

INFORMATION
ANALYSIS
DIRECTORATE



Northern Ireland

Waiting Time Statistics:

Diagnostic Waiting Times

Quarter Ending March 2019



Department of
Health

An Roinn Sláinte

Máinnystrie O Poustle

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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 2018/19 Ministerial waiting time target and the draft 2018/19 Ministerial diagnostic reporting turnaround target:

“By March 2019, 75% of patients should wait no longer than 9 weeks for a diagnostic test, with no patient waiting longer than 26 weeks”.

“By March 2019, 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 2019. 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/northern-ireland-waiting-time-statistics-diagnostic-waiting-times-march-2019>

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

Authors: Mary Farrelly, Adam Robinson, Siobhán Morgan

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Information & Analysis Directorate
Department of Health
Stormont Estate, Belfast, BT4 3SQ

Contact Information and further copies: 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, academics, and Health & Social Care stakeholders, the media and general public.

Price: Free

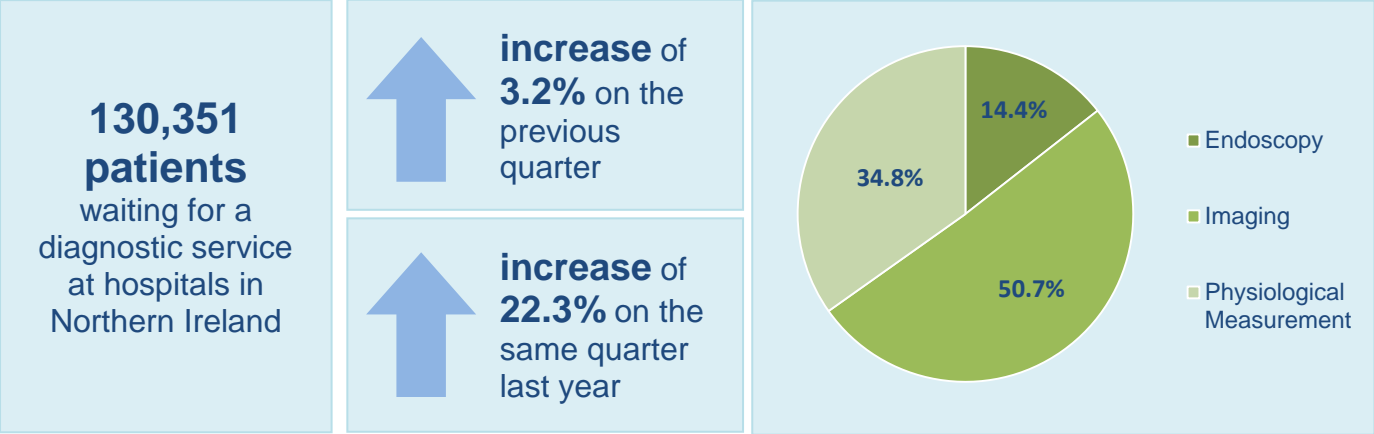
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Contents

Total number of patients waiting for a diagnostic service.....	4
Patients waiting longer than 9 weeks for a diagnostic service.....	5
Patients waiting longer than 26 weeks for a diagnostic service.....	6
Total diagnostic tests reported and dispatched.....	7
Number of urgent diagnostic tests reported and dispatched within 2 days.....	8
Appendix 1: Tables.....	9
Appendix 2: Explanatory Notes.....	12

By March 2019, 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 2019

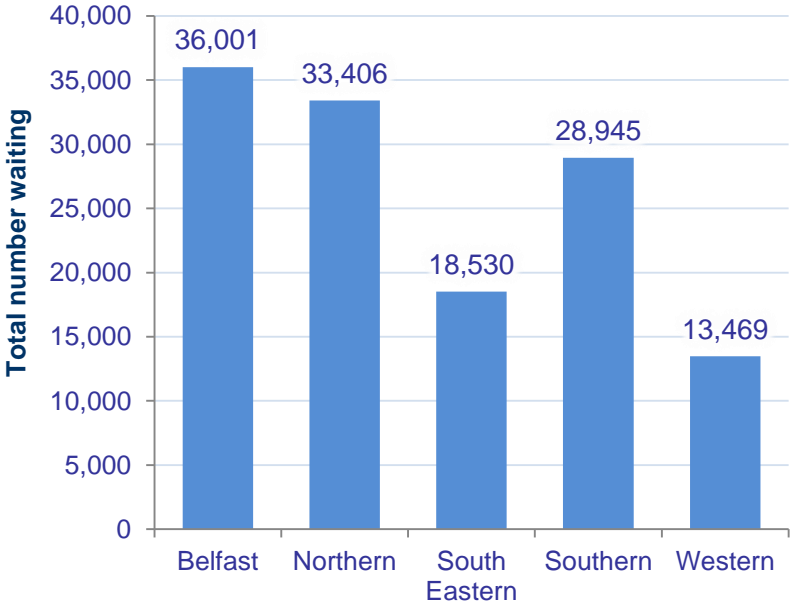


Source: SDR1

At 31st March 2019, a total of 130,351 patients were waiting for a diagnostic test, 3.2% (4,063) more than at 31st December 2018 (126,288), and 22.3% (23,735) more than at 31st March 2018 (106,616) (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).

More than a quarter (27.6%) were waiting for diagnostic tests in the Belfast HSC Trust, with a further 25.6% in the Northern HSC Trust, 22.2% in the Southern HSC Trust, 14.2% in the South Eastern HSC Trust and 10.3% in the Western HSC Trust (Table 2).



More than two thirds (69.4%, 90,459) of the 130,351 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; Pure Tone Audiometry and Gastroscopy. (Table 3).

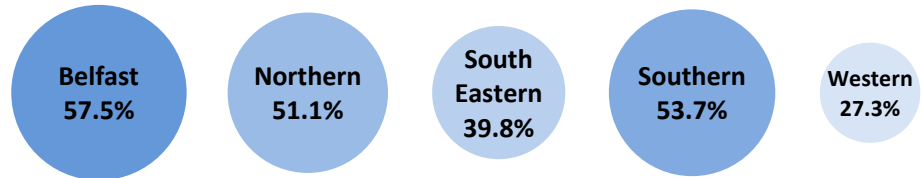
Source: SDR1

Patients waiting more than 9 weeks at 31st March 2019

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

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

49.4%
of patients were waiting longer than 9 weeks



Percentage waiting over 9 weeks

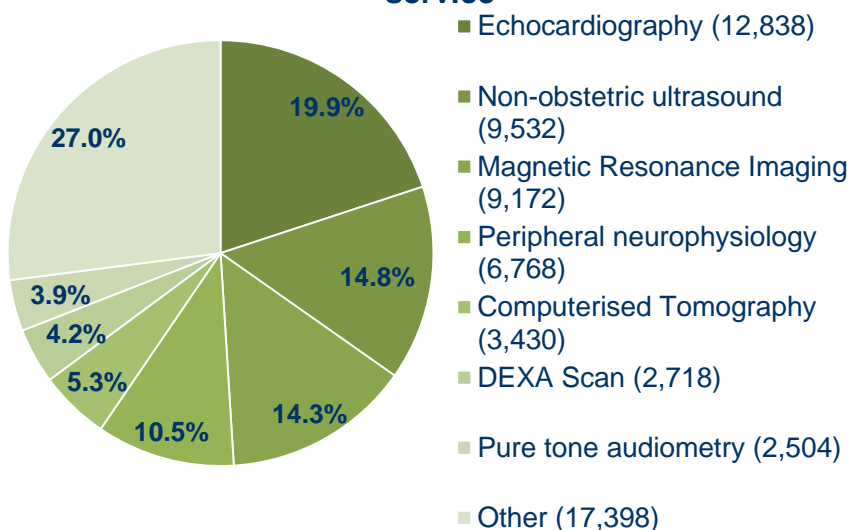
Source: SRD1

At 31st March 2019, 49.4% (64,360) of patients were waiting more than 9 weeks for a diagnostic test, compared with 51.3% (64,831) at 31st December 2018 and 41.1% (43,852) at 31st March 2018 (Table 1).

At 31st March 2019, the 9 week element of the target was not achieved by Northern Ireland as a whole, or by any individual HSC Trust. Data users should be aware that not all diagnostic services are provided at every HSC Trust (see explanatory note 10).

Almost three fifths (57.5%, 20,706) of patients were waiting longer than 9 weeks in Belfast HSC Trust at 31st March 2019, 53.7% (15,537) in the Southern HSC Trust, 51.1% (17,054) in the Northern HSC Trust, 39.8% (7,383) in the South Eastern HSC Trust and 27.3% (3,680) in the Western HSC Trust (Table 2).

Patients waiting over 9 weeks by diagnostic service



Almost three quarters (73.0%, 46,962) of the 64,360 patients waiting more than 9 weeks were waiting for one of the following diagnostic tests: Echocardiography; Non-Obstetric Ultrasound; Magnetic Resonance Imaging; Peripheral Neurophysiology; Computerised Tomography; DEXA Scan and Pure Tone Audiometry. (Table 3).

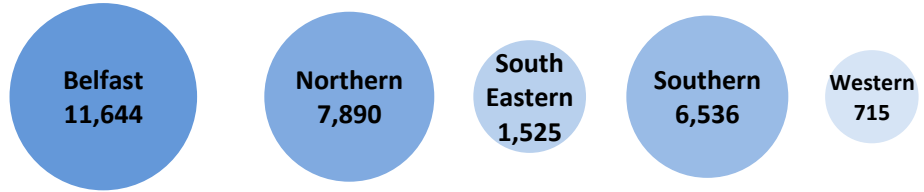
Source: SDR1

Patients waiting more than 26 weeks at 31st March 2019

Achievement of the 9 week target requires that no patients should be waiting over 26 weeks for a diagnostic test.

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

28,310 patients were waiting longer than 26 weeks



No. of patients waiting over 26 weeks

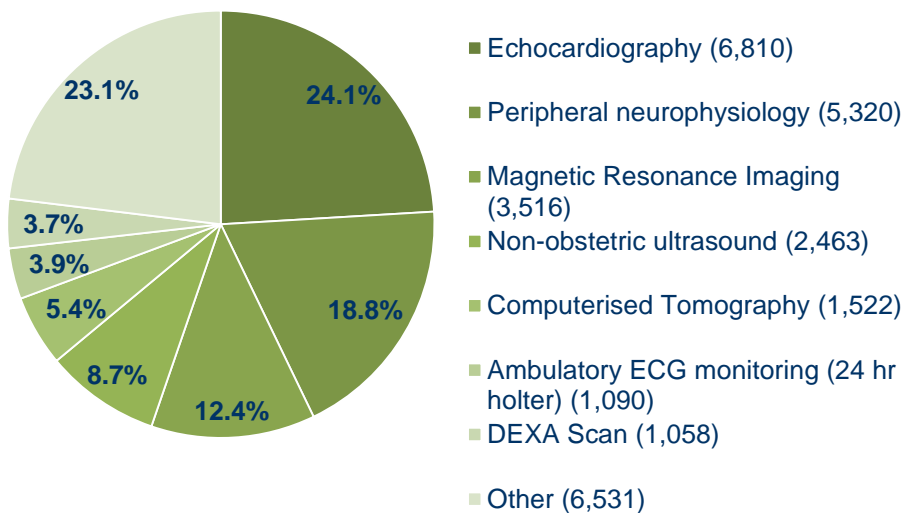
Source: SDR1

At 31st March 2019, 21.7% (28,310) of patients were waiting more than 26 weeks for a diagnostic test compared with 22.2% (28,015) at 31st December 2018 and 16.0% (17,065) at 31st March 2018 (Table 1).

At 31st March 2019, the 26 week element of the target was not achieved by Northern Ireland as a whole or by any individual HSC Trust (Table 2). Data users should be aware that not all diagnostic services are provided at every HSC Trust (see explanatory note 10).

Almost a third (32.3%, 11,644) of patients in the Belfast HSC Trust were waiting longer than 26 weeks at 31st March 2019, 23.6% (7,890) in the Northern HSC Trust, 22.6% (6,536) in the Southern HSC Trust, 8.2% (1,525) in the South Eastern HSC Trust and 5.3% (715) in the Western HSC Trust (Table 2).

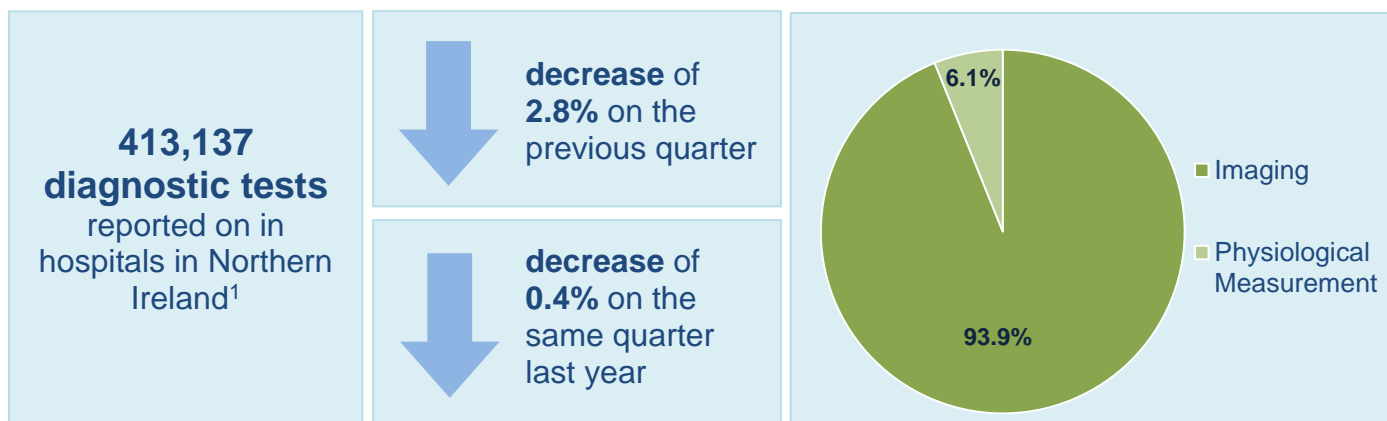
Patients waiting over 26 weeks by diagnostic service



Source: SDR1

More than three quarters (76.9%, 21,779) of the 28,310 patients waiting more than 26 weeks were waiting for one of the following diagnostic tests: Echocardiography; Peripheral Neurophysiology; Magnetic Resonance Imaging; Non-Obstetric Ultrasound; Computerised Tomography; Ambulatory ECG Monitoring (24 Hr Holter) and DEXA Scan (Table 3).

Total number of diagnostic tests reported on during quarter ending March 2019

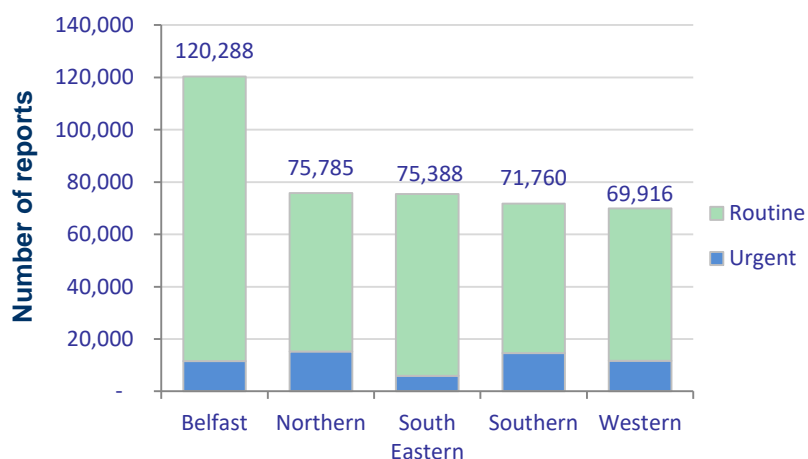


Source: DRTT Return

A total of 413,137 diagnostic tests were reported on and dispatched to the referring clinician at hospitals in Northern Ireland during the quarter ending March 2019, 2.8% (11,877) fewer than the quarter ending December 2018 (425,014), and 0.4% (1,854) fewer than the quarter ending March 2018 (414,991) (Table 4).

Of the 413,137 reported diagnostic tests, 93.9% (387,887) were reporting on an Imaging test and 6.1% (25,250) were reporting on a Physiological Measurement test¹ (Table 4).

Approximately one in eight (14.3%, 58,907) of the diagnostic tests reported on during quarter ending March 2019 were urgent diagnostic tests, with the remaining 85.7% (354,230) being routine diagnostic tests² (Table 4).



Source: DRTT Return

Over one quarter (29.1%) of diagnostic tests were reported and dispatched in the Belfast HSC Trust¹, with a further 18.3% in the Northern HSC Trust, 18.2% in the South Eastern HSC Trust, 17.4% in the Southern HSC Trust and 16.9% in the Western HSC Trust.

¹ 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.

² Reporting times of routine diagnostic tests are available in the accompanying CSV file.

Urgent diagnostic tests reported on within 2 days during quarter ending March 2019

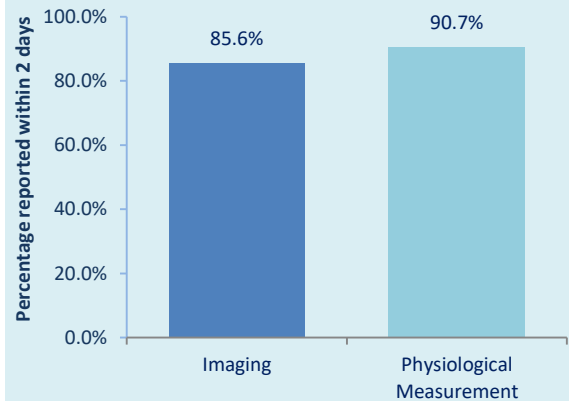
By March 2019, all urgent diagnostic tests should be reported on within 2 days of the test being undertaken.

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

↓ decrease of **1.3 percentage points** on the previous quarter

86.1% of urgent diagnostic tests reported on within 2 days

↑ increase of **0.3 percentage points** on the same quarter last year

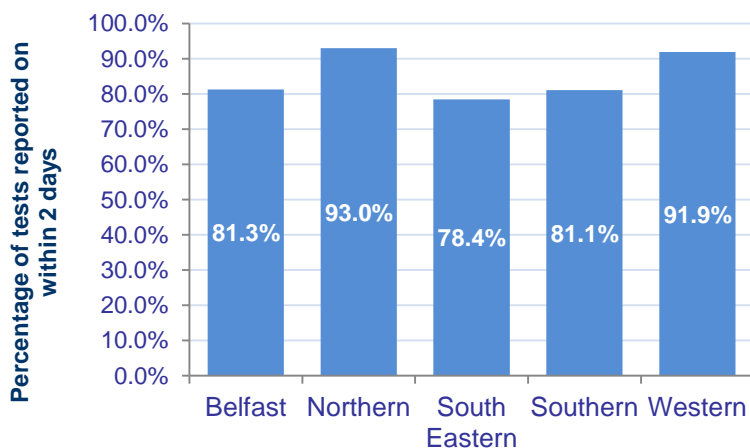


Source: DRTT Return

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

Of the 58,907 urgent diagnostic tests reported on during quarter ending March 2019, 86.1% (50,705) were reported on within 2 days, compared with 87.4% (49,940) during the quarter ending December 2018 and 85.8% (44,607) during the quarter ending March 2018 (Table 5).

Of the 58,907 urgent diagnostic tests reported on during the quarter ending March 2019, 54,111 were imaging reports and 4,796 were physiological measurement reports. A total of 85.7% of urgent imaging tests were reported on within 2 days compared with 90.7% of urgent physiological measurement tests (Table 6).



During quarter ending March 2019, the 2 day target was not achieved by any HSC Trust, although the Northern and Western Trusts respectively reported on 93.0% and 91.9% 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 2019¹

Diagnostic Category		Current Quarter (March 2019)	Previous Quarter (December 2018)	Same Quarter Last Year (March 2018)
Imaging	Total Patients Waiting	66,146	62,010	50,613
	Number waiting over 9 weeks	25,364	25,303	13,052
	<i>Percentage waiting over 9 weeks</i>	38.3%	40.8%	25.8%
	Number waiting over 26 weeks	8,608	8,097	3,259
Physiological Measurement	Total Patients Waiting	45,381	44,098	38,035
	Number waiting over 9 weeks	28,837	28,108	21,371
	<i>Percentage waiting over 9 weeks</i>	63.5%	63.7%	56.2%
	Number waiting over 26 weeks	15,052	14,449	10,065
Endoscopy	Total Patients Waiting	18,824	20,180	17,968
	Number waiting over 9 weeks	10,159	11,420	9,429
	<i>Percentage waiting over 9 weeks</i>	54.0%	56.6%	52.5%
	Number waiting over 26 weeks	4,650	5,469	3,741
Total	Total Patients Waiting	130,351	126,288	106,616
	Number waiting over 9 weeks	64,360	64,831	43,852
	<i>Percentage waiting over 9 weeks</i>	49.4%	51.3%	41.1%
	Number waiting over 26 weeks	28,310	28,015	17,065

Source: SDR1

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

Table 2: Number of patients waiting for a diagnostic service, by HSC Trust – 31st March 2019¹

HSC Trust	Patients Waiting for Diagnostic Service by Weeks Waiting						Total Waiting
	0 - 6	>6 - 9	>9 - 13	>13 - 21	>21-26	>26	
Belfast	11,755	3,540	2,845	4,131	2,086	11,644	36,001
Northern	13,284	3,068	2,514	4,102	2,548	7,890	33,406
South Eastern	8,905	2,242	2,053	2,827	978	1,525	18,530
Southern	9,767	3,641	3,129	4,248	1,624	6,536	28,945
Western	7,893	1,896	1,161	1,376	428	715	13,469
Total	51,604	14,387	11,702	16,684	7,664	28,310	130,351

Source: SDR1

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

Table 3: Number of patients waiting for a diagnostic service by type of service and weeks waiting – 31st March 2019¹

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	13,307	3,495	2,472	3,282	1,315	2,463	26,334
Magnetic Resonance Imaging	7,186	2,500	1,880	2,572	1,204	3,516	18,858
Echocardiography	3,176	1,282	1,630	2,875	1,523	6,810	17,296
Computerised Tomography	4,930	659	496	878	534	1,522	9,019
Peripheral neurophysiology	569	340	311	668	469	5,320	7,677
Pure tone audiometry	2,336	918	792	983	326	403	5,758
Gastroscopy	2,391	643	561	744	236	942	5,517
DEXA Scan	1,850	771	633	663	364	1,058	5,339
Colonoscopy	1,924	512	551	661	262	876	4,786
Plain Film Xrays	4,047	205	73	6	0	0	4,331
Ambulatory ECG monitoring (24 hr holter)	1,419	521	377	586	257	1,090	4,250
Flexi sigmoidoscopy	759	358	318	393	153	610	2,591
Cystoscopy	851	234	183	324	134	417	2,143
Sleep studies	749	221	151	246	49	118	1,534
Arthroscopy	60	89	94	153	112	986	1,494
Barium Studies/Fluoroscopy	637	213	118	122	24	18	1,132
Patient Activated Ambulatory Function	208	103	94	115	64	452	1,036
EEG	273	70	90	166	106	327	1,032
Ambulatory BP	550	134	79	106	81	45	995
Other	4,382	1,119	799	1,141	451	1,337	9,229
All diagnostic tests	51,604	14,387	11,702	16,684	7,664	28,310	130,351

Source: SDR1

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

Table 4: Number of diagnostic tests reported and dispatched by priority of report – QE March 2019²

Priority of Report	Diagnostic Category	QE March	QE	QE March
		2019	December 2018	2018
Urgent	Imaging	54,111	52,585	47,146
	Physiological Measurement	4,796	4,538	4,862
Routine	Imaging	333,776	347,287	342,040
	Physiological Measurement	20,454	20,604	20,943
Total	Imaging	387,887	399,872	389,186
	Physiological Measurement	25,250	25,142	25,805

Source: DRTT Return

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

^R Figures have been revised

Table 5: Number of urgent diagnostic tests reported and dispatched – QE March 2019²

Urgent Diagnostic Tests	Current Quarter (March 2019)	Previous Quarter (December 2018)	Same Quarter Last Year (March 2018)
Total reported	58,907	57,123	52,008
Number reported within 2 days	50,705	49,940	44,607
% reported on within 2 days	86.1%	87.4%	85.8%

Source: DRTT Return

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

^R Figures have been revised

Table 6: Number of urgent diagnostic tests reported and dispatched by diagnostic category and time in days– QE March 2019²

Diagnostic Category	Length of time reporting in days				Total Reported
	0 - 2 days	>2 - 14 days	>14 - 28 days	>28 days	
Imaging	46,355	6,765	827	164	54,111
Physiological Measurement	4,350	398	40	8	4,796
Total	50,705	7,163	867	172	58,907

Source: DRTT Return

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

Table 7: Number of urgent diagnostic tests reported and dispatched by HSC Trust and time in days – QE March 2019²

HSC Trust	Length of time reporting in days				Total Reported
	0 - 2 days	>2 - 14 days	>14 - 28 days	>28 days	
Belfast	9,394	1,700	382	78	11,554
Northern	14,153	1,032	22	6	15,213
South Eastern	4,648	1,169	98	11	5,926
Southern	11,837	2,388	306	68	14,599
Western	10,673	874	59	9	11,615
Total	50,705	7,163	867	172	58,907

Source: DRTT Return

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

Appendix 2: Explanatory Notes

1. The sources for the data contained in this release are the quarterly Departmental Returns SDR1 and the DRTT Return. Note that, prior to September 2018, diagnostic waiting time data was provided separately for 16 selected diagnostic services in the SDR1 Part 1, with all other diagnostic services provided by the HSCB on the SDR1 Part 2 return. The diagnostic reporting turnaround time information is provided by the HSCB on the DRTT return.
2. The '*Diagnostic Waiting Times Publication – Supporting Documentation*' booklet details the technical guidance and definitions used, as well as notes on how to use the data contained within this statistical release. This booklet is available to view or download from: <https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/publications/northern-ireland-waiting-time-statistics-diagnostic-waiting-times-march-2019>
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-2019>
4. From September 2018, the CSV file has a number of changes. Barium Studies and Fluoroscopy diagnostic waits have been combined together and Computerised Tomography has been split into General, Colonoscopy and Cardiac waits. In addition, all patients waiting >26 weeks have now been split into the following timebands >26-36, >36-52, >52-65, >65-78 and >78.
5. The diagnostic waiting times and diagnostic reporting turnaround times returns (SDR1 Parts 1 and 2, DRTT) include patients living outside Northern Ireland and privately funded patients waiting for diagnostic services in Health Service hospitals in Northern Ireland.
6. HSC Trusts use the Northern Ireland Picture Archive and Communications System (NIPACS) as the mechanism for managing imaging services. The HSC Board has carried out a validation exercise with Trusts to address any data quality issues. The quality of imaging waiting times and reporting times has improved in recent years.

7. A **diagnostic service** provides an examination, test, or procedure used to identify a person's disease or condition and which allows a medical diagnosis to be made. There are three categories of diagnostic test: Imaging test; Physiological Measurement test; and Day Case Endoscopy.
8. The **diagnostic waiting time** relates to all tests with a diagnostic element. Included are tests that are part diagnostic and subsequently part therapeutic. A therapeutic procedure is defined as a procedure which involves actual treatment of a person's disease, condition or injury. Purely therapeutic procedures are excluded from the diagnostic waiting times target. Patients currently admitted to a hospital bed and waiting for an emergency procedure, patients waiting for a planned procedure and patients waiting for procedures as part of screening programmes are also excluded from the waiting times target.
9. The waiting time for a diagnostic service commences on the date on which the referral for the service is received by the Health Care provider and stops on the date on which the test is performed. Patients who cannot attend (CNA) have their waiting time adjusted to commence on the date they informed the HSC Trust that they could not attend, while patients who do not attend (DNA) have their waiting time adjusted to commence on the date of the DNA.
10. A number of diagnostic services may not be provided at all of the five HSC Trusts in Northern Ireland. In this situation, patients from one HSC Trust area will be waiting to be seen at a service provided at another HSC Trust. Users should therefore be cautious in how they use these data. For example, they should not be used to calculate the total number of patients waiting per head of the population residing within each HSC Trust area. Neither should the actual number of patients waiting longer than the recommended waiting time be used as indicator of poor performance within an individual HSC Trust. Users who require an indication of the latter are advised to refer to the commentary section of the publication which provides an indication of the percentage of total waiters that have been waiting over the maximum recommended waiting times, within each HSC Trust.
11. A number of the diagnostic services, particularly endoscopies, reported on the SDR 1 (Part 1 & 2) returns are managed as an admission: either an inpatient admission or a day case. As such, they will be included in both the inpatient and day case waiting time and diagnostic waiting time figures. Due to the risk of multiple counting, these two sets of data should not be combined to give an estimate of the total number of patients waiting for admission or a diagnostic service.
12. Some people will be waiting on more than one waiting list or be on the same waiting list for more than one outpatient appointment/admission/diagnostic test at the same time due to having more than one condition.

13. The draft 2018/19 Ministerial diagnostic waiting time target, states that, by March 2019, 75% of patients should wait no longer than 9 weeks for a diagnostic test, with no patient waiting longer than 26 weeks.
14. For Tables 2 and 3, each diagnostic waiting time band relates to the number of completed weeks a patient has been waiting for a diagnostic service. For example, a patient waiting exactly 6 weeks would be included in the 0-6 week time band and a patient waiting 6 weeks and 1 day would be included in the >6-9 week (greater than 6 weeks but waiting no longer than 9 weeks) time band.
15. Patients waiting 'longer than 9 weeks' for a diagnostic service includes all patients in the >9 - 13, >13 - 21, >21-26, >26-36, >36-52, >52-65, >65-78 and >78 week time bands. All patients waiting 'over 26 weeks' includes everyone in the >26-36, >36-52, >52-65, >65-78 and >78 week time bands.
16. The diagnostic reporting turnaround time is the time interval between the completion of the diagnostic test and the results of that test being verified or dispatched to the referring clinician in Northern Ireland, whichever is applicable.
17. Diagnostic reporting times apply to a selected subset of imaging and physiological measurement diagnostic services. These services are: Magnetic Resonance Imaging; Computerised Tomography; Non-Obstetric Ultrasound; Barium Studies; DEXA Scan; Radio-Nuclide Imaging; Pure Tone Audiometry; Echocardiography; Perfusion Studies; Peripheral Neurophysiology; Sleep Studies; and Urodynamics Pressures and Flows and Plain Film X-rays.
18. Data for Plain Film X-rays is only available from April 2015 onwards, as such DRTT figures should not be compared prior to this date.
19. The draft 2018/19 Ministerial diagnostic reporting turnaround target, states that, by March 2019, all urgent diagnostic tests should be reported on within two days of the test being undertaken.
20. Further information on routine diagnostic reporting times are available in the accompanying CSV file at: <https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/articles/diagnostic-waiting-times>
21. The information on diagnostic and reporting times contained within this publication is currently under review. The Department is looking at how this information is sourced and the validation procedures that are carried out with a view to improving the quality. All quality issues identified as part of this review are being addressed on an ongoing basis.

22. Resubmissions for Quarter Ending June 18 were received from Belfast and Northern HSC Trusts for the SDR1 return and from Northern HSC Trust for the DRTT return. These amendments have been reflected in this publication.
23. The Department of Health's policy is to publish revised figures with subsequent statistical releases unless it is decided that the magnitude of the change merits earlier notification.
24. The information contained within this publication is not National Statistics.
25. Figures relating to diagnostic waiting times and diagnostic reporting turnaround times for the quarter ending 30th June 2019 will be released on Thursday 29th August 2019.

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>