

INFORMATION  
ANALYSIS  
DIRECTORATE



# Northern Ireland Waiting Time Statistics: Diagnostic Waiting Times Quarter Ending March 2020

# Reader Information

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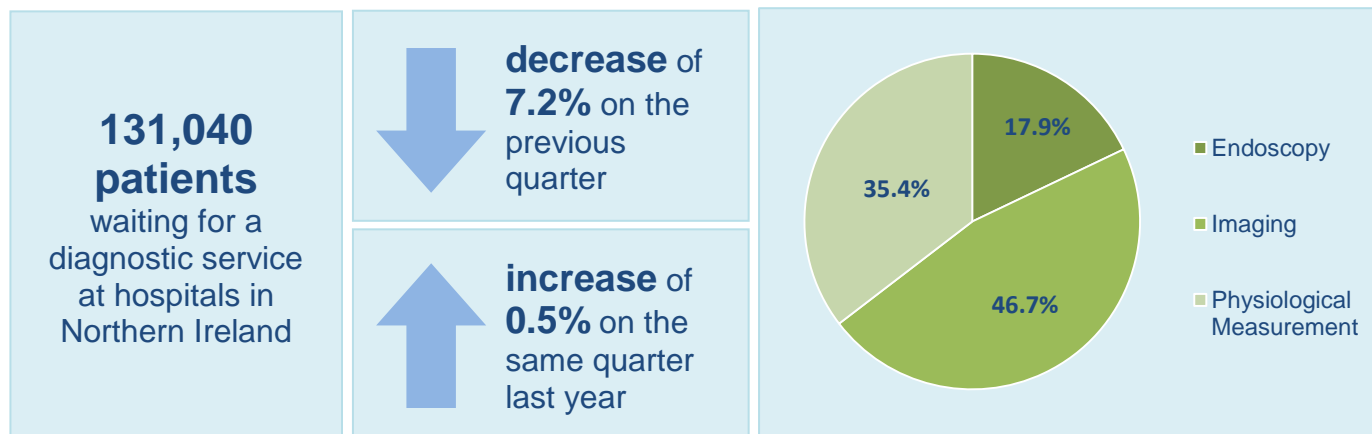
- Purpose:** This statistical release presents information on waiting times and reporting times for diagnostic services in Northern Ireland and reports on the performance of the Health and Social Care (HSC) Trusts against the draft 2019/20 Ministerial waiting time target and the draft 2019/20 Ministerial 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 31<sup>st</sup> March 2020. 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-2020>  
Due to the redeployment of resources during the Covid-19 pandemic, the data contained within this publication has not been subject to the same level of quality assurance it generally would.
- Internet:** <https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/articles/diagnostic-waiting-times>
- Authors:** Mary Farrelly, Adam Robinson, Siobhán Morgan
- Publication Date:** Thursday 28th May 2020
- Reporting Period:** 1<sup>st</sup> January 2020 – 31st March 2020
- Issued by:** Hospital Information Branch  
Information & Analysis Directorate  
Department of Health  
Stormont Estate, Belfast, BT4 3SQ
- Contact:** [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, healthcare professionals, academics, and Health & Social Care stakeholders, the media and general public.
- Price:** Free
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**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.**

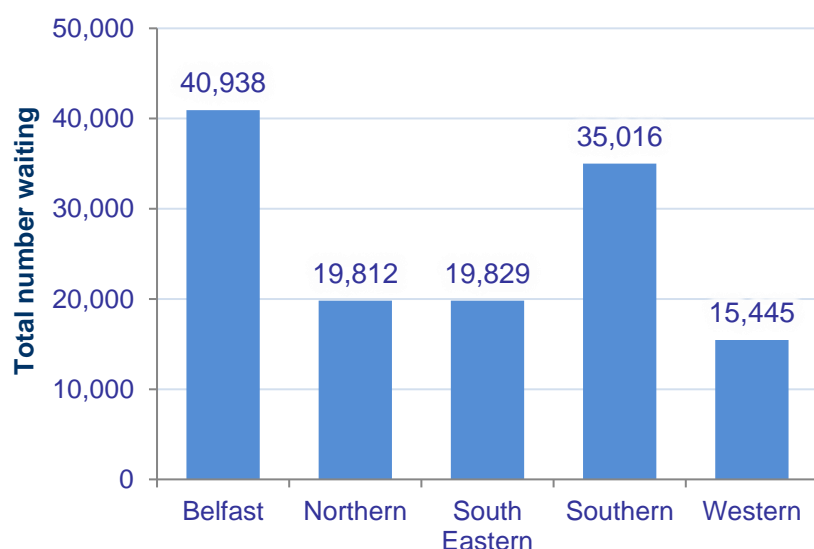
## Total number of patients waiting at 31<sup>st</sup> March 2020



Source: SDR1

At 31<sup>st</sup> March 2020, a total of 131,040 patients were waiting for a diagnostic test, 7.2% (10,234) fewer than at 31<sup>st</sup> December 2019 (141,274), and 0.5% (637) more than at 31<sup>st</sup> March 2019 (130,403) (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).



Almost a third (31.2%) were waiting for diagnostic tests in the Belfast HSC Trust, with a further 26.7% in the Southern HSC Trust, 15.1% in both the Northern and South Eastern HSC Trusts and 11.8% in the Western HSC Trust (Table 2).

Source: SDR1

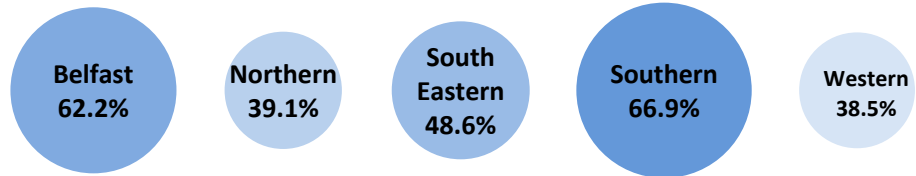
Almost two thirds (65.1%, 85,276) of the 131,040 patients were waiting for a diagnostic test within one of the following seven diagnostic services: Non-obstetric Ultrasound; Magnetic Resonance Imaging; Echocardiography; Peripheral Neurophysiology; Computerised Tomography; Gastroscopy and Pure Tone Audiometry. (Table 3).

## Patients waiting more than 9 weeks at 31<sup>st</sup> March 2020

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

**55.1%**  
of patients were waiting longer than 9 weeks



### Percentage waiting over 9 weeks

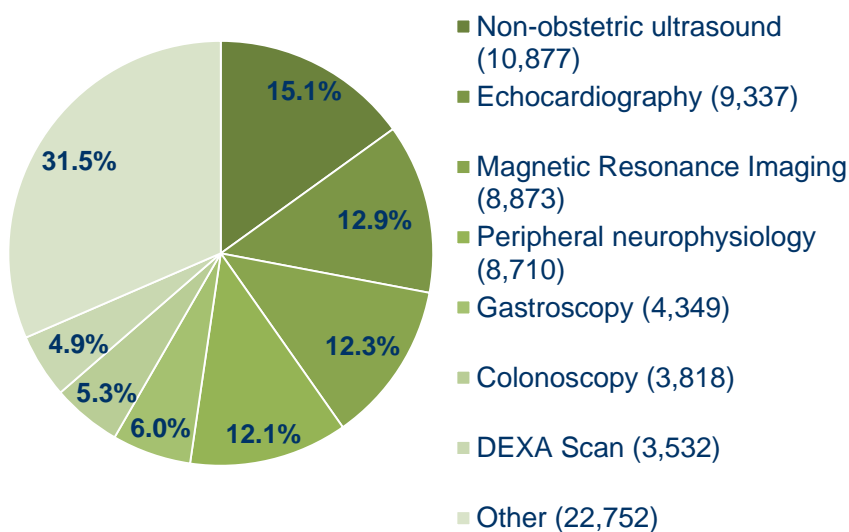
Source: SRD1

At 31<sup>st</sup> March 2020, 55.1% (72,248) of patients were waiting more than 9 weeks for a diagnostic test, compared with 57.5% (81,286) at 31<sup>st</sup> December 2019 and 49.4% (64,387) at 31<sup>st</sup> March 2019 (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 two thirds of patients were waiting longer than 9 weeks in the Southern (66.9%, 23,436) and Belfast (62.2%, 25,473) HSC Trusts, almost half (48.6%, 9,639) in the South Eastern HSC Trust and around two fifths in the Northern (39.1%, 7,754) and Western (38.5%, 5,946) HSC Trusts (Table 2).

### Patients waiting over 9 weeks by diagnostic service



Of the 72,248 patients waiting more than 9 weeks, over two thirds (68.5%, 49,496) were waiting for one of the following diagnostic tests: Non-Obstetric Ultrasound; Echocardiography; Magnetic Resonance Imaging; Peripheral Neurophysiology; Gastroscopy; Colonoscopy and DEXA Scan. (Table 3).

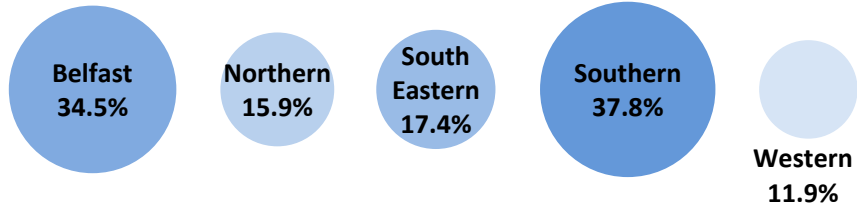
Source: SDR1

## Patients waiting more than 26 weeks at 31<sup>st</sup> March 2020

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

**27.3%** of patients were waiting longer than 26 weeks



### Percentage waiting over 26 weeks

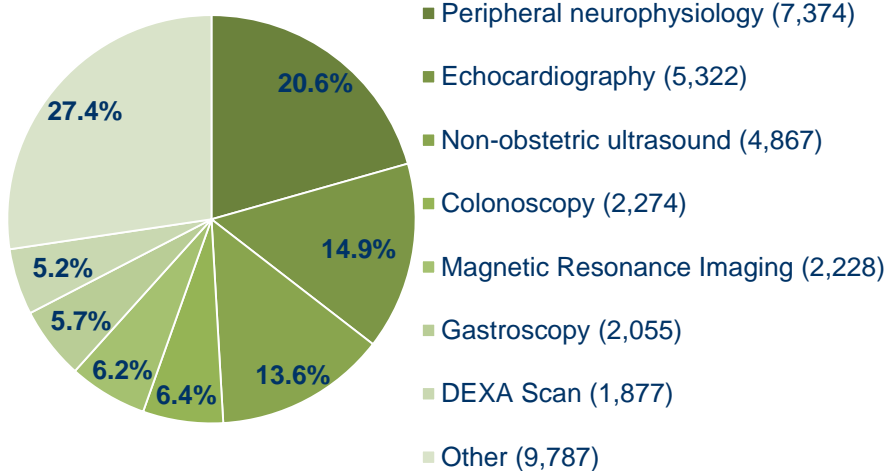
Source: SDR1

At 31<sup>st</sup> March 2020, 27.3% (35,784) of patients were waiting more than 26 weeks for a diagnostic test compared with 30.4% (42,895) at 31<sup>st</sup> December 2019 and 21.7% (28,321) at 31<sup>st</sup> March 2019 (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 Southern (37.8%, 13,223) and Belfast (34.5%, 14,110) HSC Trusts were waiting longer than 26 weeks, 17.4% (3,459) in the South Eastern HSC Trust, 15.9% (3,153) in the Northern HSC Trust and 11.9% (1,839) in the Western HSC Trust (Table 2).

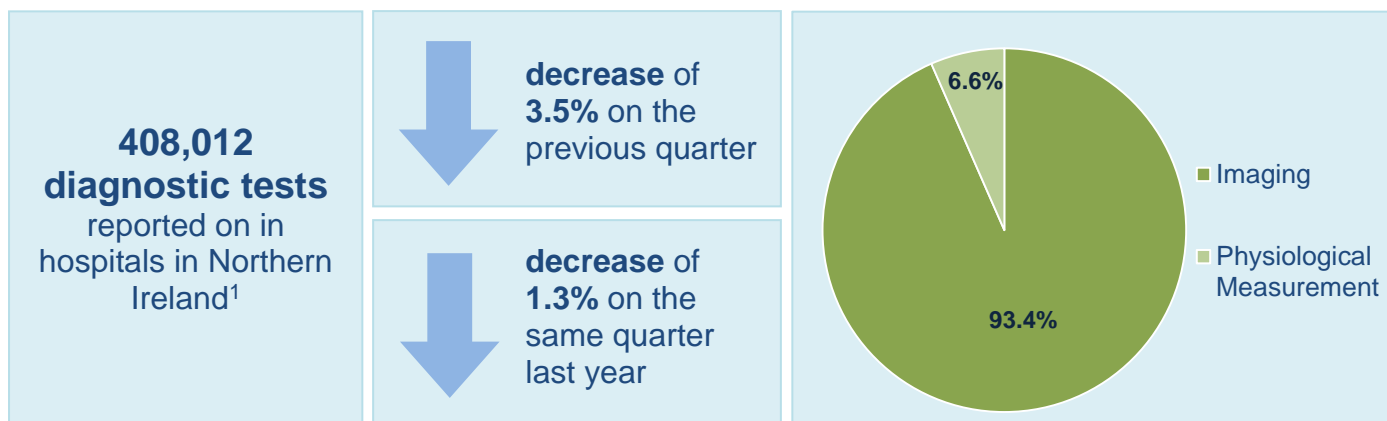
### Patients waiting over 26 weeks by diagnostic service



Almost three quarters (72.6%, 25,997) of the 35,784 patients waiting more than 26 weeks were waiting for one of the following diagnostic tests: Peripheral Neurophysiology; Echocardiography; Non-Obstetric Ultrasound; Colonoscopy; Magnetic Resonance Imaging; Gastroscopy and DEXA Scan. (Table 3).

Source: SDR1

## Total number of diagnostic tests reported on during quarter ending March 2020

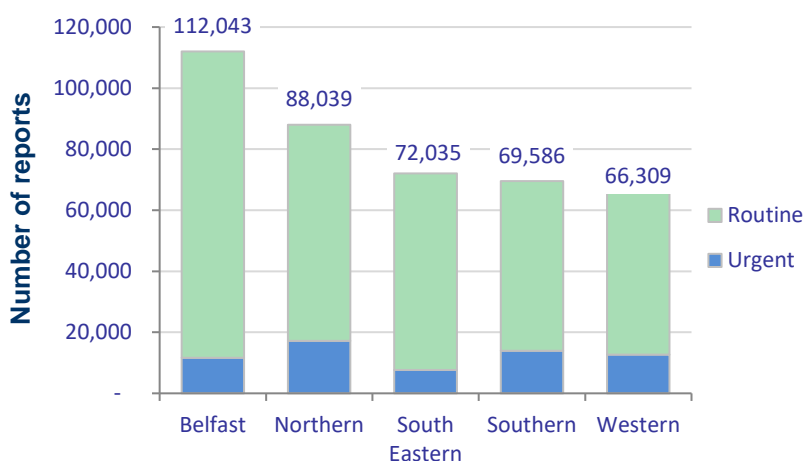


Source: DRTT Return

A total of 408,012 diagnostic tests were reported on and dispatched to the referring clinician at hospitals in Northern Ireland during the quarter ending March 2020, 3.5% (14,971) fewer than the quarter ending December 2019 (422,983), and 1.3% (5,208) fewer than the quarter ending March 2019 (413,220) (Table 4).

Of the 408,012 reported diagnostic tests, 93.4% (381,172) were reporting on an Imaging test and 6.6% (26,840) were reporting on a Physiological Measurement test (Table 4).

Approximately one sixth (15.4%, 62,970) of the diagnostic tests reported on during quarter ending March 2020 were urgent diagnostic tests, with the remaining 84.6% (345,042) being routine diagnostic tests<sup>1</sup> (Table 4).



More than a quarter (27.5%) of diagnostic tests were reported and dispatched in the Belfast HSC Trust, with a further 21.6% in the Northern HSC Trust, 17.7% in the South Eastern HSC Trust, 17.1% in the Southern HSC Trust and 16.3% in the Western HSC Trust.<sup>2</sup>

Source: DRTT Return

<sup>1</sup> Reporting times of routine diagnostic tests are available in the accompanying CSV file.

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

## Urgent diagnostic tests reported on within 2 days during quarter ending March 2020

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

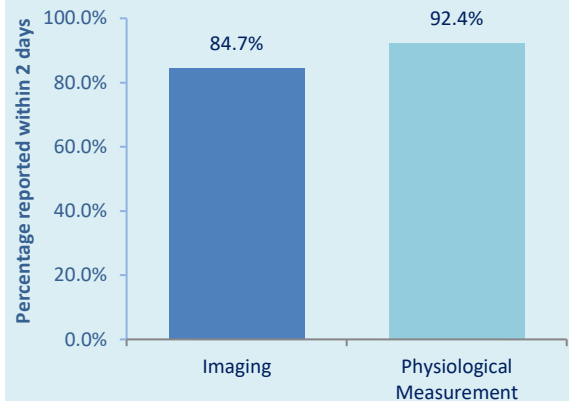


**increase of 0.8 percentage points** on the previous quarter



**decrease of 0.7 percentage points** on the same quarter last year

**85.4%** of urgent diagnostic tests reported on within 2 days

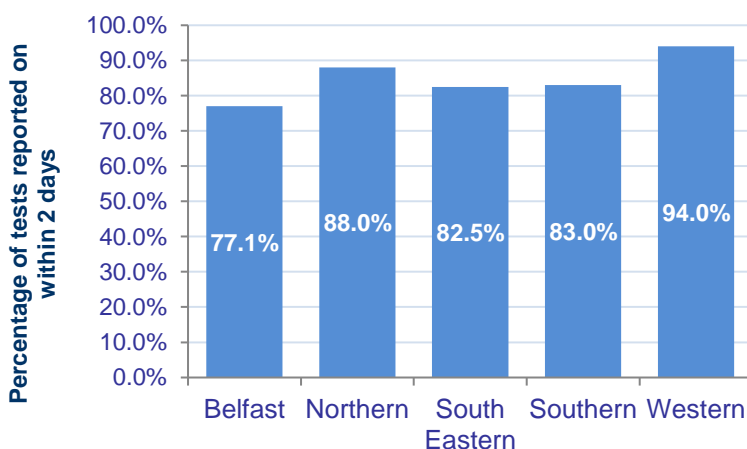


Source: DRTT Return

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

Of the 62,970 urgent diagnostic tests reported on during quarter ending March 2020, 85.4% (53,797) were reported on within 2 days, compared with 84.6% (54,328) during the quarter ending December 2019 and 86.1% (50,784) during the quarter ending March 2019 (Table 5).

Of the 62,970 urgent diagnostic tests, 56,755 were imaging reports and 6,215 were physiological measurement reports. A total of 84.7% of urgent imaging tests were reported on within 2 days compared with 92.4% of urgent physiological measurement tests (Table 6).



During the quarter ending March 2020, the 2 day target was not achieved by any HSC Trust, although the Western Trust reported on 94.0% 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 2020<sup>1</sup>**

Diagnostic Category		Current Quarter (March 2020)	Previous Quarter (December 2019)	Same Quarter Last Year (March 2019)
<b>Imaging</b>	Total Patients Waiting	61,154	70,436	66,146
	Number waiting over 9 weeks	27,867	35,456	25,364
	<i>Percentage waiting over 9 weeks</i>	45.6%	50.3%	38.3%
	Number waiting over 26 weeks	10,252	16,969	8,608
<b>Physiological Measurement</b>	Total Patients Waiting	46,403	48,368	45,433
	Number waiting over 9 weeks	29,608	32,304	28,864
	<i>Percentage waiting over 9 weeks</i>	63.8%	66.8%	63.5%
	Number waiting over 26 weeks	17,122	18,731	15,063
<b>Endoscopy</b>	Total Patients Waiting	23,483	22,470	18,824
	Number waiting over 9 weeks	14,773	13,526	10,159
	<i>Percentage waiting over 9 weeks</i>	62.9%	60.2%	54.0%
	Number waiting over 26 weeks	8,410	7,195	4,650
<b>Total</b>	Total Patients Waiting	131,040	141,274	130,403
	Number waiting over 9 weeks	72,248	81,286	64,387
	<i>Percentage waiting over 9 weeks</i>	55.1%	57.5%	49.4%
	Number waiting over 26 weeks	35,784	42,895	28,321

Source: SDR1

<sup>1</sup>Refer to Explanatory Notes 1–15 & 22-25

**Table 2: Number of patients waiting for a diagnostic service, by HSC Trust – 31st March 2020<sup>1</sup>**

HSC Trust	Patients Waiting for Diagnostic Service by Weeks Waiting						Total Waiting
	0 - 6	>6 - 9	>9 - 13	>13 - 21	>21-26	>26	
Belfast	11,237	4,228	3,467	5,070	2,826	14,110	40,938
Northern	9,676	2,382	1,539	1,964	1,098	3,153	19,812
South Eastern	7,545	2,645	2,377	2,675	1,128	3,459	19,829
Southern	7,861	3,719	3,006	4,656	2,551	13,223	35,016
Western	6,733	2,766	1,999	1,607	501	1,839	15,445
<b>Total</b>	<b>43,052</b>	<b>15,740</b>	<b>12,388</b>	<b>15,972</b>	<b>8,104</b>	<b>35,784</b>	<b>131,040</b>

Source: SDR1

<sup>1</sup>Refer 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 2020<sup>1</sup>**

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	9,518	3,169	2,378	2,399	1,233	4,867	23,564
Magnetic Resonance Imaging	5,072	2,538	2,318	3,024	1,303	2,228	16,483
Echocardiography	2,352	1,199	1,073	1,855	1,087	5,322	12,888
Peripheral neurophysiology	465	278	332	624	380	7,374	9,453
Computerised Tomography	4,452	1,162	865	1,158	463	940	9,040
Gastroscopy	2,306	752	712	1,065	517	2,055	7,407
Pure tone audiometry	2,352	1,243	950	1,003	337	556	6,441
Colonoscopy	1,974	603	442	652	450	2,274	6,395
DEXA Scan	1,509	817	647	584	424	1,877	5,858
Ambulatory ECG monitoring (24 hr holter)	1,490	534	288	417	294	1,253	4,276
Flexi sigmoidoscopy	768	322	260	541	299	1,529	3,719
Plain Film Xrays	3,240	170	18	7	4	0	3,439
Ambulatory ECG	762	244	176	447	216	617	2,462
Cystoscopy	752	263	157	134	65	437	1,808
Barium Studies/Fluoroscopy	594	202	221	263	131	299	1,710
Sleep studies	753	367	184	160	63	153	1,680
Arthroscopy	58	67	83	150	86	1,001	1,445
Ambulatory BP	507	224	145	177	61	86	1,200
Patient Activated Ambulatory Function	268	92	84	97	48	491	1,080
Other	3,860	1,494	1,055	1,215	643	2,425	10,692
<b>All diagnostic tests</b>	<b>43,052</b>	<b>15,740</b>	<b>12,388</b>	<b>15,972</b>	<b>8,104</b>	<b>35,784</b>	<b>131,040</b>

Source: SDR1

<sup>1</sup>Refer to Explanatory Notes 1–15 & 22-25

**Table 4: Number of diagnostic tests reported and dispatched by priority of report – QE March 2020<sup>2</sup>**

Priority of Report	Diagnostic Category	Current Quarter (Mar 2020)	Previous Quarter (Dec 2019)	Same Quarter Last Year (Mar 2019)
<b>Urgent</b>	Imaging	56,755	57,656	54,111
	Physiological Measurement	6,215	6,540	4,869
<b>Routine</b>	Imaging	324,417	337,372	333,776
	Physiological Measurement	20,625	21,415	20,464
<b>Total</b>	Imaging	381,172	395,028	387,887
	Physiological Measurement	26,840	27,955	25,333

Source: DRTT Return

<sup>2</sup>Refer to Explanatory Notes 1-3, 5 & 16–25

**Table 5: Number of urgent diagnostic tests reported and dispatched – QE March 2020<sup>2</sup>**

Urgent Diagnostic Tests	Current Quarter (Mar 2020)	Previous Quarter (Dec 2019)	Same Quarter Last Year (Mar 2019)
Total reported	62,970	64,196	58,980
Number reported within 2 days	53,797	54,328	50,784
% reported on <i>within 2 days</i>	85.4%	84.6%	86.1%

Source: DRTT Return

<sup>2</sup>Refer 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 March 2020<sup>2</sup>**

Diagnostic Category	Length of time reporting in days				Total Reported
	0 - 2 days	>2 - 14 days	>14 - 28 days	>28 days	
Imaging	48,053	7,261	862	579	56,755
Physiological Measurement	5,744	410	28	33	6,215
<b>Total</b>	<b>53,797</b>	<b>7,671</b>	<b>890</b>	<b>612</b>	<b>62,970</b>

Source: DRTT Return

<sup>2</sup>Refer 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 2020<sup>2</sup>**

HSC Trust	Length of time reporting in days				Total Reported
	0 - 2 days	>2 - 14 days	>14 - 28 days	>28 days	
Belfast	8,932	1,783	428	449	11,592
Northern	15,133	1,982	63	9	17,187
South Eastern	6,303	1,101	155	82	7,641
Southern	11,542	2,091	213	62	13,908
Western	11,887	714	31	10	12,642
<b>Total</b>	<b>53,797</b>	<b>7,671</b>	<b>890</b>	<b>612</b>	<b>62,970</b>

Source: DRTT Return

<sup>2</sup>Refer 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-March-2020>
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-March-2020>
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 30<sup>th</sup> June 2020 will be released on Thursday 27<sup>th</sup> August 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](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/publications/type/statisticalreports>