

INFORMATION
ANALYSIS
DIRECTORATE



Northern Ireland

Waiting Time Statistics:

Diagnostic Waiting Times

Quarter Ending December 2019



Department of
Health

An Roinn Sláinte

Mánnystrie O Poustle

www.health-ni.gov.uk

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 2019/20 Ministerial waiting time target and the draft 2019/20 Ministerial diagnostic reporting turnaround target:

“By March 2020, 75% of patients should wait no longer than 9 weeks for a diagnostic test, with no patient waiting longer than 26 weeks”.

“By March 2020, 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 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-December-2019>

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

Authors: Mary Farrelly, Adam Robinson, Siobhán Morgan

Publication Date: Thursday 27th February 2020

Reporting Period: 1st October 2019 – 31st December 2019

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

Contact: statistics@health-ni.gov.uk

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

Price: Free

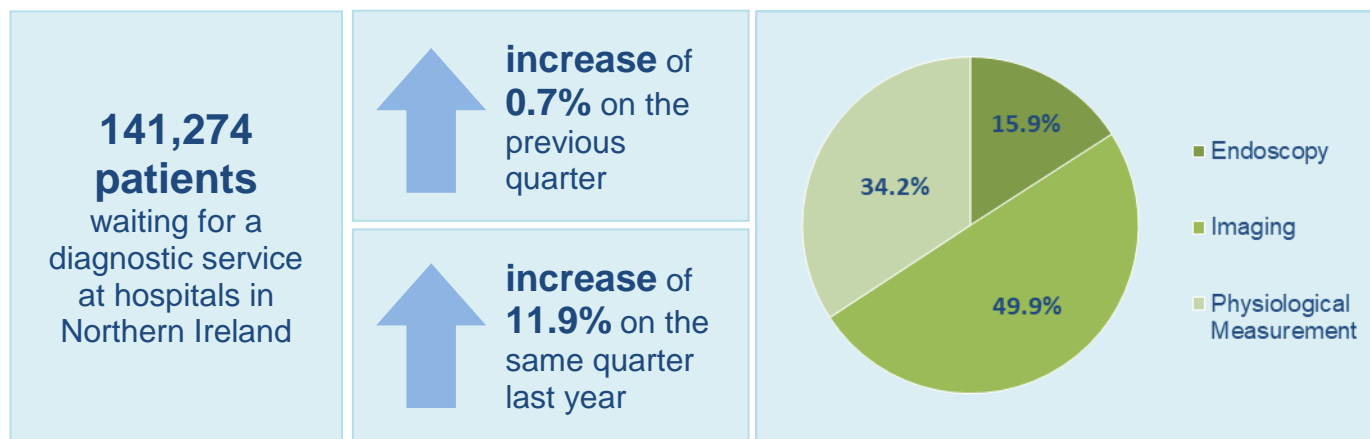
Copyright: This publication is Crown copyright and may be reproduced free of charge in any format or medium. Any material used must be acknowledged, and the title of the publication specified.

Contents

Total number of patients waiting for a 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 2020, 75% of patients should wait no longer than 9 weeks for a diagnostic test, with no patient waiting longer than 26 weeks.

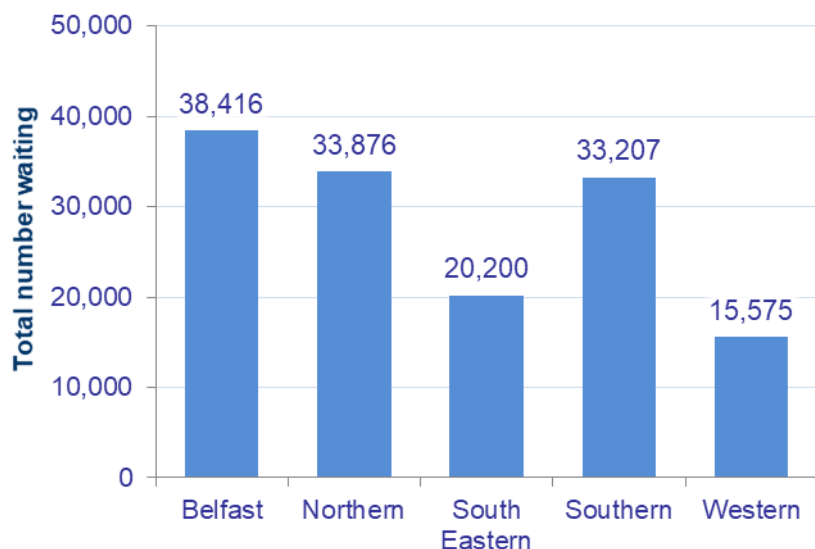
Total number of patients waiting at 31st December 2019



Source: SDR1

At 31st December 2019, a total of 141,274 patients were waiting for a diagnostic test, 0.7% (1,037) more than at 30th September 2019 (140,237), and 11.9% (14,986) more than at 31st December 2018 (126,288) (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 (27.2%) were waiting for diagnostic tests in the Belfast HSC Trust, with a further 24.0% in the Northern HSC Trust, 23.5% in the Southern HSC Trust, 14.3% in the South Eastern HSC Trust and 11.0% in the Western HSC Trust (Table 2).

Source: SDR1

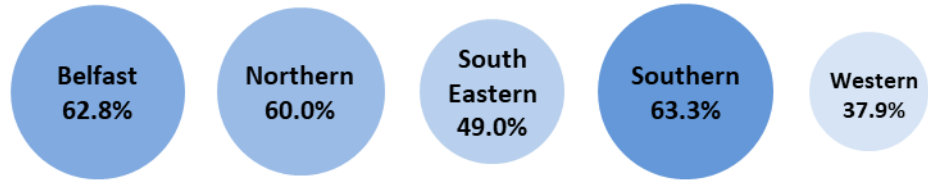
More than two thirds (70.2%, 99,144) of the 141,274 patients were waiting for a diagnostic test within one of the following seven diagnostic services: Non-obstetric Ultrasound; Magnetic Resonance Imaging; Echocardiography; Computerised Tomography; Peripheral Neurophysiology; Gastroscopy and Pure Tone Audiometry. (Table 3).

Patients waiting more than 9 weeks at 31st December 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

57.5%
of patients were waiting longer than 9 weeks



Percentage waiting over 9 weeks

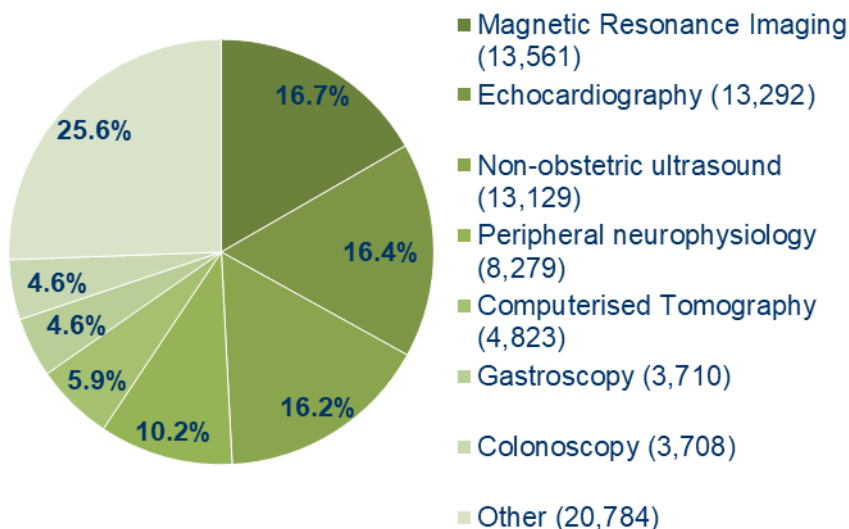
Source: SRD1

At 31st December 2019, 57.5% (81,286) of patients were waiting more than 9 weeks for a diagnostic test, compared with 56.9% (79,842) at 30th September 2019 and 51.3% (64,831) at 31st December 2018 (Table 1).

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).

Around three fifths of patients were waiting longer than 9 weeks in the Southern (63.3%, 21,032), Belfast (62.8%, 24,132) and Northern (60.0%, 20,315) HSC Trusts, almost half (49.0%, 9,901) in the South Eastern HSC Trust and over a third (37.9%, 5,906) in the Western HSC Trust (Table 2).

Patients waiting over 9 weeks by diagnostic service



Of the 81,286 patients waiting more than 9 weeks, three quarters (74.4%, 60,502) were waiting for one of the following diagnostic tests: Magnetic Resonance Imaging; Echocardiography; Non-Obstetric Ultrasound; Peripheral Neurophysiology; Computerised Tomography; Gastroscopy and Colonoscopy. (Table 3).

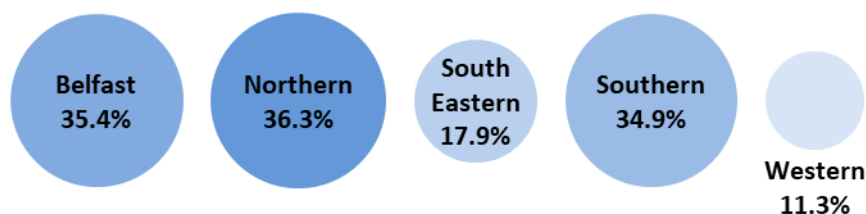
Source: SDR1

Patients waiting more than 26 weeks at 31st December 2019

Achievement of the 26 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

30.4% of patients were waiting longer than 26 weeks



Percentage waiting over 26 weeks

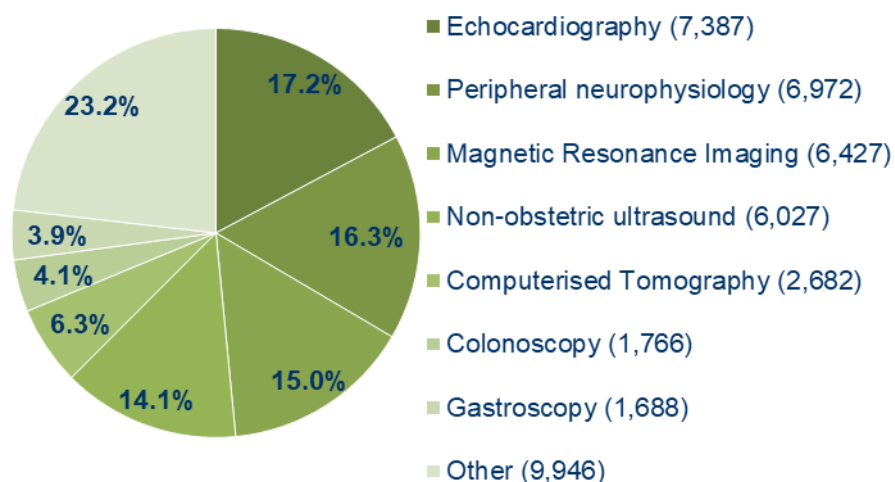
Source: SDR1

At 31st December 2019, 30.4% (42,895) of patients were waiting more than 26 weeks for a diagnostic test compared with 30.3% (42,546) at 30th September 2019 and 22.2% (28,015) at 31st December 2018 (Table 1).

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).

Around a third of patients in the Northern (36.3%, 12,308), Belfast (35.4%, 13,617) and Southern (34.9%, 11,592) HSC Trusts were waiting longer than 26 weeks, 17.9% (3,617) in the South Eastern HSC Trust and 11.3% (1,761) in the Western HSC Trust (Table 2).

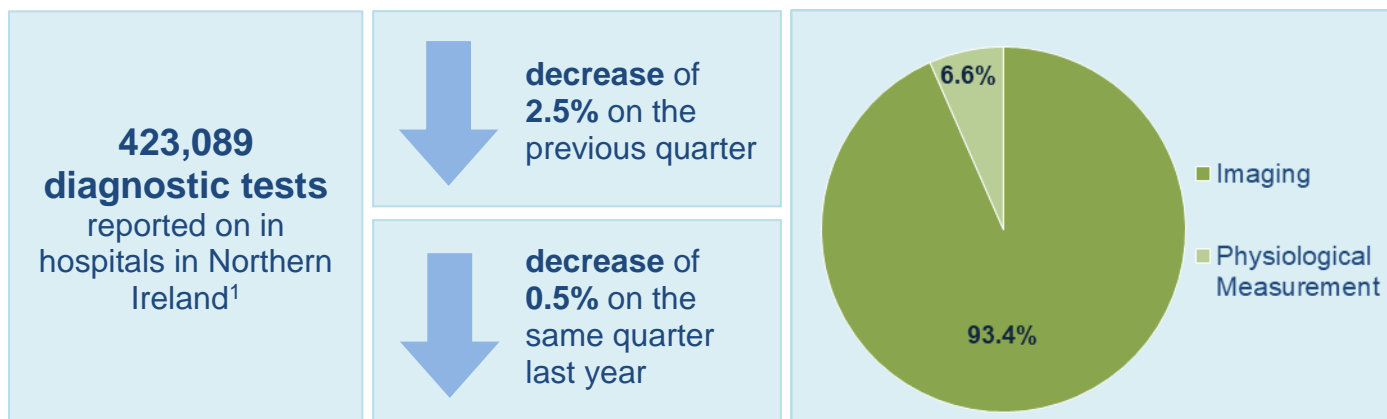
Patients waiting over 26 weeks by diagnostic service



More than three quarters (76.8%, 32,949) of the 42,895 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; Colonoscopy and Gastroscopy. (Table 3).

Source: SDR1

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

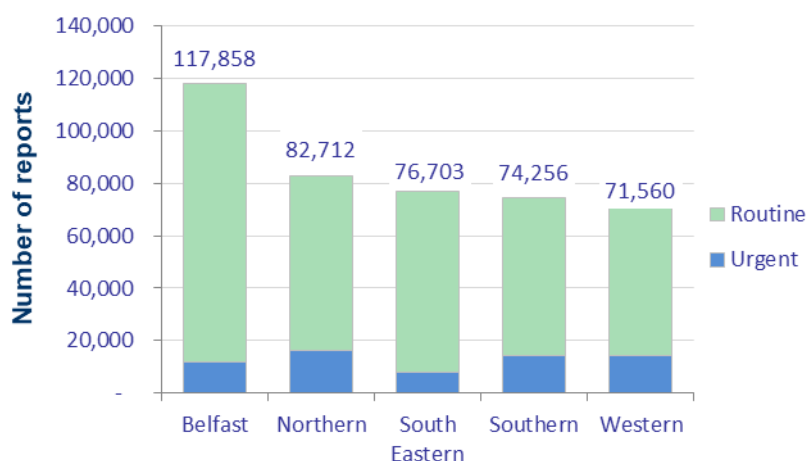


Source: DRTT Return

A total of 423,089 diagnostic tests were reported on and dispatched to the referring clinician at hospitals in Northern Ireland during the quarter ending December 2019, 2.5% (10,918) fewer than the quarter ending September 2019 (434,007), and 0.5% (1,925) fewer than the quarter ending December 2018 (425,014) (Table 4).

Of the 423,089 reported diagnostic tests, 93.4% (395,134) were reporting on an Imaging test and 6.6% (27,955) were reporting on a Physiological Measurement test (Table 4).

Approximately one in seven (15.2%, 64,196) of the diagnostic tests reported on during quarter ending December 2019 were urgent diagnostic tests, with the remaining 84.8% (358,893) being routine diagnostic tests¹ (Table 4).



More than a quarter (27.9%) of diagnostic tests were reported and dispatched in the Belfast HSC Trust, with a further 19.5% in the Northern HSC Trust, 18.1% in the South Eastern HSC Trust, 17.6% in the Southern HSC Trust and 16.9% in the Western HSC Trust.²

Source: DRTT Return

¹ Reporting times of routine diagnostic tests are available in the accompanying CSV file.

² Diagnostic reporting turnaround times relate only to a selected subset of Imaging and Physiological Measurement tests. Day case endoscopies are reported on the day of the test and as such are not included.

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

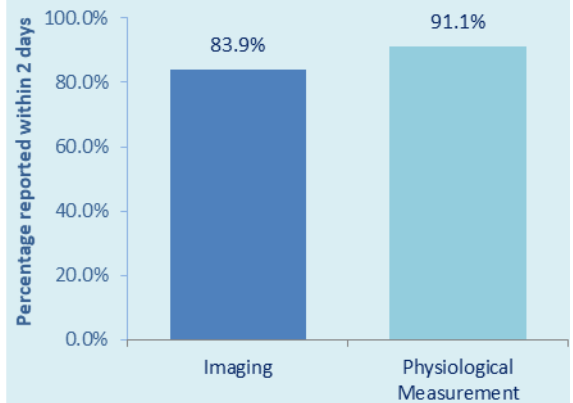
By March 2020, all urgent diagnostic tests should be reported on within 2 days of the test being undertaken.

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

↓ decrease of **0.4 percentage points** on the previous quarter

84.6% of urgent diagnostic tests reported on within 2 days

↓ decrease of **1.3 percentage points** on the same quarter last year

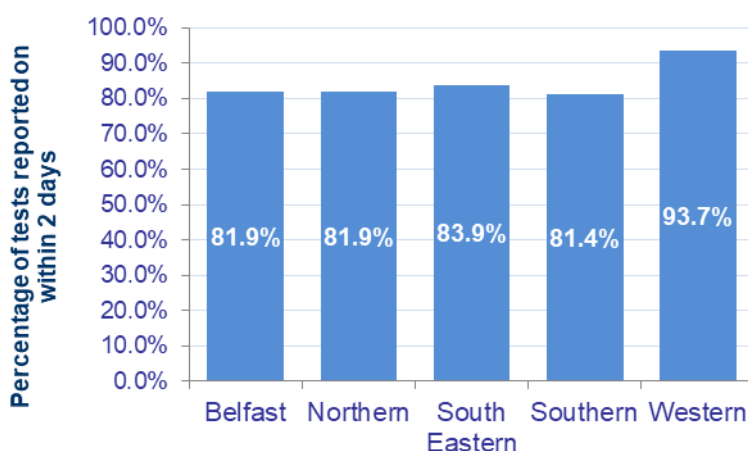


Source: DRTT Return

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

Of the 64,196 urgent diagnostic tests reported on during quarter ending December 2019, 84.6% (54,328) were reported on within 2 days, compared with 85.1% (53,098) during the quarter ending September 2019 and 87.4% (49,940) during the quarter ending December 2018 (Table 5).

Of the 64,196 urgent diagnostic tests, 57,656 were imaging reports and 6,540 were physiological measurement reports. A total of 83.9% of urgent imaging tests were reported on within 2 days compared with 91.1% of urgent physiological measurement tests (Table 6).



During the quarter ending December 2019, the 2 day target was not achieved by any HSC Trust, although the Western Trust reported on 93.7% 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 December 2019¹

Diagnostic Category		Current Quarter (December 2019)	Previous Quarter (September 2019)	Same Quarter Last Year (December 2018)
Imaging	Total Patients Waiting	70,436	70,165	62,010
	Number waiting over 9 weeks	35,456	34,467	25,303
	<i>Percentage waiting over 9 weeks</i>	<i>50.3%</i>	<i>49.1%</i>	<i>40.8%</i>
	Number waiting over 26 weeks	16,969	16,999	8,097
Physiological Measurement	Total Patients Waiting	48,368	49,443	44,098
	Number waiting over 9 weeks	32,304	33,234	28,108
	<i>Percentage waiting over 9 weeks</i>	<i>66.8%</i>	<i>67.2%</i>	<i>63.7%</i>
	Number waiting over 26 weeks	18,731	19,358	14,449
Endoscopy	Total Patients Waiting	22,470	20,629	20,180
	Number waiting over 9 weeks	13,526	12,141	11,420
	<i>Percentage waiting over 9 weeks</i>	<i>60.2%</i>	<i>58.9%</i>	<i>56.6%</i>
	Number waiting over 26 weeks	7,195	6,189	5,469
Total	Total Patients Waiting	141,274	140,237	126,288
	Number waiting over 9 weeks	81,286	79,842	64,831
	<i>Percentage waiting over 9 weeks</i>	<i>57.5%</i>	<i>56.9%</i>	<i>51.3%</i>
	Number waiting over 26 weeks	42,895	42,546	28,015

Source: SDR1

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

Table 2: Number of patients waiting for a diagnostic service, by HSC Trust – 31st December 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	10,138	4,146	3,773	4,781	1,961	13,617	38,416
Northern	10,987	2,574	2,320	3,559	2,128	12,308	33,876
South Eastern	8,046	2,253	2,443	2,823	1,018	3,617	20,200
Southern	8,810	3,365	3,319	4,205	1,916	11,592	33,207
Western	7,235	2,434	1,993	1,639	513	1,761	15,575
Total	45,216	14,772	13,848	17,007	7,536	42,895	141,274

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 December 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	10,514	3,124	2,534	3,110	1,458	6,027	26,767
Magnetic Resonance Imaging	5,303	2,901	2,793	3,261	1,080	6,427	21,765
Echocardiography	3,259	1,224	1,715	2,764	1,426	7,387	17,775
Computerised Tomography	4,594	1,099	901	867	373	2,682	10,516
Peripheral neurophysiology	460	319	310	607	390	6,972	9,058
Gastroscopy	2,450	742	673	948	401	1,688	6,902
Pure tone audiometry	1,955	1,095	907	1,011	340	1,053	6,361
Colonoscopy	2,054	573	593	869	480	1,766	6,335
DEXA Scan	1,531	615	550	532	281	1,656	5,165
Ambulatory ECG monitoring (24 hr holter)	1,352	466	540	529	231	1,358	4,476
Plain Film Xrays	3,512	155	44	11	5	2	3,729
Flexi sigmoidoscopy	778	238	313	503	317	1,216	3,365
Cystoscopy	837	220	133	85	38	489	1,802
Sleep studies	773	267	236	170	43	114	1,603
Barium Studies/Fluoroscopy	584	176	167	267	80	154	1,428
Arthroscopy	49	68	90	160	48	981	1,396
Ambulatory BP	579	174	145	147	44	78	1,167
Patient Activated Ambulatory Function	257	60	105	157	51	490	1,120
EEG	208	106	96	146	77	292	925
Other	4,167	1,150	1,003	863	373	2,063	9,619
All diagnostic tests	45,216	14,772	13,848	17,007	7,536	42,895	141,274

Source: SDR1

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

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

Priority of Report	Diagnostic Category	Current Quarter (Dec 2019)	Previous Quarter (Sep 2019)	Same Quarter Last Year (Dec 2018)
Urgent	Imaging	57,656	56,430	52,585
	Physiological Measurement	6,540	5,987	4,538
Routine	Imaging	337,478	351,907	347,287
	Physiological Measurement	21,415	19,683	20,604
Total	Imaging	395,134	408,337	399,872
	Physiological Measurement	27,955	25,670	25,142

Source: DRTT Return

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

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

Urgent Diagnostic Tests	Current Quarter (Dec 2019)	Previous Quarter (Sep 2019)	Same Quarter Last Year (Dec 2018)
Total reported	64,196	62,417	57,123
Number reported within 2 days	54,328	53,098	49,940
% reported on <i>within 2 days</i>	84.6%	85.1%	87.4%

Source: DRTT Return

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

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

Diagnostic Category	Length of time reporting in days				Total Reported
	0 - 2 days	>2 - 14 days	>14 - 28 days	>28 days	
Imaging	48,368	7,925	793	570	57,656
Physiological Measurement	5,960	530	40	10	6,540
Total	54,328	8,455	833	580	64,196

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 December 2019²

HSC Trust	Length of time reporting in days				Total Reported
	0 - 2 days	>2 - 14 days	>14 - 28 days	>28 days	
Belfast	9,589	1,659	219	240	11,707
Northern	13,230	2,600	222	110	16,162
South Eastern	6,533	1,139	106	7	7,785
Southern	11,737	2,206	256	216	14,415
Western	13,239	851	30	7	14,127
Total	54,328	8,455	833	580	64,196

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/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-December-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 2019/20 Ministerial diagnostic waiting time target, states that, by March 2020, 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 2019/20 Ministerial diagnostic reporting turnaround target, states that, by March 2020, 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/publications/northern-ireland-waiting-time-statistics-diagnostic-waiting-times-December-2019>
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 September 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 31st March 2020 will be released on Thursday 28th May 2020.

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>