

INFORMATION  
ANALYSIS  
DIRECTORATE



# Northern Ireland Waiting Time Statistics: Diagnostic Waiting Times Quarter Ending September 2021

# 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 2021/22 Ministerial waiting time target and the draft 2021/22 Ministerial diagnostic reporting turnaround target:

*“By March 2022, 75% of patients should wait no longer than 9 weeks for a diagnostic test, with no patient waiting longer than 26 weeks”.*

*“By March 2022, 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 30th September 2021. 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/diagnostic-waiting-times-supporting-documentation>

Users should be aware that the COVID-19 pandemic drastically altered the functions of hospitals during the current reporting period and should exercise caution when using these data, given that hospital records may not be fully updated at this time.

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

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

**Price:** Free

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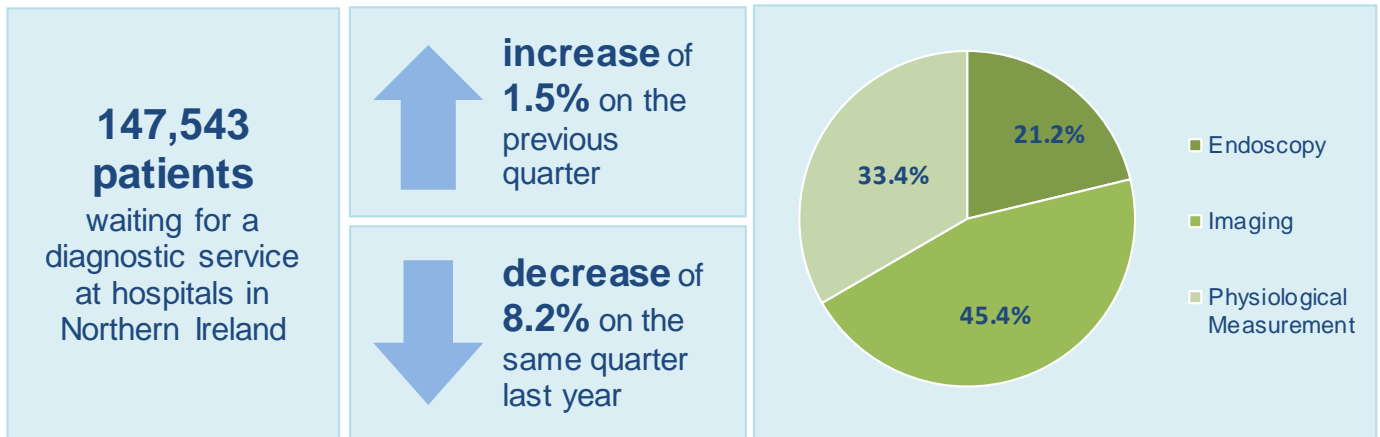
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**By March 2022, 75% of patients should wait no longer than 9 weeks for a diagnostic test, with no patient waiting longer than 26 weeks.**

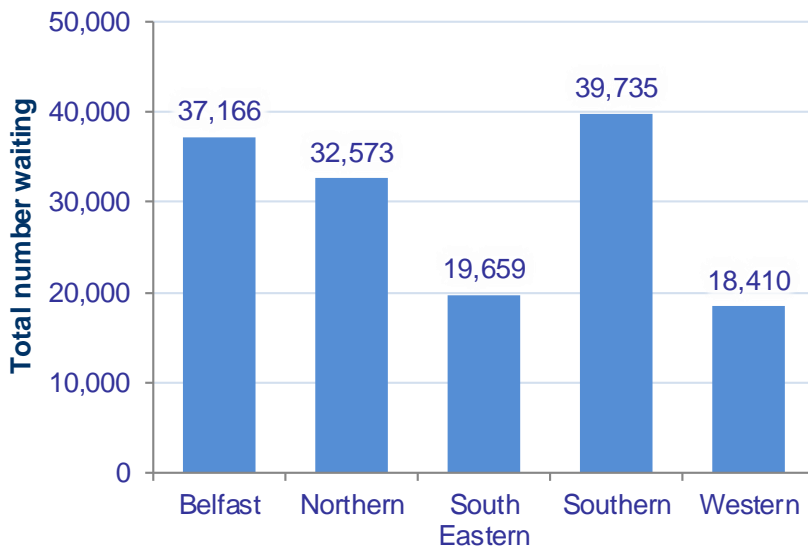
## Total number of patients waiting at 30<sup>th</sup> September 2021



Source: SDR1

At 30<sup>th</sup> September 2021, a total of 147,543 patients were waiting for a diagnostic test, 1.5% (2,242) more than at 30<sup>th</sup> June 2021 (145,301), and 8.2% (13,123) fewer than at 30<sup>th</sup> September 2020 (160,666) (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 of all patients waiting for diagnostic tests were in each of the Southern (26.9%) and Belfast (25.2%) HSC Trusts, with a further 22.1% in the Northern HSC Trust, 13.3% in the South Eastern HSC Trust and 12.5% in the Western HSC Trust (Table 2).

Source: SDR1

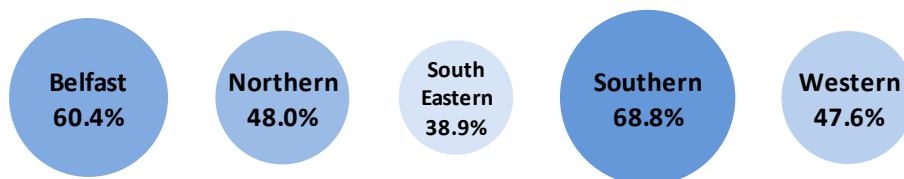
Around half (51.5%, 75,997) of the 147,543 patients were waiting for a diagnostic test within one of the following six diagnostic services: Non-Obstetric Ultrasound; Magnetic Resonance Imaging; Echocardiography; Plain Film X-Rays; Gastroscopy and Computerised Tomography (Table 3).

## Patients waiting more than 9 weeks at 30<sup>th</sup> September 2021

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 any HSC Trust

**55.5%**  
of patients were waiting longer than 9 weeks



### Percentage waiting over 9 weeks

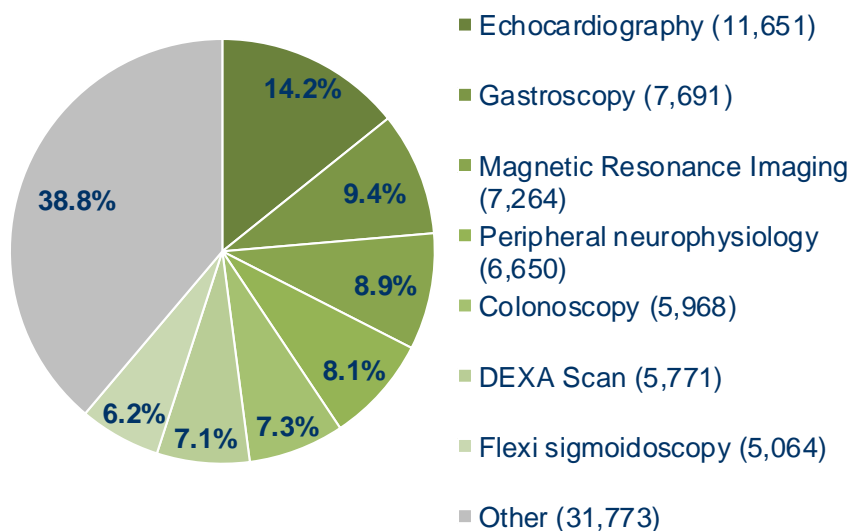
Source: SRD1

At 30<sup>th</sup> September 2021, 55.5% (81,832) of patients were waiting more than 9 weeks for a diagnostic test, compared with 52.4% (76,184) at 30<sup>th</sup> June 2021 and 65.4% (105,088) at 30<sup>th</sup> September 2020 (Table 1).

The 9 week element of the target was not achieved by any individual HSC Trust nor Northern Ireland as a whole. Data users should be aware that not all diagnostic services are provided at every HSC Trust (see explanatory note 10).

In the Southern HSC Trust, two thirds (68.8%, 27,343) of patients were waiting longer than 9 weeks, 60.4% (22,431) in the Belfast HSC Trust, 48.0% (15,637) in the Northern HSC Trust, 47.6% (8,766) in the Western HSC Trust and 38.9% (7,655) in the South Eastern HSC Trust (Table 2).

### Patients waiting over 9 weeks by diagnostic service



Of the 81,832 patients waiting over 9 weeks, more than three fifths (61.2%, 50,059) were waiting for one of the following diagnostic tests: Echocardiography; Gastroscopy; Magnetic Resonance Imaging; Peripheral Neurophysiology; Colonoscopy; DEXA Scan and Flexi Sigmoidoscopy. (Table 3).

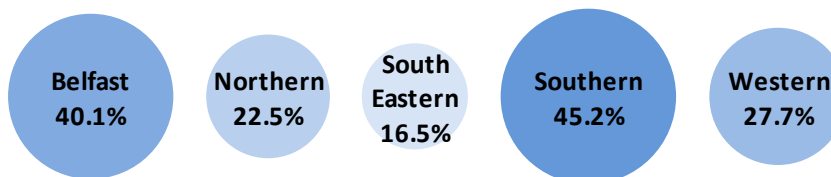
Source: SDR1

## Patients waiting more than 26 weeks at 30<sup>th</sup> September 2021

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

This element was **not achieved** by any HSC Trust

**32.9%** of patients were waiting longer than 26 weeks



### Percentage waiting over 26 weeks

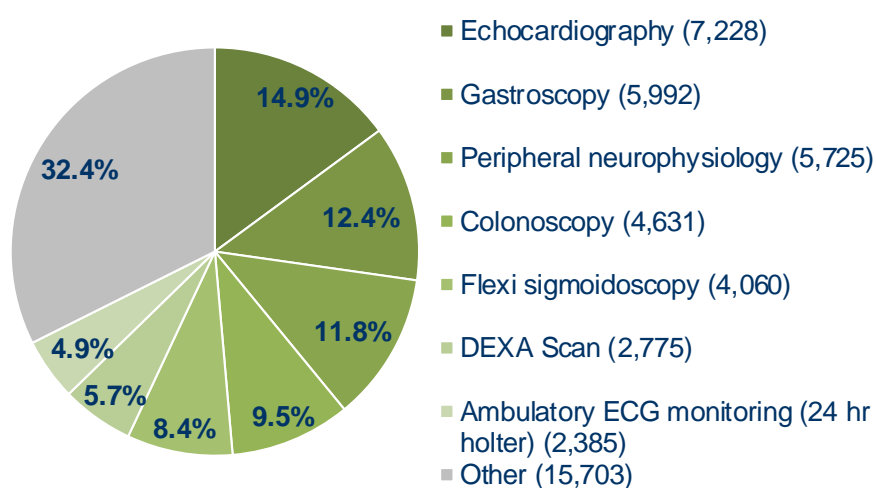
Source: SDR1

At 30<sup>th</sup> September 2021, 32.9% (48,499) of patients were waiting more than 26 weeks for a diagnostic test compared with 33.4% (48,543) at 30<sup>th</sup> June 2021 and 44.8% (71,968) at 30<sup>th</sup> September 2020 (Table 1).

The 26 week element of the target was not achieved by any individual HSC Trust nor Northern Ireland as a whole (Table 2). Data users should be aware that not all diagnostic services are provided at every HSC Trust (see explanatory note 10).

Of patients waiting in the Southern HSC Trust, almost half (45.2%, 17,946) were waiting longer than 26 weeks, 40.1% (14,901) in the Belfast HSC Trust, 27.7% (5,091) in the Western HSC Trust, 22.5% (7,313) in the Northern HSC Trust and 16.5% (3,248) in the South Eastern HSC Trust (Table 2).

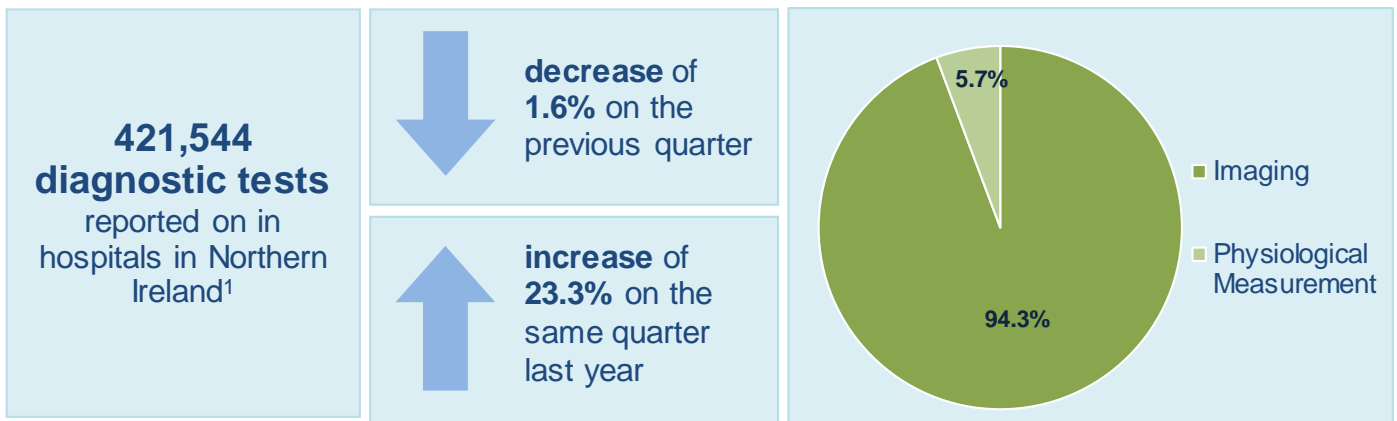
### Patients waiting over 26 weeks by diagnostic service



Around two-thirds (67.6%, 32,796) of the 48,499 patients waiting more than 26 weeks were waiting for one of the following diagnostic tests: Echocardiography; Gastroscopy; Peripheral Neurophysiology; Colonoscopy; Flexi Sigmoidoscopy; DEXA Scan and Ambulatory ECG Monitoring (24 Hr Holter) (Table 3).

Source: SDR1

## Total number of diagnostic tests reported on during quarter ending September 2021

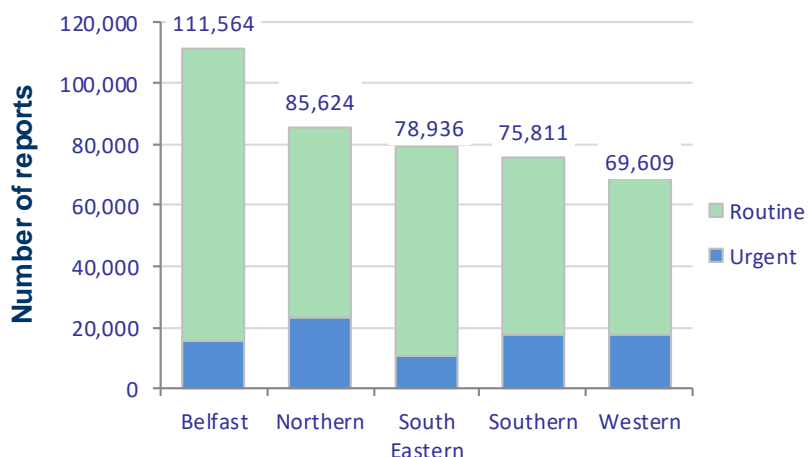


Source: DRTT Return

A total of 421,544 diagnostic tests were reported on and dispatched to the referring clinician at hospitals in Northern Ireland during the quarter ending September 2021, 1.6% (6,942) fewer than the quarter ending June 2021 (428,486), and 23.3% (79,610) more than the quarter ending September 2020 (341,934) (Table 4).<sup>1</sup>

Of the 421,544 reported diagnostic tests, 94.3% (397,484) were reporting on an Imaging test and 5.7% (24,060) were reporting on a Physiological Measurement test<sup>2</sup> (Table 4).

A fifth (20.1%, 84,697) of the diagnostic tests reported on during quarter ending September 2021 were urgent diagnostic tests, with the remaining 79.9% (336,847) being routine diagnostic tests (Table 4).



More than a quarter (26.5%) of diagnostic tests were reported and dispatched in the Belfast HSC Trust, with a further 20.3% in the Northern HSC Trust, 18.7% in the South Eastern HSC Trust, 18.0% in the Southern HSC Trust and 16.5% in the Western HSC Trust<sup>1</sup>.

Source: DRTT Return

<sup>1</sup> Detailed reporting times of urgent and 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 September 2021

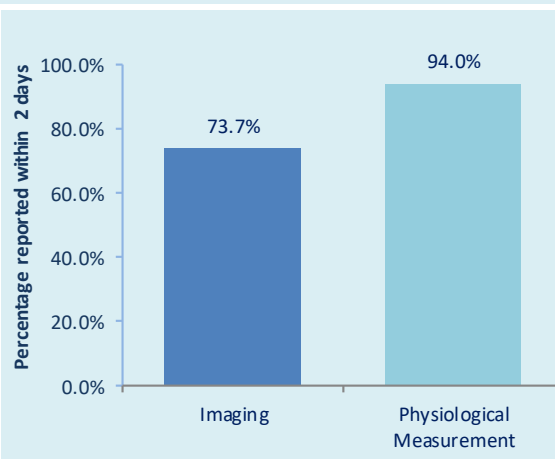
By March 2022, all urgent diagnostic tests should be reported on within 2 days of the test being undertaken.

This element was **not achieved** by any HSC Trust

↓ decrease of **4.4 percentage points** on the previous quarter

**75.8%** of urgent diagnostic tests reported on within 2 days

↓ decrease of **10.4 percentage points** on the same quarter last year

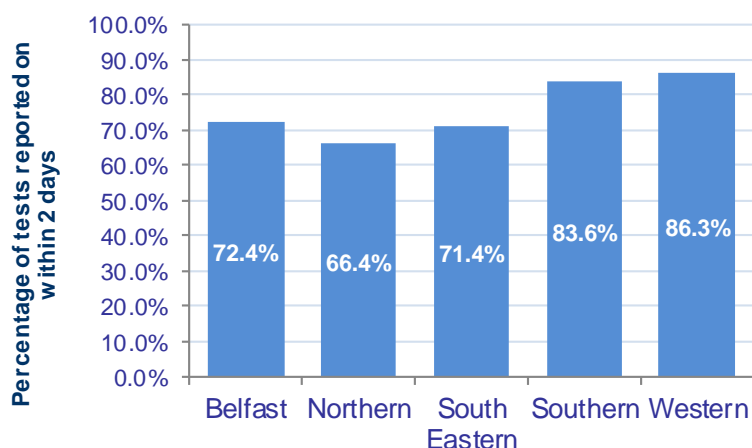


Source: DRTT Return

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

Of the 84,697 urgent diagnostic tests reported on during quarter ending September 2021, 75.8% (64,190) were reported on within 2 days, compared with 80.2% (68,653) during the quarter ending June 2021 and 86.2% (59,577) during the quarter ending September 2020 (Table 5).

Of the 84,697 urgent diagnostic tests, 76,145 were imaging reports and 8,552 were physiological measurement reports. A total of 73.7% of urgent imaging tests were reported on within 2 days compared with 94.0% of urgent physiological measurement tests (Table 6).



During the quarter ending September 2021, the 2 day target was not achieved by any HSC Trust. The Western Trust reported on 86.3% 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 – 30th September 2021<sup>1</sup>**

Diagnostic Category		Current Quarter (September 2021)	Previous Quarter (June 2021)	Same Quarter Last Year (September 2020)
<b>Imaging</b>	Total Patients Waiting	67,002	64,139	79,847
	Number waiting over 9 weeks	23,638	20,048	42,686
	<i>Percentage waiting over 9 weeks</i>	35.3%	31.3%	53.5%
	Number waiting over 26 weeks	9,164	8,709	24,943
<b>Physiological Measurement</b>	Total Patients Waiting	49,228	50,028	53,307
	Number waiting over 9 weeks	34,155	32,647	41,333
	<i>Percentage waiting over 9 weeks</i>	69.4%	65.3%	77.5%
	Number waiting over 26 weeks	20,429	21,161	30,116
<b>Endoscopy</b>	Total Patients Waiting	31,313	31,134	27,512
	Number waiting over 9 weeks	24,039	23,489	21,069
	<i>Percentage waiting over 9 weeks</i>	76.8%	75.4%	76.6%
	Number waiting over 26 weeks	18,906	18,673	16,909
<b>Total</b>	Total Patients Waiting	147,543	145,301	160,666
	Number waiting over 9 weeks	81,832	76,184	105,088
	<i>Percentage waiting over 9 weeks</i>	55.5%	52.4%	65.4%
	Number waiting over 26 weeks	48,499	48,543	71,968

Source: SDR1

<sup>1</sup>Refer to Explanatory Notes 1–16 & 22-25

**Table 2: Number of patients waiting for a diagnostic service, by HSC Trust – 30th June 2021<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	12,127	2,608	2,413	3,648	1,469	14,901	37,166
Northern	13,823	3,113	2,538	4,282	1,504	7,313	32,573
South Eastern	10,399	1,605	1,555	2,102	750	3,248	19,659
Southern	9,869	2,523	2,470	4,978	1,949	17,946	39,735
Western	7,932	1,712	1,558	1,677	440	5,091	18,410
<b>Total</b>	<b>54,150</b>	<b>11,561</b>	<b>10,534</b>	<b>16,687</b>	<b>6,112</b>	<b>48,499</b>	<b>147,543</b>

Source: SDR1

<sup>1</sup>Refer to Explanatory Notes 1–16 & 22-25

**Table 3: Number of patients waiting for a diagnostic service by type of service and weeks waiting – 30th September 2021<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	11,105	1,889	1,309	820	65	170	15,358
Magnetic Resonance Imaging	6,223	1,728	1,537	2,559	1,010	2,158	15,215
Echocardiography	2,601	912	1,122	2,289	1,012	7,228	15,164
Plain Film Xrays	10,845	528	26	7	1	6	11,413
Gastroscopy Computerised	2,260	439	483	828	388	5,992	10,390
Tomography	5,241	1,005	843	1,115	165	88	8,457
DEXA Scan	1,703	750	818	1,607	571	2,775	8,224
Colonoscopy	1,856	336	314	684	339	4,631	8,160
Peripheral neurophysiology	381	195	186	497	242	5,725	7,226
Pure tone audiometry	2,198	961	894	1,505	385	713	6,656
Flexi sigmoidoscopy	532	194	223	522	259	4,060	5,790
Ambulatory ECG monitoring (24 hr holter)	1,213	421	418	573	164	2,385	5,174
Spirometry inc.flow volume curves	969	297	402	506	176	715	3,065
Radio-Nuclide Imaging	882	204	137	389	189	1,074	2,875
Magnetic Resonance Imaging - Cardiac Barium	210	90	123	233	158	1,945	2,759
Studies/Fluoroscopy	620	188	217	383	154	941	2,503
Transfer Factor	774	211	293	388	135	400	2,201
Cystoscopy	690	180	144	184	61	830	2,089
Arthroscopy	69	27	26	82	53	1,402	1,659
Other	3,778	1,006	1,019	1,516	585	5,261	13,165
<b>All diagnostic tests</b>	<b>54,150</b>	<b>11,561</b>	<b>10,534</b>	<b>16,687</b>	<b>6,112</b>	<b>48,499</b>	<b>147,543</b>

Source: SDR1

<sup>1</sup>Refer to Explanatory Notes 1–16 & 22-25

**Table 4: Number of diagnostic tests reported and dispatched by priority of report – QE September 2021<sup>2</sup>**

Priority of Report	Diagnostic Category	Current Quarter (Sep 2021)	Previous Quarter (Jun 2021)	Same Quarter Last Year (Sep 2020)
<b>Urgent</b>	Imaging	76,145	76,136	61,465
	Physiological Measurement	8,552	9,493	7,669
<b>Routine</b>	Imaging	321,339	327,677	262,379
	Physiological Measurement	15,508	15,180	10,421
<b>Total</b>	Imaging	397,484	403,813	323,844
	Physiological Measurement	24,060	24,673	18,090

Source: DRTT Return

<sup>2</sup>Refer to Explanatory Notes 1-5 & 17-25

**Table 5: Number of urgent diagnostic tests reported and dispatched – QE September 2021<sup>2</sup>**

Urgent Diagnostic Tests	Current Quarter (Sep 2021)	Previous Quarter (Jun 2021)	Same Quarter Last Year (Sep 2020)
Total reported	84,697	85,629	69,134
Number reported within 2 days	64,190	68,653	59,577
<i>% reported on within 2 days</i>	<i>75.8%</i>	<i>80.2%</i>	<i>86.2%</i>

Source: DRTT Return

<sup>2</sup>Refer to Explanatory Notes 1-5 & 17-25

**Table 6: Number of urgent diagnostic tests reported and dispatched by diagnostic category and time in days– QE September 2021<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	56,154	16,363	2,644	984	76,145
Physiological Measurement	8,036	342	99	75	8,552
<b>Total</b>	<b>64,190</b>	<b>16,705</b>	<b>2,743</b>	<b>1,059</b>	<b>84,697</b>

Source: DRTT Return

<sup>2</sup>Refer to Explanatory Notes 1-5 & 17-25

**Table 7: Number of urgent diagnostic tests reported and dispatched by HSC Trust and time in days – QE September 2021<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	11,357	3,395	440	484	15,676
Northern	15,593	5,924	1,661	315	23,493
South Eastern	7,609	2,702	274	67	10,652
Southern	14,631	2,471	269	130	17,501
Western	15,000	2,213	99	63	17,375
<b>Total</b>	<b>64,190</b>	<b>16,705</b>	<b>2,743</b>	<b>1,059</b>	<b>84,697</b>

Source: DRTT Return

<sup>2</sup>Refer to Explanatory Notes 1-5 & 17-25

## 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 SDR. 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-2021>
4. 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.
5. 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.
6. 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.
7. Due to technical issues, data for cardiology physiological measurement diagnostic tests from the Royal Belfast Hospital for Sick Children have not been available since February 2020. The impact of this on the statistics in this report is minimal. At February 2020, there were 321 patients waiting for this service, this was approximately 7% of the total waiting for Belfast HSC Trust's cardiology service.

8. 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.
9. 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.
10. 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.
11. 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.
12. A number of the diagnostic services, particularly endoscopies, reported on the SDR1 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.
13. Some people will be waiting on more than one waiting list or be on the same waiting list for more than one outpatient appointment/admission/diagnostic test at the same time due to having more than one condition.

14. The draft 2021/22 Ministerial diagnostic waiting time target, states that, by March 2022, 75% of patients should wait no longer than 9 weeks for a diagnostic test, with no patient waiting longer than 26 weeks.
15. For Tables 2 and 3, each diagnostic waiting time band relates to the number of completed weeks a patient has been waiting for a diagnostic service. For example, a patient waiting exactly 6 weeks would be included in the 0-6 week time band and a patient waiting 6 weeks and 1 day would be included in the >6-9 week (greater than 6 weeks but waiting no longer than 9 weeks) time band.
16. 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.
17. 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.
18. 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.
19. 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.
20. The draft 2021/22 Ministerial diagnostic reporting turnaround target, states that, by March 2022, all urgent diagnostic tests should be reported on within two days of the test being undertaken.
21. 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-September-2021>
22. 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.

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 31<sup>st</sup> December 2021 will be released on Thursday 24<sup>th</sup> February 2022.

**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>