

INFORMATION
ANALYSIS
DIRECTORATE



Northern Ireland Waiting Time Statistics: Diagnostic Waiting Times Quarter Ending June 2022

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 2022/23 Ministerial waiting time target and the draft 2022/23 Ministerial diagnostic reporting turnaround target:

“By March 2023, 75% of patients should wait no longer than 9 weeks for a diagnostic test, with no patient waiting longer than 26 weeks”.

“By March 2023, 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 June 2022. 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>

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 Trusts in Northern Ireland, healthcare professionals, academics, and Health & Social Care stakeholders, the media and general public.

Price: Free

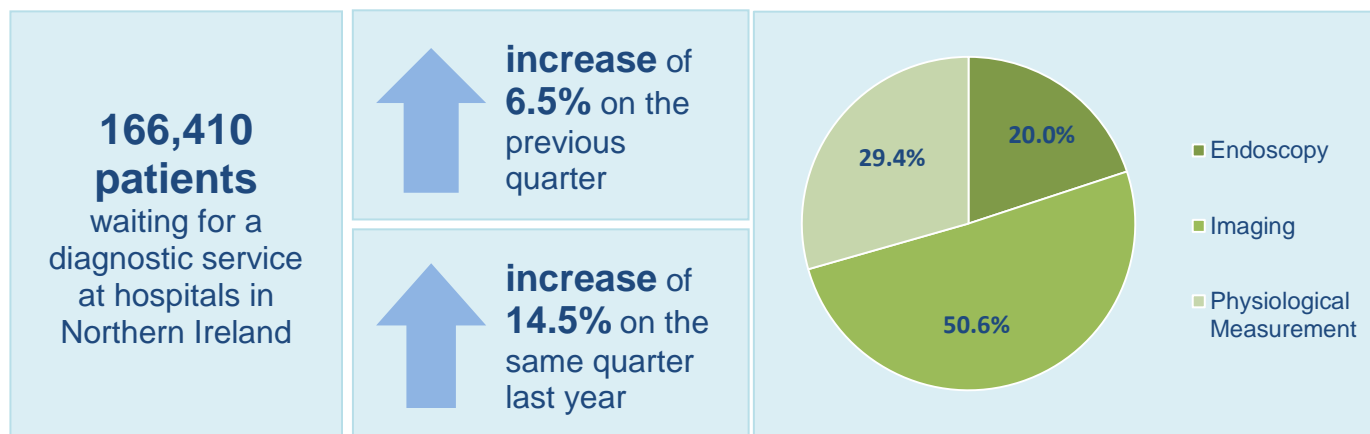
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By March 2023, 75% of patients should wait no longer than 9 weeks for a diagnostic test, with no patient waiting longer than 26 weeks.

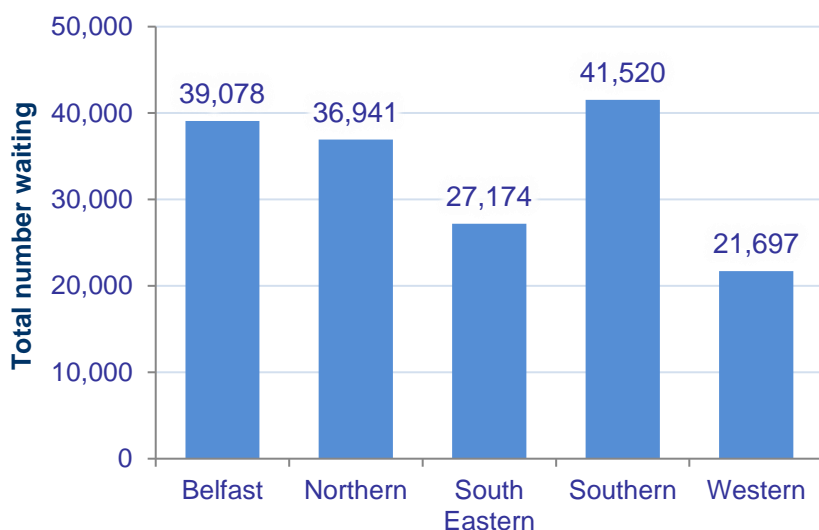
Total number of patients waiting at 30th June 2022



Source: SDR1

At 30th June 2022, a total of 166,410 patients were waiting for a diagnostic test, 6.5% (10,140) more than at 31st March 2022 (156,270), and 14.5% (21,109) more than at 30th June 2021 (145,301) (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).



A quarter of all patients waiting for diagnostic tests were in the Southern (25.0%) HSC Trust, with a further 23.5% in the Belfast HSC Trust, 22.2% in the Northern HSC Trust, 16.3% in the South Eastern HSC Trust and 13.0% in the Western HSC Trust (Table 2).

Source: SDR1

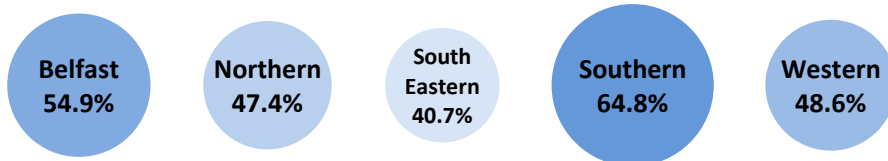
More than half (55.4%, 92,198) of the 166,410 patients were waiting for a diagnostic test within one of the following seven diagnostic services: Magnetic Resonance Imaging; Non-Obstetric Ultrasound; Plain Film Xrays; Echocardiography; Computerised Tomography and Gastroscopy. (Table 3).

Patients waiting more than 9 weeks at 30th June 2022

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

52.6%
of patients were waiting longer than 9 weeks



Percentage waiting over 9 weeks

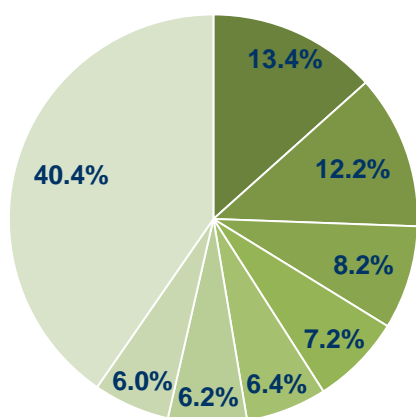
Source: SRD1

At 30th June 2022, 52.6% (87,480) of patients were waiting more than 9 weeks for a diagnostic test, compared with 50.7% (79,297) at 31st March 2022 and 52.4% (76,184) at 30th June 2021 (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, almost two thirds (64.8%, 26,892) of patients were waiting longer than 9 weeks, 54.9% (21,461) in the Belfast HSC Trust, 48.6% (10,553) in the Western HSC Trust, 47.4% (17,520) in the Northern HSC Trust and 40.7% (11,054) in the South Eastern HSC Trust (Table 2).

Patients waiting over 9 weeks by diagnostic service



- Magnetic Resonance Imaging (11,707)
- Echocardiography (10,665)
- Gastroscopy (7,178)
- Colonoscopy (6,283)
- DEXA Scan (5,596)
- Flexi sigmoidoscopy (5,446)
- Pure tone audiometry (5,291)
- Other (35,314)

Of the 87,480 patients waiting over 9 weeks, around three fifths (59.6%, 52,166) were waiting for one of the following diagnostic tests: Magnetic Resonance Imaging; Echocardiography; Gastroscopy; Colonoscopy; Dexa Scan; Flexi Sigmoidoscopy and Pure Tone Audiometry.

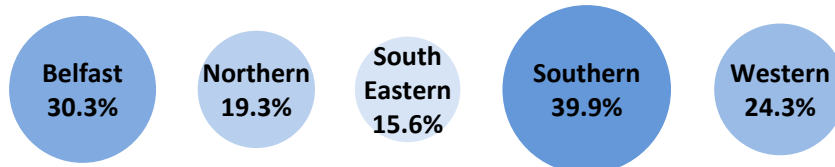
Source: SDR1

Patients waiting more than 26 weeks at 30th June 2022

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

27.1% of patients were waiting longer than 26 weeks



Percentage waiting over 26 weeks

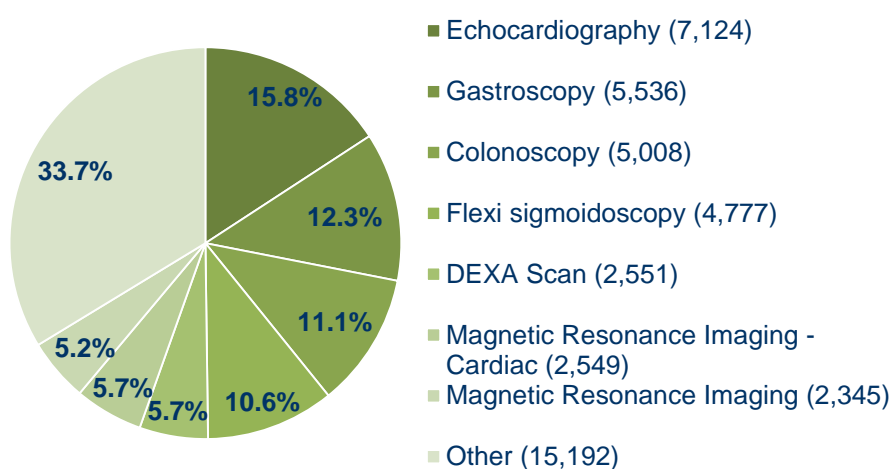
Source: SDR1

At 30th June 2022, 27.1% (45,082) of patients were waiting more than 26 weeks for a diagnostic test compared with 29.6% (46,312) at 31st March 2022 and 33.4% (48,543) at 30th June 2021 (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, around two fifths (39.9%, 16,567) were waiting longer than 26 weeks, 30.3% (11,846) in the Belfast HSC Trust, 24.3% (5,282) in the Western HSC Trust, 19.3% (7,139) in the Northern HSC Trust and 15.6% (4,248) in the South Eastern HSC Trust (Table 2).

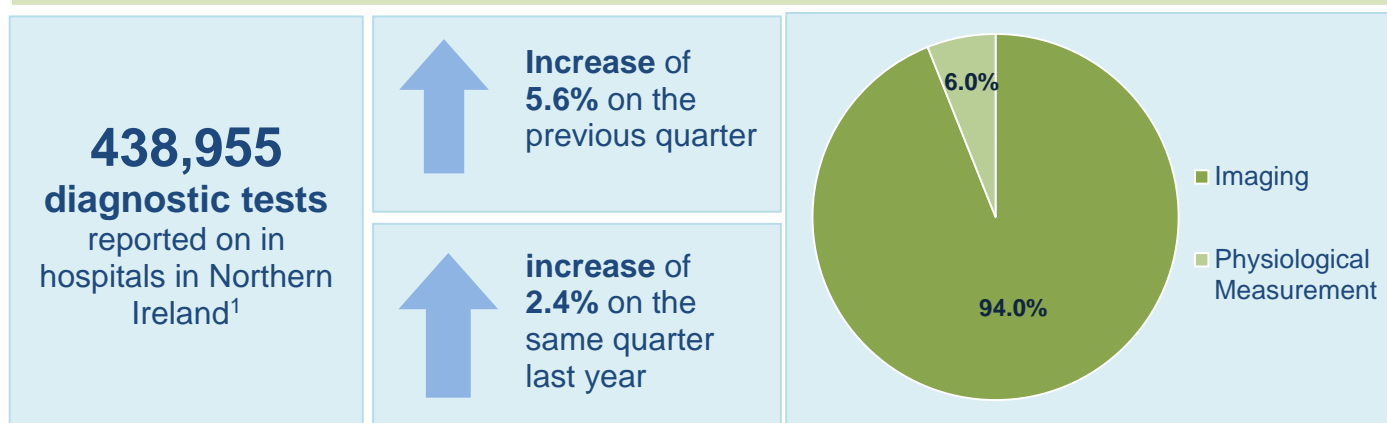
Patients waiting over 26 weeks by diagnostic service



Around two thirds (66.3%, 29,890) of the 45,082 patients waiting more than 26 weeks were waiting for one of the following diagnostic tests: Echocardiography; Gastroscopy; Colonoscopy; Flexi Sigmoidoscopy; DEXA Scan; Magnetic Resonance Imaging - Cardiac and Magnetic Resonance Imaging.

Source: SDR1

Total number of diagnostic tests reported on during quarter ending June 2022

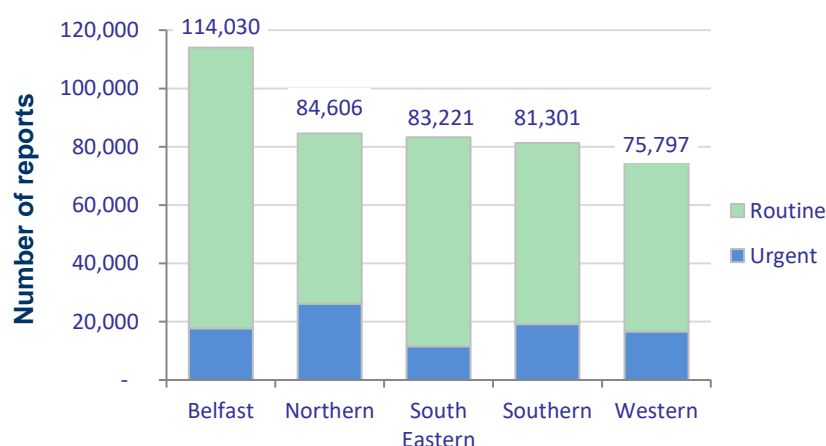


Source: DRTT Return

A total of 438,955 diagnostic tests were reported on and dispatched to the referring clinician at hospitals in Northern Ireland during the quarter ending June 2022, an increase of 5.6% (23,414) from the quarter ending March 2022 (415,541), and 2.4% (10,469) more than the quarter ending June 2021 (428,486) (Table 4).¹

Of the 438,955 reported diagnostic tests, 94.0% (412,407) were reporting on an Imaging test and 6.0% (26,548) were reporting on a Physiological Measurement test² (Table 4).

Over one fifth (20.8%, 91,097) of the diagnostic tests reported on during quarter ending June 2022 were urgent diagnostic tests, with the remaining 79.2% (347,858) being routine diagnostic tests (Table 4).



More than a quarter (26.0%) of diagnostic tests were reported and dispatched in the Belfast HSC Trust, with a further 19.3% in the Northern HSC Trust, 19.0% in the South Eastern HSC Trust, 18.5% in the Southern HSC Trust and 17.3% 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 June 2022

By March 2023, 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

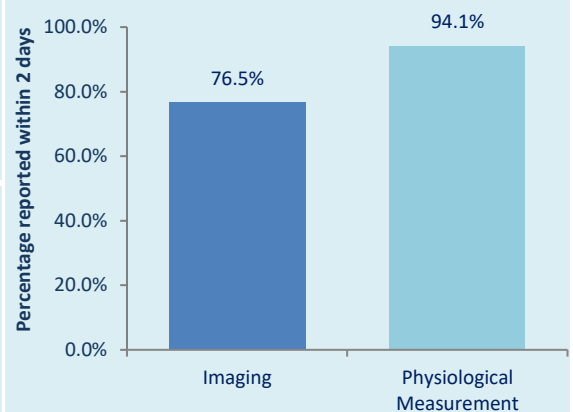


increase of 1.4 percentage points on the previous quarter



decrease of 1.9 percentage points on the same quarter last year

78.3% of urgent diagnostic tests reported on within 2 days

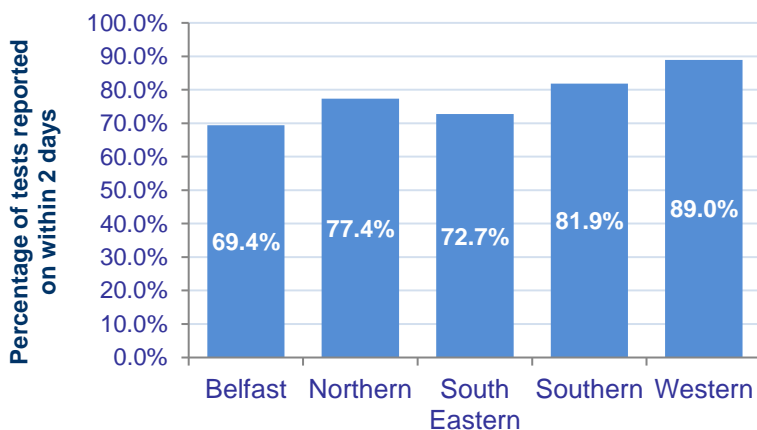


Source: DRTT Return

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

Of the 91,097 urgent diagnostic tests reported on during quarter ending June 2022, 78.3% (71,323) were reported on within 2 days, compared with 76.9% (67,305) during the quarter ending March 2022 and 80.2% (68,653) during the quarter ending June 2021 (Table 5).

Of the 91,097 urgent diagnostic tests, 82,048 were imaging reports and 9,049 were physiological measurement reports. A total of 76.5% (62,807) of urgent imaging tests were reported on within 2 days compared with 94.1% (8,516) of urgent physiological measurement tests (Table 6).



During the quarter ending June 2022, the 2 day target was not achieved by any HSC Trust. The Western Trust reported on 89.0% 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 – 30th June 2022¹

Diagnostic Category		Current Quarter (June 2022)	Previous Quarter (March 2022)	Same Quarter Last Year (June 2021)
Imaging	Total Patients Waiting	84,248	76,069	64,139
	Number waiting over 9 weeks	31,940	25,863	20,048
	<i>Percentage waiting over 9 weeks</i>	37.9%	34.0%	31.3%
	Number waiting over 26 weeks	10,045	10,242	8,709
Physiological Measurement	Total Patients Waiting	48,961	48,063	50,028
	Number waiting over 9 weeks	30,550	29,264	32,647
	<i>Percentage waiting over 9 weeks</i>	62.4%	60.9%	65.3%
	Number waiting over 26 weeks	15,265	16,748	21,161
Endoscopy	Total Patients Waiting	33,201	32,138	31,134
	Number waiting over 9 weeks	24,990	24,170	23,489
	<i>Percentage waiting over 9 weeks</i>	75.3%	75.2%	75.4%
	Number waiting over 26 weeks	19,772	19,322	18,673
Total	Total Patients Waiting	166,410	156,270	145,301
	Number waiting over 9 weeks	87,480	79,297	76,184
	<i>Percentage waiting over 9 weeks</i>	52.6%	50.7%	52.4%
	Number waiting over 26 weeks	45,082	46,312	48,543

Source: SDR1

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

Table 2: Number of patients waiting for a diagnostic service, by HSC Trust – 30th June 2022¹

HSC Trust	Patients Waiting for Diagnostic Service by Weeks Waiting						Total Waiting
	0 - 6	>6 - 9	>9 - 13	>13 - 21	>21-26	>26	
Belfast	13,927	3,690	3,393	4,604	1,618	11,846	39,078
Northern	15,515	3,906	3,623	4,921	1,837	7,139	36,941
South Eastern	12,842	3,278	2,565	3,334	907	4,248	27,174
Southern	10,929	3,699	3,256	4,857	2,212	16,567	41,520
Western	8,787	2,357	1,947	2,664	660	5,282	21,697
Total	62,000	16,930	14,784	20,380	7,234	45,082	166,410

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 – 30th June 2022¹

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	7,496	2,677	2,747	5,036	1,579	2,345	21,880
Non-obstetric ultrasound	11,988	3,180	2,154	1,433	177	303	19,235
Plain Film Xrays	12,195	2,268	1,085	53	3	2	15,606
Echocardiography	3,396	899	982	1,777	782	7,124	14,960
Computerised Tomography	5,764	1,314	1,052	1,311	544	431	10,416
Gastroscopy	2,401	522	541	696	405	5,536	10,101
Pure tone audiometry	2,673	1,073	1,268	2,356	703	964	9,037
Colonoscopy	2,148	428	445	548	282	5,008	8,859
DEXA Scan	2,000	897	881	1,576	588	2,551	8,493
Flexi sigmoidoscopy	550	180	176	298	195	4,777	6,176
Ambulatory ECG monitoring (24 hr holter)	1,401	517	619	931	357	2,011	5,836
Peripheral neurophysiology	401	243	328	530	276	1,675	3,453
Magnetic Resonance Imaging - Cardiac	227	80	131	281	109	2,549	3,377
Radio-Nuclide Imaging	868	276	169	250	99	1,077	2,739
Cystoscopy	858	264	233	460	173	690	2,678
Spirometry inc.flow volume curves	1,190	274	257	361	104	339	2,525
Barium Studies/Fluoroscopy	538	212	211	245	146	780	2,132
Sleep studies	954	259	160	275	55	323	2,026
Arthroscopy	86	37	44	99	51	1,571	1,888
Other	4,866	1,330	1,301	1,864	606	5,026	14,993
All diagnostic tests	62,000	16,930	14,784	20,380	7,234	45,082	166,410

Source: SDR1

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

Table 4: Number of diagnostic tests reported and dispatched by priority of report – QE June 2022²

Priority of Report	Diagnostic Category	Current Quarter (Jun 2022)	Previous Quarter (Mar 2022)	Same Quarter Last Year (Jun 2021)
Urgent	Imaging	82,048	79,175	76,136
	Physiological Measurement	9,049	8,374	9,493
Routine	Imaging	330,359	311,279	327,677
	Physiological Measurement	17,499	16,713	15,180
Total	Imaging	412,407	390,454	403,813
	Physiological Measurement	26,548	25,087	24,673

Source: DRTT Return

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

Table 5: Number of urgent diagnostic tests reported and dispatched – QE June 2022²

Urgent Diagnostic Tests	Current Quarter (Jun 2022)	Previous Quarter (Mar 2022)	Same Quarter Last Year (Jun 2021)
Total reported	91,097	87,549	85,629
Number reported within 2 days	71,323	67,305	68,653
<i>% reported on within 2 days</i>	78.3%	76.9%	80.2%

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 June 2022²

Diagnostic Category	Length of time reporting in days				Total Reported
	0 - 2 days	>2 - 14 days	>14 - 28 days	>28 days	
Imaging	62,807	16,313	2,548	380	82,048
Physiological Measurement	8,516	359	96	78	9,049
Total	71,323	16,672	2,644	458	91,097

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 June 2022²

HSC Trust	Length of time reporting in days				Total Reported
	0 - 2 days	>2 - 14 days	>14 - 28 days	>28 days	
Belfast	12,254	3,624	1,498	285	17,661
Northern	20,223	5,753	158	3	26,137
South Eastern	8,405	3,030	98	23	11,556
Southern	15,652	2,592	807	67	19,118
Western	14,789	1,673	83	80	16,625
Total	71,323	16,672	2,644	458	91,097

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 Strategic Planning and Performance Directorate in the Department of Health 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-june-2022>
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 Strategic Planning and Performance Group in the Department of Health 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 2022/23 Ministerial diagnostic waiting time target, states that, by March 2023, 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 2022/23 Ministerial diagnostic reporting turnaround target, states that, by March 2023, 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-june-2022>
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 30th September 2022 will be released on Thursday 24th November 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

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