

INFORMATION
ANALYSIS
DIRECTORATE



Northern Ireland Waiting Time Statistics: Diagnostic Waiting Times Quarter Ending December 2021

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 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 31st December 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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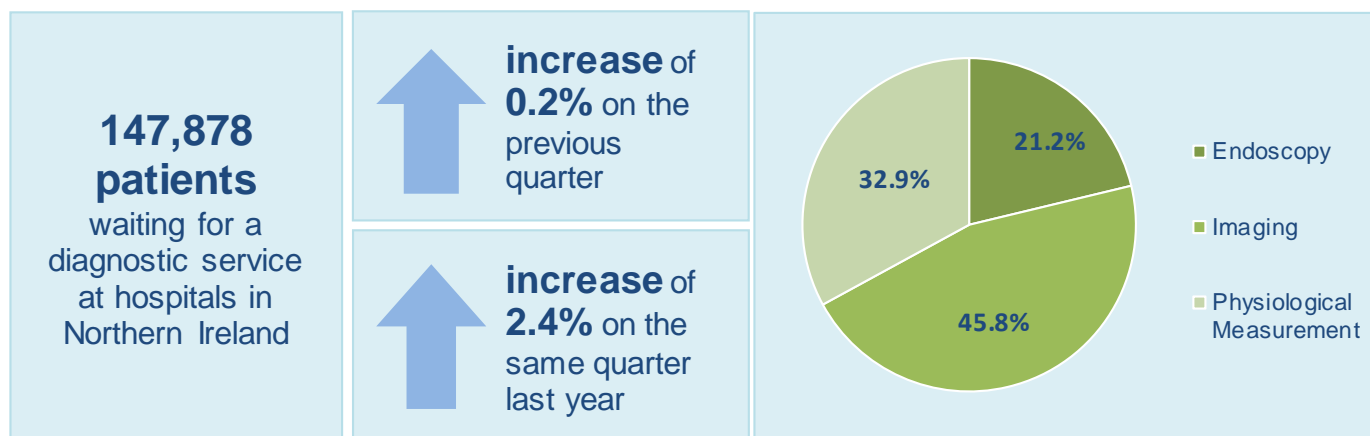
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Contents

Total number of patients waiting for a diagnostic service.....	5
Patients waiting longer than 9 weeks for a diagnostic service.....	6
Patients waiting longer than 26 weeks for a diagnostic service.....	7
Total diagnostic tests reported and dispatched.....	8
Number of urgent diagnostic tests reported and dispatched within 2 days.....	9
Appendix 1: Tables.....	10
Appendix 2: Explanatory Notes.....	14

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.

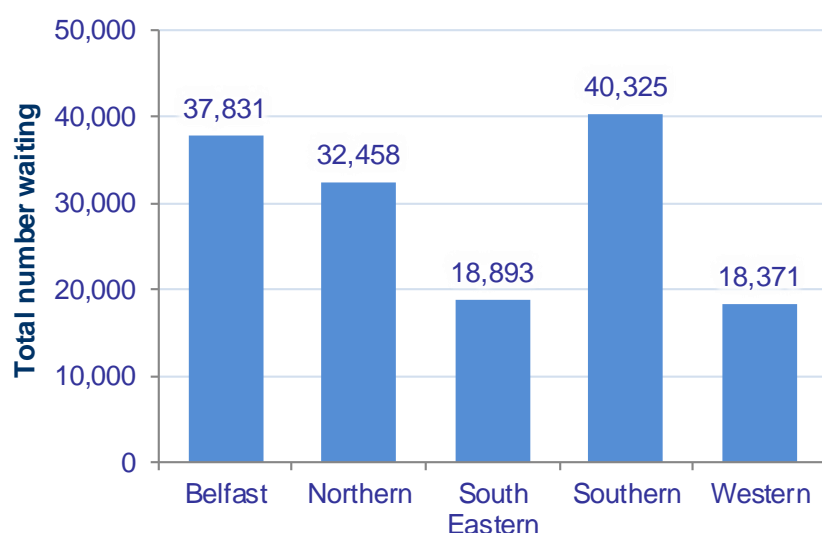
Total number of patients waiting at 31st December 2021



Source: SDR1

At 31st December 2021, a total of 147,878 patients were waiting for a diagnostic test, 0.2% (335) more than at 30th September 2021 (147,543), and 2.4% (3,445) more than at 31st December 2020 (144,433) (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 (27.3%) and Belfast (25.6%) HSC Trusts, with a further 21.9% in the Northern HSC Trust, 12.8% in the South Eastern HSC Trust and 12.4% in the Western HSC Trust (Table 2).

Source: SDR1

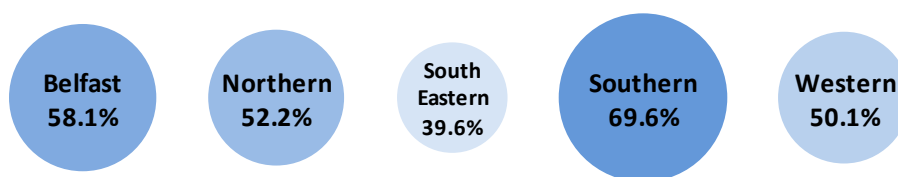
Around half (50.9%, 75,246) of the 147,878 patients were waiting for a diagnostic test within one of the following six diagnostic services: Magnetic Resonance Imaging; Echocardiography; Non-Obstetric Ultrasound; Gastroscopy; Plain Film X-Rays or Computerised Tomography. (Table 3).

Patients waiting more than 9 weeks at 31st December 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

56.6%
of patients were waiting longer than 9 weeks



Percentage waiting over 9 weeks

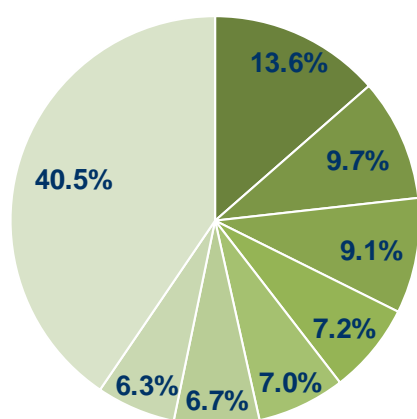
Source: SRD1

At 31st December 2021, 56.6% (83,643) of patients were waiting more than 9 weeks for a diagnostic test, compared with 55.5% (81,832) at 30th September 2021 and 62.8% (90,643) at 31st December 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, more than two thirds (69.6%, 28,049) of patients were waiting longer than 9 weeks, 58.1% (21,980) in the Belfast HSC Trust, 52.2% (16,932) in the Northern HSC Trust, 50.1% (9,202) in the Western HSC Trust and 39.6% (7,480) in the South Eastern HSC Trust (Table 2).

Patients waiting over 9 weeks by diagnostic service



- Echocardiography (11,338)
- Magnetic Resonance Imaging (8,086)
- Gastroscopy (7,634)
- Colonoscopy (6,017)
- DEXA Scan (5,824)
- Peripheral neurophysiology (5,637)
- Flexi sigmoidoscopy (5,238)
- Other (33,869)

Of the 83,643 patients waiting over 9 weeks, around three fifths (59.5%, 49,774) were waiting for one of the following diagnostic tests: Echocardiography; Magnetic Resonance Imaging; Gastroscopy; Colonoscopy; DEXA Scan; Peripheral Neurophysiology or Flexi Sigmoidoscopy (Table 3).

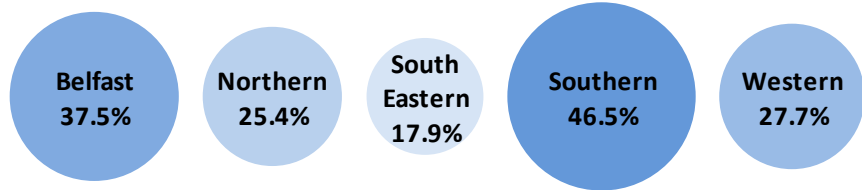
Source: SDR1

Patients waiting more than 26 weeks at 31st December 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

33.6% of patients were waiting longer than 26 weeks



Percentage waiting over 26 weeks

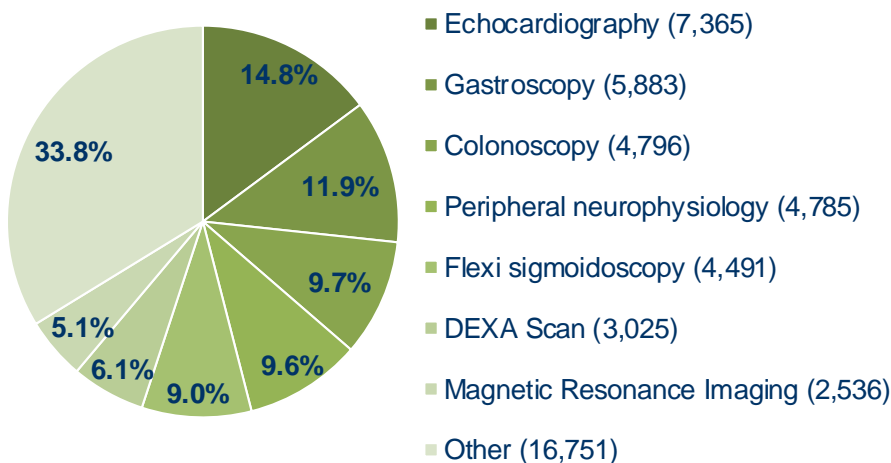
Source: SDR1

At 31st December 2021, 33.6% (49,632) of patients were waiting more than 26 weeks for a diagnostic test compared with 32.9% (48,499) at 30th September 2021 and 40.0% (57,818) at 31st December 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 (46.5%, 18,733) were waiting longer than 26 weeks, 37.5% (14,178) in the Belfast HSC Trust, 27.7% (5,096) in the Western HSC Trust, 25.4% (8,243) in the Northern HSC Trust and 17.9% (3,382) in the South Eastern HSC Trust (Table 2).

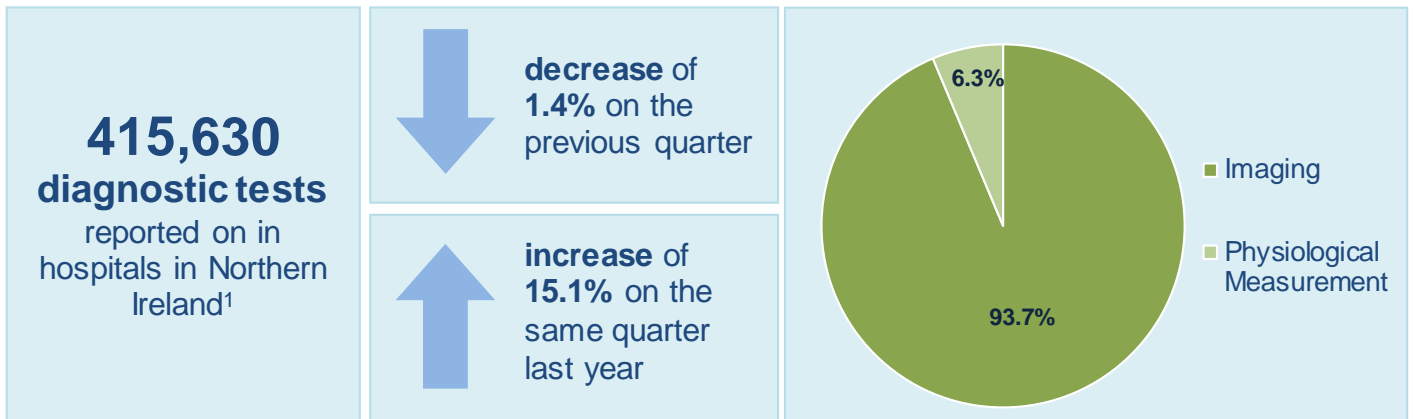
Patients waiting over 26 weeks by diagnostic service



Around two-thirds (66.2%, 32,881) of the 49,632 patients waiting more than 26 weeks were waiting for one of the following diagnostic tests: Echocardiography; Gastroscopy; Colonoscopy; Peripheral Neurophysiology; Flexi Sigmoidoscopy; DEXA Scan or Magnetic Resonance Imaging (Table 3).

Source: SDR1

Total number of diagnostic tests reported on during quarter ending December 2021

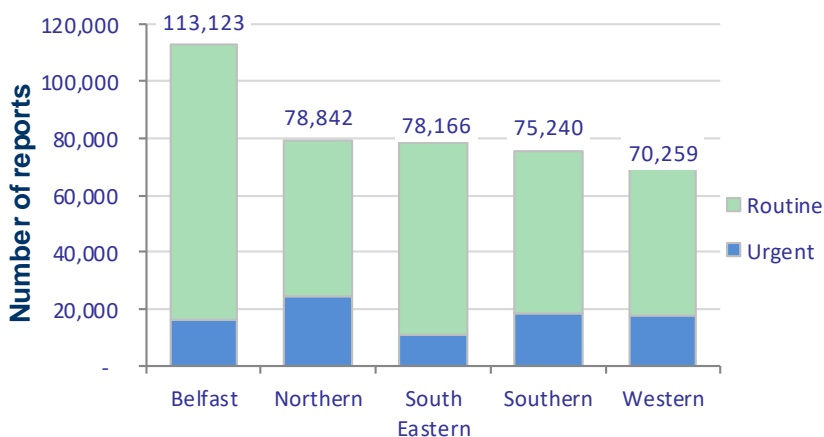


Source: DRTT Return

A total of 415,630 diagnostic tests were reported on and dispatched to the referring clinician at hospitals in Northern Ireland during the quarter ending December 2021, 1.4% (5,914) fewer than the quarter ending September 2021 (421,544), and 15.1% (54,382) more than the quarter ending December 2020 (361,248) (Table 4).¹

Of the 415,630 reported diagnostic tests, 93.7% (389,368) were reporting on an Imaging test and 6.3% (26,262) were reporting on a Physiological Measurement test² (Table 4).

Over one fifth (21.0%, 87,286) of the diagnostic tests reported on during quarter ending December 2021 were urgent diagnostic tests, with the remaining 79.0% (328,344) being routine diagnostic tests (Table 4).



More than a quarter (27.2%) of diagnostic tests were reported and dispatched in the Belfast HSC Trust, with a further 19.0% in the Northern HSC Trust, 18.8% in the South Eastern HSC Trust, 18.1% in the Southern HSC Trust and 16.9% in the Western HSC Trust¹.

Source: DRTT Return

¹ Detailed reporting times of urgent and 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 2021

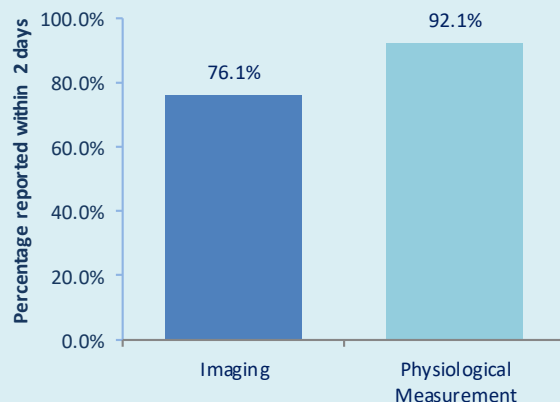
By March 2022, all urgent diagnostic tests should be reported on within 2 days of the test being undertaken.

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

increase of 1.9 percentage points on the previous quarter

77.7% of urgent diagnostic tests reported on within 2 days

decrease of 8.7 percentage points on the same quarter last year

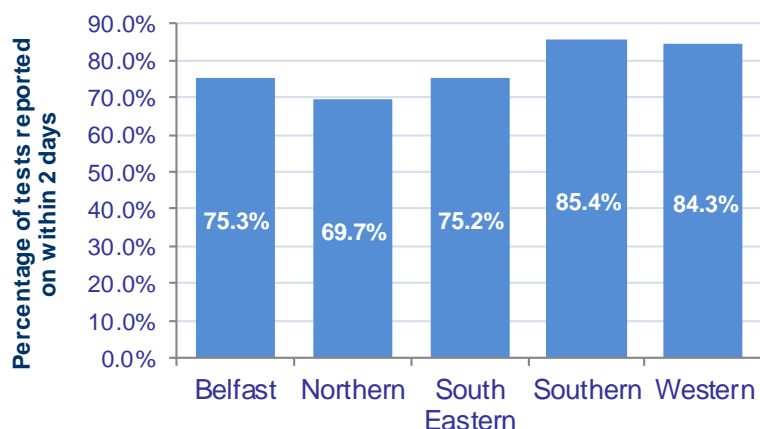


Source: DRTT Return

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

Of the 87,286 urgent diagnostic tests reported on during quarter ending December 2021, 77.7% (67,798) were reported on within 2 days, compared with 75.8% (64,190) during the quarter ending September 2021 and 86.4% (65,172) during the quarter ending December 2020 (Table 5).

Of the 87,286 urgent diagnostic tests, 78,565 were imaging reports and 8,721 were physiological measurement reports. A total of 76.1% of urgent imaging tests were reported on within 2 days compared with 92.1% of urgent physiological measurement tests (Table 6).



During the quarter ending December 2021, the 2 day target was not achieved by any HSC Trust. The Southern Trust reported on 85.4% 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 2021¹

Diagnostic Category		Current Quarter (December 2021)	Previous Quarter (September 2021)	Same Quarter Last Year (December 2020)
Imaging	Total Patients Waiting	67,742	67,002	65,979
	Number waiting over 9 weeks	26,778	23,638	30,828
	<i>Percentage waiting over 9 weeks</i>	39.5%	35.3%	46.7%
	Number waiting over 26 weeks	10,950	9,164	15,302
Physiological Measurement	Total Patients Waiting	48,725	49,228	49,371
	Number waiting over 9 weeks	32,649	34,155	37,522
	<i>Percentage waiting over 9 weeks</i>	67.0%	69.4%	76.0%
	Number waiting over 26 weeks	19,359	20,429	25,451
Endoscopy	Total Patients Waiting	31,411	31,313	29,083
	Number waiting over 9 weeks	24,216	24,039	22,293
	<i>Percentage waiting over 9 weeks</i>	77.1%	76.8%	76.7%
	Number waiting over 26 weeks	19,323	18,906	17,065
Total	Total Patients Waiting	147,878	147,543	144,433
	Number waiting over 9 weeks	83,643	81,832	90,643
	<i>Percentage waiting over 9 weeks</i>	56.6%	55.5%	62.8%
	Number waiting over 26 weeks	49,632	48,499	57,818

Source: SDR1

¹Refer to Explanatory Notes 1–16 & 22-25

Table 2: Number of patients waiting for a diagnostic service, by HSC Trust – 31st December 2021¹

HSC Trust	Patients Waiting for Diagnostic Service by Weeks Waiting						Total Waiting
	0 - 6	>6 - 9	>9 - 13	>13 - 21	>21-26	>26	
Belfast	12,092	3,759	3,150	3,296	1,356	14,178	37,831
Northern	12,038	3,488	2,746	4,123	1,820	8,243	32,458
South Eastern	8,971	2,442	1,861	1,601	636	3,382	18,893
Southern	9,037	3,239	3,364	4,094	1,858	18,733	40,325
Western	6,952	2,217	1,854	1,684	568	5,096	18,371
Total	49,090	15,145	12,975	14,798	6,238	49,632	147,878

Source: SDR1

¹Refer to Explanatory Notes 1–16 & 22-25

Table 3: Number of patients waiting for a diagnostic service by type of service and weeks waiting – 31st December 2021¹

Diagnostic Test	Patients Waiting for Diagnostic Service by Weeks Waiting						Total Waiting
	0 - 6	>6 - 9	>9 - 13	>13 - 21	>21-26	>26	
Magnetic Resonance Imaging	6,457	2,222	1,953	2,566	1,031	2,536	16,765
Echocardiography	2,512	1,008	1,241	1,719	1,013	7,365	14,858
Non-obstetric ultrasound	9,371	2,239	1,359	824	157	67	14,017
Gastroscopy	2,026	460	546	803	402	5,883	10,120
Plain Film X-Rays	7,658	1,564	446	83	7	4	9,762
Computerised Tomography	5,017	1,492	1,260	934	420	601	9,724
DEXA Scan	1,564	913	867	1,418	514	3,025	8,301
Colonoscopy	1,834	432	373	585	263	4,796	8,283
Pure tone audiometry	1,927	966	1,170	1,341	555	688	6,647
Peripheral neurophysiology	381	243	233	400	219	4,785	6,261
Flexi sigmoidoscopy	534	191	198	348	201	4,491	5,963
Ambulatory ECG monitoring (24 hr holter)	1,146	541	543	619	146	2,317	5,312
Radio-Nuclide Imaging	834	276	272	401	161	1,523	3,467
Spirometry inc.flow volume curves	1,201	386	391	405	174	669	3,226
Magnetic Resonance Imaging - Cardiac	188	104	94	224	138	2,239	2,987
Barium Studies/Fluoroscopy	617	221	205	321	149	951	2,464
Transfer Factor	934	291	299	329	135	377	2,365
Cystoscopy	650	238	162	146	44	556	1,796
Arthroscopy	55	52	55	85	35	1,469	1,751
Other	4,184	1,306	1,308	1,247	474	5,290	13,809
All diagnostic tests	49,090	15,145	12,975	14,798	6,238	49,632	147,878

Source: SDR1

¹Refer to Explanatory Notes 1–16 & 22-25

Table 4: Number of diagnostic tests reported and dispatched by priority of report – QE December 2021²

Priority of Report	Diagnostic Category	Current Quarter (Dec 2021)	Previous Quarter (Sep 2021)	Same Quarter Last Year (Dec 2020)
Urgent	Imaging	78,565	76,145	66,795
	Physiological Measurement	8,721	8,552	8,642
Routine	Imaging	310,803	321,339	271,245
	Physiological Measurement	17,541	15,508	14,566
Total	Imaging	389,368	397,484	338,040
	Physiological Measurement	26,262	24,060	23,208

Source: DRTT Return

²Refer to Explanatory Notes 1-5 & 17-25

Table 5: Number of urgent diagnostic tests reported and dispatched – QE December 2021²

Urgent Diagnostic Tests	Current Quarter (Dec 2021)	Previous Quarter (Sep 2021)	Same Quarter Last Year (Dec 2020)
Total reported	87,286	84,697	75,437
Number reported within 2 days	67,798	64,190	65,172
<i>% reported on within 2 days</i>	<i>77.7%</i>	<i>75.8%</i>	<i>86.4%</i>

Source: DRTT Return

²Refer 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 December 2021²

Diagnostic Category	Length of time reporting in days				Total Reported
	0 - 2 days	>2 - 14 days	>14 - 28 days	>28 days	
Imaging	59,762	16,920	1,025	858	78,565
Physiological Measurement	8,036	507	104	74	8,721
Total	67,798	17,427	1,129	932	87,286

Source: DRTT Return

²Refer 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 December 2021²

HSC Trust	Length of time reporting in days				Total Reported
	0 - 2 days	>2 - 14 days	>14 - 28 days	>28 days	
Belfast	11,995	2,723	509	695	15,922
Northern	17,050	7,176	190	45	24,461
South Eastern	8,130	2,588	71	16	10,805
Southern	15,739	2,340	257	100	18,436
Western	14,884	2,600	102	76	17,662
Total	67,798	17,427	1,129	932	87,286

Source: DRTT Return

²Refer 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-December-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 31st March 2022 will be released on Thursday 26th May 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

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>