,420	535	441	399	301	2,635	2,830	<b>8,561</b>
Urology	1,780	467	446	367	263	2,338	2,476	<b>8,137</b>
Gastroenterology	1,481	471	435	311	251	2,506	2,644	<b>8,099</b>
Pain Management	903	457	418	371	314	3,424	1,631	<b>7,518</b>
Plastic Surgery	726	253	234	211	161	1,626	1,870	<b>5,081</b>
Geriatric Medicine	857	263	242	179	125	443	208	<b>2,317</b>
Restorative Dentistry	345	153	137	116	67	656	13	<b>1,487</b>
Other	3,704	1,128	743	587	525	1,721	177	<b>8,585</b>
<b>All Specialties</b>	<b>49,999</b>	<b>17,954</b>	<b>15,218</b>	<b>12,656</b>	<b>10,212</b>	<b>80,713</b>	<b>94,953</b>	<b>281,705</b>

Source: CH3 Return

<sup>1</sup>Refer to Explanatory Notes 1–10 & 13-14

**Table 3b: Percentage of patients waiting for a first consultant-led outpatient appointment by weeks waiting and specialty – 31<sup>st</sup> December 2018<sup>1</sup>**

Specialty	Patients waiting for a first consultant-led outpatient appointment, by weeks waiting						
	0 - 6	>6 - 9	>9 - 12	>12 - 15	>15 - 18	>18 - 52	>52
ENT	13.3%	5.7%	5.0%	4.5%	3.8%	35.4%	32.2%
General Surgery	22.2%	7.9%	6.8%	5.4%	4.6%	31.7%	21.4%
T & O Surgery	12.9%	4.6%	3.4%	3.2%	2.5%	24.1%	49.4%
Ophthalmology	13.3%	5.3%	4.9%	4.4%	3.4%	27.9%	40.9%
Dermatology	19.2%	6.5%	5.3%	5.1%	4.5%	31.4%	27.9%
Neurology	7.8%	3.4%	3.5%	2.8%	2.4%	25.2%	54.9%
Gynaecology	28.6%	7.8%	6.0%	4.4%	3.6%	23.0%	26.6%
General Medicine	14.7%	5.0%	3.6%	3.0%	2.3%	20.2%	51.2%
Oral Surgery	8.3%	3.5%	2.7%	2.8%	2.8%	27.0%	52.8%
Rheumatology	11.2%	4.7%	4.6%	3.8%	3.0%	28.3%	44.4%
Paediatrics	25.1%	10.1%	9.3%	6.5%	5.0%	26.3%	17.7%
Cardiology	35.7%	13.0%	10.4%	7.1%	4.4%	26.7%	2.7%
Thoracic Medicine	16.6%	6.2%	5.2%	4.7%	3.5%	30.8%	33.1%
Urology	21.9%	5.7%	5.5%	4.5%	3.2%	28.7%	30.4%
Gastroenterology	18.3%	5.8%	5.4%	3.8%	3.1%	30.9%	32.6%
Pain Management	12.0%	6.1%	5.6%	4.9%	4.2%	45.5%	21.7%
Plastic Surgery	14.3%	5.0%	4.6%	4.2%	3.2%	32.0%	36.8%
Geriatric Medicine	37.0%	11.4%	10.4%	7.7%	5.4%	19.1%	9.0%
Restorative Dentistry	23.2%	10.3%	9.2%	7.8%	4.5%	44.1%	0.9%
Other	43.1%	13.1%	8.7%	6.8%	6.1%	20.0%	2.1%
<b>All Specialties</b>	<b>17.7%</b>	<b>6.4%</b>	<b>5.4%</b>	<b>4.5%</b>	<b>3.6%</b>	<b>28.7%</b>	<b>33.7%</b>

Source: CH3 Return

<sup>1</sup>Refer to Explanatory Notes 1–10 & 13-14

**Table 4: Number of completed waits for a first consultant-led outpatient appointment commissioned by the Health Service: QE September 2016 - QE September 2018<sup>2</sup>**

Quarter Ending	Number of Completed First Outpatient Waits		
	Within Health Service Hospitals	Independent Sector*	Total Commissioned by Health Service
QE Dec 2016	119,587	673	120,260
QE Mar 2017	124,143	1,725	125,868
QE June 2017	117,101	555	117,656
QE Sept 2017	110,935	1,109	112,044
QE Dec 2017	117,820	880	118,700
QE Mar 2018	120,967	2,328	123,295
QE June 2018 <sup>P</sup>	123,375	728	124,103
QE Sept 2018 <sup>P</sup>	114,806	1,663	116,469
QE Dec 2018 <sup>P</sup>	122,839	2,265	125,104

Source: QOAR and IS1 Part 1 Returns

<sup>P</sup> Data are currently provisional

\* Not National Statistics

<sup>2</sup>Refer to Explanatory Notes 1-2, 4 & 11–14

## Appendix 2: Explanatory Notes

1. The sources for the data contained in this release are the DoH CH3, QOAR and IS1 Part 1 Returns. These returns collect information from Health and Social Care Trusts on a quarterly basis.
2. The '*Outpatient 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/northern-ireland-waiting-time-statistics-outpatient-waiting-times-december-2018>.
3. All of the data contained in the tables are available on a quarterly basis and can be supplied by individual specialty or Provider HSC Trust if this level of detail is required. In addition, quarterly data relating to waiting times for a first consultant-led outpatient appointment have been published in spreadsheet format (CSV), split by HSC Trust, Specialty and Programme of Care, in order to aid secondary analysis. These data are available at <https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/articles/outpatient-waiting-times-december-2018>.
4. Information includes patients living outside Northern Ireland and privately funded patients waiting for treatment in Health Service hospitals in Northern Ireland.
5. Outpatient waiters are defined as patients still waiting for their first outpatient appointment at the end of the quarter, including those who have cancelled or missed a previous appointment. An outpatient appointment is to enable a patient to see a consultant, a member of their team or locum for such a member, in respect of one referral. Waiting time for a first outpatient appointment begins on the date the HSC Trust receives a referral for a first outpatient appointment and ends on the date a patient attends a first outpatient appointment. 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 their DNA.
6. From 1<sup>st</sup> April 2014, Oral Surgery services undertaken by consultants contracted to the South Eastern HSC Trust were centralised, meaning that records for patients waiting for this service in both the Northern and Southern HSC Trusts are now held and managed in the South Eastern HSC Trust. A breakdown of the waiting times for these patients broken down by HSC Trust has been provided in the spreadsheet located at <https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/articles/outpatient-waiting-times-december-2018>.

7. Each outpatient waiting time band relates to the number of completed weeks a patient has been waiting for outpatient assessment. 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) time band. The Ministerial target, for outpatient waiting times, as set out in the Health and Social Care (Commissioning Plan) Direction states that by March 2019, 50% of patients should wait no longer than nine weeks for a first outpatient appointment, with no patient waiting longer than 52 weeks.
8. Some people will be waiting on more than one waiting list or be on the waiting list for more than one outpatient appointment/admission/diagnostic test at the same time due to having more than one condition.
9. The Ministerial target, for outpatient waiting times, as set out in the Health and Social Care (Commissioning Plan) Direction states that by March 2019, 50% of patients should wait no longer than nine weeks for a first outpatient appointment, with no patient waiting longer than 52 weeks.
10. A number of outpatient services may not be provided at a patient's local HSC Trust or at each of the five HSC Trusts, and instead are provided at a single regional centre for Northern Ireland. In such circumstances, patients from one HSC Trust area will be waiting to be seen at a service provided at another HSC Trust. In some cases a consultant from one HSC Trust may provide a 'visiting' service at another HSC Trust, and so the patient may not be reported at the HSC Trust at which they attend. 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 Trust area, as HSC Trusts that provide services for the whole of Northern Ireland will have a higher number of patients waiting per head of the population than those that provide more localised services. 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. The total number of completed outpatient waits each quarter, within HSC hospitals, is derived as the total number of attendances at a first outpatient appointment from the Departmental Quarterly Outpatient Activity Return (QOAR).

12. The number of patients who received an outpatient assessment, commissioned by the Health Service, in the Independent Sector is collected on the IS1 Part 1 Return. These figures are provided by the HSC Board. They are published for each transferring Health and Social Care Trust (Trust responsible for the patient's waiting time). They are not National Statistics and they have not been validated by the Department; however, they have been included to provide users with a comprehensive view of completed outpatient waits during each quarter.
  
13. HIB surveyed data providers during 2011/12 to ascertain the cost of producing, validating and submitting the information required for this publication. This relates to the time taken to generate, validate and submit data, over and above what is already required by their organisation for internal performance management purposes. The cost to data providers of compliance within HIB's requirements for this publication, based on HSC salary costs, was £3,110.
  
14. Figures relating to outpatient waiting times for the quarter ending 31<sup>st</sup> March 2019 will be released on Thursday 30<sup>th</sup> May 2019.

**Further information on Outpatient 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](mailto: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/topics/doh-statistics-and-research>