

INFORMATION
ANALYSIS
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Northern Ireland Waiting Time Statistics: Diagnostic Waiting Times Quarter Ending December 2016



Department of
Health

An Roinn Sláinte

Mánnystrie O Poustie

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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 2016/17 Ministerial waiting time target and the 2016/17 Ministerial diagnostic reporting turnaround target:

“By March 2017, 75% of patients should wait no longer than 9 weeks for a diagnostic test, with no patient waiting longer than 26 weeks”.

“From April 2016, 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 2016. Data are presented by HSC Trust, diagnostic category, diagnostic test, and time band. Further information on routine diagnostic reporting times are available in the accompanying CSV file.

Statistical Quality: The ‘*Diagnostic Waiting Times Publication – Supporting Documentation*’ booklet details the technical guidance, definitions, as well as notes on how to use the data contained within this statistical release. This booklet is available to view or download from the following link:

<https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/publications/northern-ireland-waiting-time-statistics-diagnostic-waiting-times-december-2016>

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, health care professionals, academics, and Health & Social Care stakeholders, the media and general public.

Price: Free

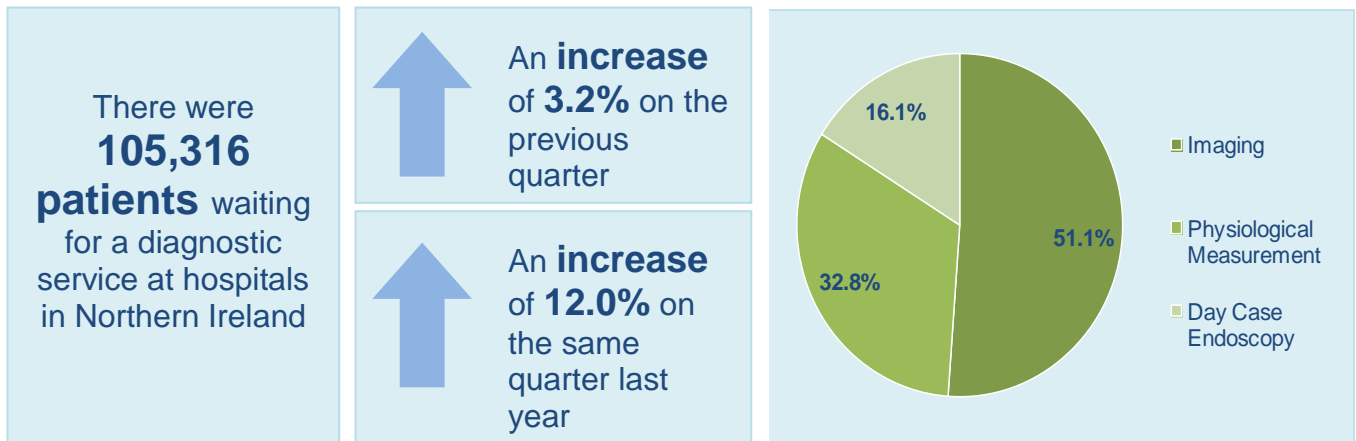
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By March 2017, 75% of patients should wait no longer than 9 weeks for a diagnostic test, with no patient waiting longer than 26 weeks.

Total number of patients waiting at 31st December 2016



Source: SDR1 Part 1&2

At 31st December 2016, a total of 105,316 patients were waiting for a diagnostic test, 3.2% (3,255) more than at 30th September 2016 (102,061), and 12.0% (11,273) more than at 31st December 2015 (94,043) (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 be cautious in how they use these data (see explanatory note 10).



Just over a third (36.4%) were waiting for diagnostic tests in the Belfast HSC Trust, with a further 20.8% in the Southern HSC Trust, 19.2% in the Northern HSC Trust, 11.9% in the Western HSC Trust and 11.8% in the South Eastern HSC Trust (Table 2).

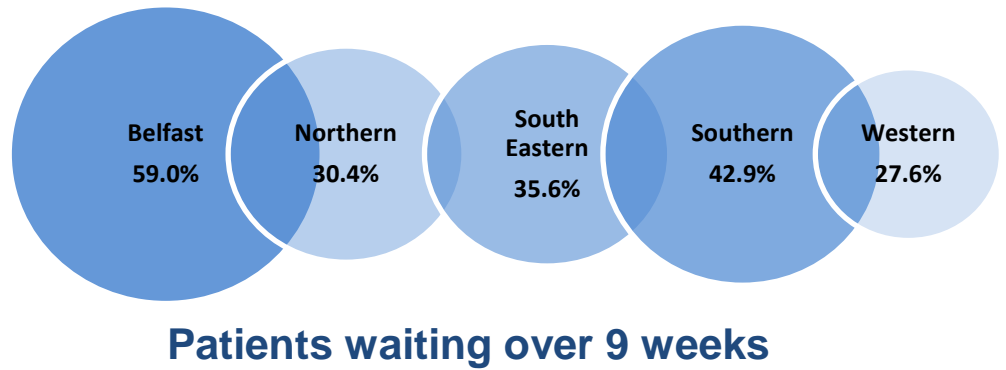
Source: SDR1 Part 1&2

Over two-thirds (68.7%, 72,399) of the 105,316 patients were waiting for a diagnostic test within one of the following seven diagnostic services: Non-obstetric Ultrasound; Magnetic Resonance Imaging; Echocardiography; Computerised Tomography; Gastroscopy; Peripheral Neurophysiology and Pure Tone Audiometry. (Table 3).

Patients waiting more than 9 weeks at 31st December 2016

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

43.7%
of patients
were waiting longer
than 9 weeks



Source: SRD1 Part 1&2

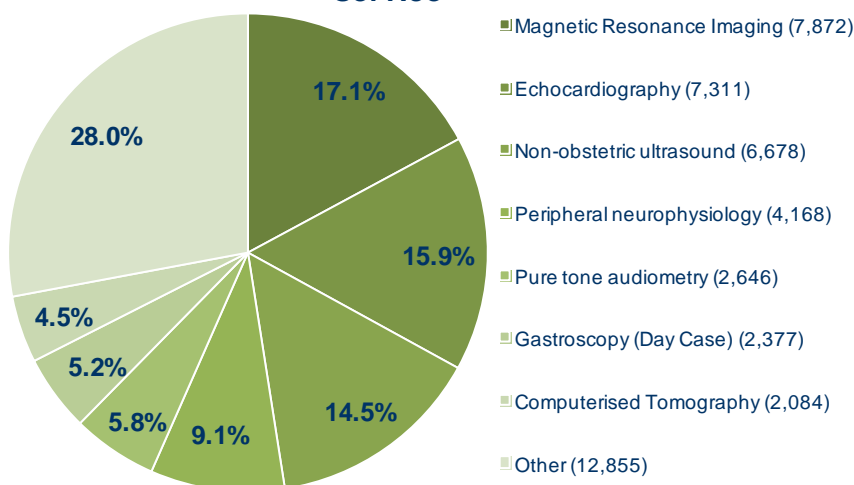
Achievement of the 9 week target requires that less than 25% of patients should be waiting over 9 weeks for a diagnostic test.

At 31st December 2016, 43.7% (45,991) of patients were waiting more than 9 weeks for a diagnostic test, compared with 39.9% (40,686) at 30th September 2016 and 35.7% (33,555) at 31st December 2015 (Table 1).

At 31st December 2016, the 9 week element of the target was not achieved by Northern Ireland as a whole or by any HSC Trust (Table 2). Data users should be aware that many diagnostic services are not provided at every HSC Trust (see explanatory note 10).

Over half (59.0%, 22,601) of patients were waiting longer than 9 weeks in Belfast HSC Trust at 31st December 2016, 42.9% (9,379) in the Southern HSC Trust, 35.6% (4,412) in the South Eastern HSC Trust, 30.4% (6,146) in the Northern HSC Trust and 27.6% (3,453) in the Western HSC Trust (Table 2).

Patients waiting over 9 weeks by diagnostic service



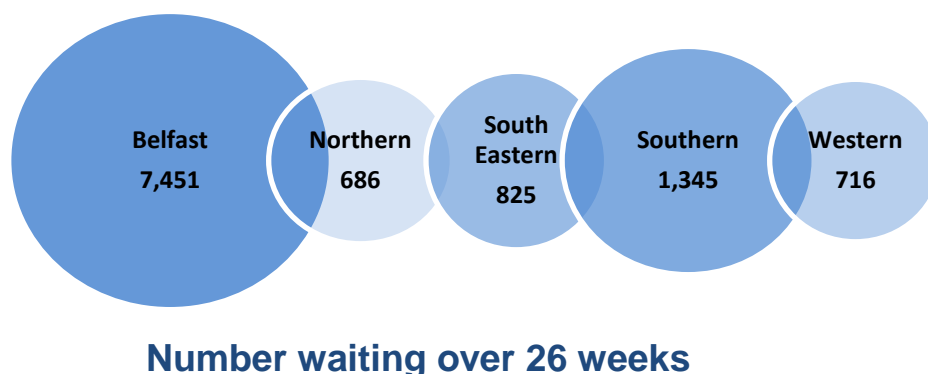
Over two-thirds (72.0%, 33,136) of the 45,991 patients waiting more than 9 weeks were waiting for one of the following diagnostic tests: Magnetic Resonance Imaging; Echocardiography; Non-Obstetric Ultrasound; Peripheral Neurophysiology; Pure Tone Audiometry; Gastroscopy; and Computerised Tomography (Table 3).

Source: SDR1 Part1&2

Patients waiting more than 26 weeks at 31st December 2016

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

11,023
patients
were waiting longer
than 26 weeks



Number waiting over 26 weeks

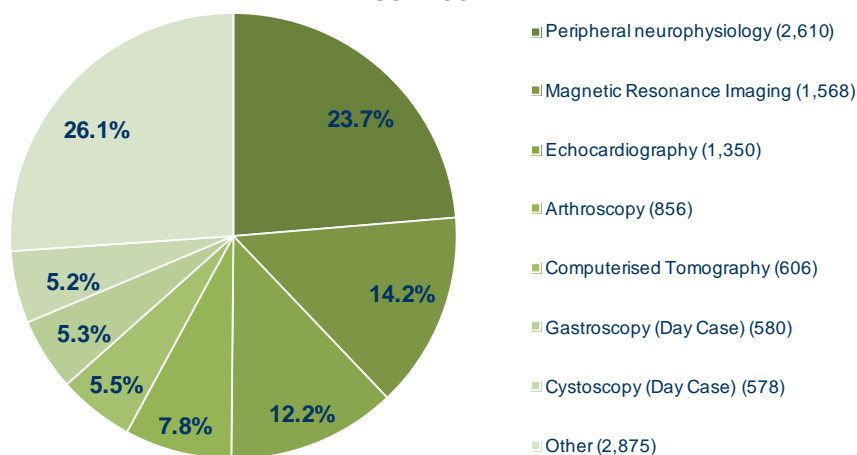
Source: SDR1 Part1&2

At 31st December 2016, 10.5% (11,023) of patients were waiting more than 26 weeks for a diagnostic test compared with 9.5% (9,675) at 30th September 2016 and 7.6% (7,111) at 31st December 2015 (Table 1).

At 31st December 2016, 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 many diagnostic services are not provided at every HSC Trust (see explanatory note 10).

Just under one in five (19.5%, 7,451) patients in the Belfast HSC Trust were waiting longer than 26 weeks at 31st December 2016, 6.7% (825) in the South Eastern HSC Trust, 6.2% (1,345) in the Southern HSC Trust, 5.7% (716) in the Western HSC Trust and 3.4% (686) in the Northern HSC Trust (Table 2).

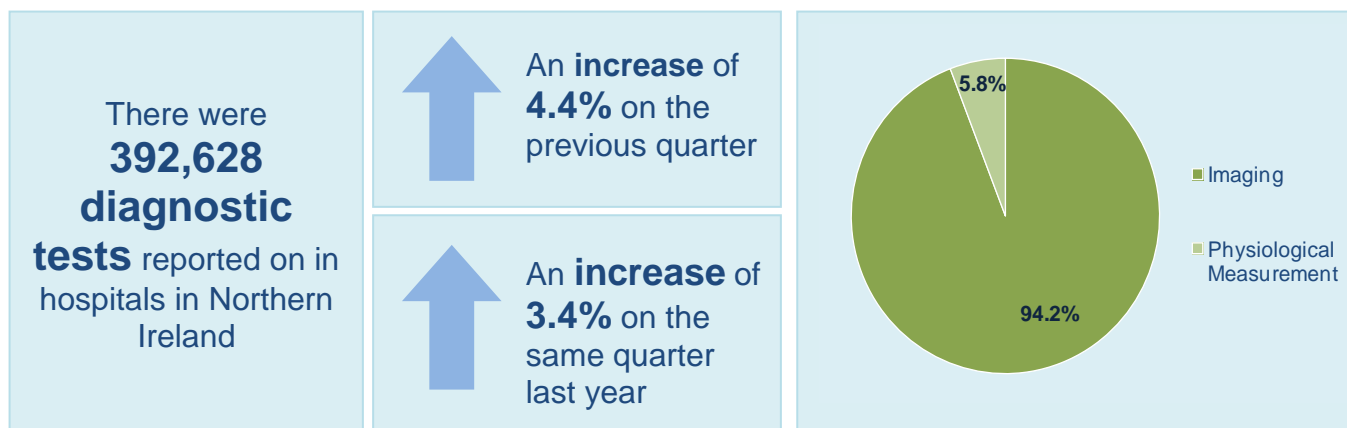
Patients waiting over 26 weeks by diagnostic service



Source: SDR1 Part1&2

Almost three quarters (73.9%, 8,148) of the 11,023 patients waiting more than 26 weeks were waiting for one of the following diagnostic tests: Peripheral Neurophysiology; Magnetic Resonance Imaging; Echocardiography; Arthroscopy; Computerised Tomography; Gastroscopy and Cystoscopy (Table 3).

Total number of diagnostic tests reported on during quarter ending December 2016



Source: DRTT Return

A total of 392,628 diagnostic tests¹ were reported on and dispatched to the referring clinician at hospitals in Northern Ireland during the quarter ending December 2016, 4.4% (16,717) more than the quarter ending September 2016 (375,911), and 3.4% (12,792) more than the quarter ending December 2015 (379,836) (Table 4).

Of the 392,628 reported diagnostic tests, 94.2% (369,664) were reporting on an Imaging test and 5.8% (22,964) were reporting on a Physiological Measurement test² (Table 4).

Just over one tenth (12.4%, 48,593) of the diagnostic tests reported on during quarter ending December 2016 were urgent diagnostic tests, with the remaining 87.6% (344,035) being routine diagnostic tests³ (Table 4).



Source: DRTT Return

Over one quarter (27.9%) of diagnostic tests were reported and dispatched in the Belfast HSC Trust¹, with a further 20.1% in the Northern HSC Trust, 17.5% in the South Eastern HSC Trust, 17.3% in the Western HSC Trust and 17.2% in the Southern HSC Trust.

¹ Due to mapping issues following the installation of a new information system within the Royal Victoria hospital in Belfast HSC Trust, it is not currently possible to report on the total number of urgent Computerised Tomography diagnostic reporting turnaround times.

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.

³ Reporting times of routine diagnostic tests are available in the accompanying CSV file.

From April 2016, all urgent diagnostic tests should be reported on within 2 days of the test being undertaken.

Urgent diagnostic tests reported on within 2 days during quarter ending December 2016

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

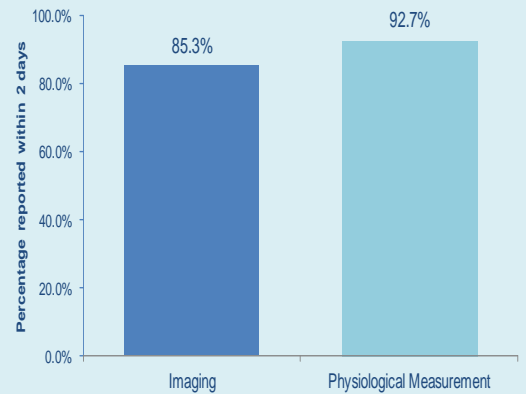
86.0% of urgent diagnostic tests reported on within 2 days



An increase of **0.7 percentage point** on the previous quarter



A decrease of **1.8 percentage points** on the same quarter last year

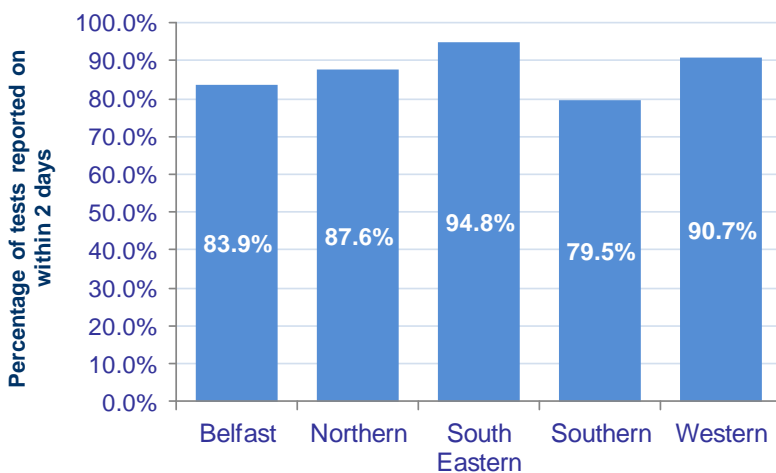


Source: DRTT Return

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

Of the 48,593 urgent diagnostic tests reported on during quarter ending December 2016, 86.0% (41,788) were reported on within 2 days, compared with 85.3% (40,464) during the quarter ending September 2016 and 87.8% (40,736) during the quarter ending December 2015 (Table 5).

Of the 48,593 urgent diagnostic tests reported on during the quarter ending December 2016, 43,816 were imaging reports and 4,777 were physiological measurement reports. A total of 85.3% urgent imaging tests were reported on within 2 days compared with 92.7% of urgent physiological measurement tests (Table 6).



During quarter ending December 2016, the 2 day target was not achieved by any HSC Trust, although the South Eastern Trust reported on 94.8% of urgent diagnostic tests (Table 7).

Source: DRTT Return

Appendix 1: Tables

Table 1: Number of patients waiting for a diagnostic service by diagnostic category – 31st December 2016¹

Diagnostic Category		Current Quarter (31 st December 2016)	Previous Quarter (30 th September 2016)	Same Quarter Last Year (31 st December 2015)
Imaging	Total Patients Waiting	53,863	50,363	48,482
	Number waiting over 9 weeks	18,410	13,618	11,905
	<i>Percentage waiting over 9 weeks</i>	34.2%	27.0%	24.6%
	Number waiting over 26 weeks	2,545	1,495	631
Physiological Measurement	Total Patients Waiting	34,491	32,384	27,287
	Number waiting over 9 weeks	18,979	16,433	12,555
	<i>Percentage waiting over 9 weeks</i>	55.0%	50.7%	46.0%
	Number waiting over 26 weeks	5,143	3,526	2,771
Endoscopy	Total Patients Waiting	16,962	19,314	18,274
	Number waiting over 9 weeks	8,602	10,635	9,095
	<i>Percentage waiting over 9 weeks</i>	50.7%	55.1%	49.8%
	Number waiting over 26 weeks	3,335	4,654	3,709
Total	Total Patients Waiting	105,316	102,061	94,043
	Number waiting over 9 weeks	45,991	40,686	33,555
	<i>Percentage waiting over 9 weeks</i>	43.7%	39.9%	35.7%
	Number waiting over 26 weeks	11,023	9,675	7,111

Source: SDR1 Part 1 & 2 Returns

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

Table 2: Number of patients waiting for a diagnostic service, by HSC Trust – 31st December 2016¹

HSC Trust	Patients Waiting for Diagnostic Service by Weeks Waiting						Total Waiting
	0 - 6	>6 - 9	>9 - 13	>13 - 21	>21-26	>26	
Belfast	11,241	4,456	5,139	6,939	3,072	7,451	38,298
Northern	11,021	3,063	2,715	1,960	785	686	20,230
South Eastern	6,353	1,638	1,688	1,459	440	825	12,403
Southern	8,710	3,776	3,087	3,788	1,159	1,345	21,865
Western	7,047	2,020	1,422	925	390	716	12,520
Total	44,372	14,953	14,051	15,071	5,846	11,023	105,316

Source: SDR1 Part 1 & 2 Returns

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

Table 3: Number of patients waiting for a diagnostic service by type of service and weeks waiting – 31st December 2016¹

Diagnostic Test	Patients Waiting for Diagnostic Service by Weeks Waiting						Total Waiting
	0 - 6	>6 - 9	>9 - 13	>13 - 21	>21-26	>26	
Non-obstetric ultrasound	10,835	4,009	3,203	2,955	368	152	21,522
Magnetic Resonance Imaging	5,636	2,558	2,696	2,786	822	1,568	16,066
Cardiology - echocardiography	2,939	1,335	1,838	2,661	1,462	1,350	11,585
Computerised Tomography	4,812	1,027	717	553	208	606	7,923
Gastroscopy (Day Case)	2,252	747	795	772	230	580	5,376
Neurophysiology - peripheral neurophysiology	591	301	355	724	479	2,610	5,060
Audiology - pure tone audiometry	1,389	832	733	1,004	543	366	4,867
Ambulatory ECG monitoring (24 hr holter)	1,584	575	680	340	396	99	3,674
Colonoscopy (Day Case)	1,668	457	482	446	180	427	3,660
Plain Film Xrays	3,023	139	22	8	0	0	3,192
DEXA Scan	1,155	459	293	644	328	143	3,022
Cystoscopy (Day Case)	913	194	240	266	84	578	2,275
Flexi sigmoidoscopy (Day Case)	714	298	252	218	117	215	1,814
Respiratory physiology - sleep studies	781	309	221	179	27	78	1,595
Arthroscopy	87	93	162	230	108	856	1,536
Cardiology - perfusion studies	320	155	217	256	178	193	1,319
Patient Activated Ambulatory Function	287	120	90	183	81	214	975
Fluroscopy	654	127	62	57	21	23	944
Hysteroscopy	356	90	112	131	39	209	937
Other	4,376	1,128	881	658	175	756	7,974
All diagnostic tests	44,372	14,953	14,051	15,071	5,846	11,023	105,316

Source: SDR1 Part 1 & 2 Returns

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

Table 4: Number of diagnostic tests reported and dispatched by priority of report – QE December 2016²

Priority of Report	Diagnostic Category	QE		
		December 2016	September 2016	December 2015
Urgent	Imaging	43,816	42,890	42,180
	Physiological Measurement	4,777	4,556	4,190
Routine	Imaging	325,848	310,757	314,963
	Physiological Measurement	18,187	17,708	18,503
Total	Imaging	369,664	353,647	357,143
	Physiological Measurement	22,964	22,264	22,693

Source: DRTT Return

²Refer to Explanatory Notes 1-2, 4-5 & 16–25

Table 5: Number of urgent diagnostic tests reported and dispatched – QE December 2016²

Urgent Diagnostic Tests	QE December 2016	QE September 2016	QE December 2015
Total reported	48,593	47,446	46,370
Number reported within 2 days	41,788	40,464	40,736
% reported on within 2 days	86.0%	85.3%	87.8%

Source: DRTT Return

²Refer to Explanatory Notes 1-2, 4-5 & 16–25

Table 6: Number of urgent diagnostic tests reported and dispatched by diagnostic category and time in days– QE December 2016²

Diagnostic Category	Length of time reporting in days				Total Reported
	0 - 2 days	>2 - 14 days	>14 - 28 days	>28 days	
Imaging	37,362	6,018	337	99	43,816
Physiological Measurement	4,426	336	13	2	4,777
Total	41,788	6,354	350	101	48,593

Source: DRTT Return

²Refer to Explanatory Notes 1-2, 4-5 & 16–25

Table 7: Number of urgent diagnostic tests reported and dispatched by HSC Trust and time in days – QE December 2016²

HSC Trust	Length of time reporting in days				Total Reported
	0 - 2 days	>2 - 14 days	>14 - 28 days	>28 days	
Belfast	10,233	1,840	88	42	12,203
Northern	11,030	1,527	31	4	12,592
South Eastern	4,313	222	12	1	4,548
Southern	8,874	2,033	207	49	11,163
Western	7,338	732	12	5	8,087
Total	41,788	6,354	350	101	48,593

Source: DRTT Return

²Refer to Explanatory Notes 1-2, 4-5 & 16–25

Appendix 2: Explanatory Notes

1. The sources for the data contained in this release are the quarterly Departmental Returns SDR1 (Parts 1 & 2) and the DRTT Return. The source for the diagnostic waiting time data for 16 selected diagnostic services is the Departmental Return SDR1 Part 1 (See explanatory note 2). The waiting time information for all other diagnostic services is 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, definitions, as well as notes on how to use the data contained within this statistical release. This booklet is available to view or download from the following link: <https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/publications/northern-ireland-waiting-time-statistics-diagnostic-waiting-times-december-2016>
3. The 16 selected diagnostic 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; Urodynamics Pressures and Flows; Colonoscopy; Flexi Sigmoidoscopy; Cystoscopy and Gastroscopy.
4. 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/articles/diagnostic-waiting-times>
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 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 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. Waiting time statistics for day case endoscopies also include patients waiting for these services that are managed as inpatient admissions.
13. The 2016/17 Ministerial diagnostic waiting time target, as detailed in the Health and Social Care (Commissioning Plan) Direction (Northern Ireland) 2016, states that, by March 2017, 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 (greater than 6 weeks but waiting no longer than 9 weeks) week time band.
15. Patients waiting 'longer than 9 weeks' for a diagnostic service includes all patients in the >9 - 13, >13 - 21, >21 - 26 and >26 week time bands. All patients waiting 'over 26 weeks' included everyone in the >26 week time band.
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. Due to mapping issues following the installation of a new information system within the Royal Victoria hospital in Belfast HSC Trust, it is not currently possible to report on the total number of urgent Computerised Tomography diagnostic reporting turnaround times.

20. The 2016/17 Ministerial diagnostic reporting turnaround target, as detailed in the Health and Social Care (Commissioning Plan) Direction (Northern Ireland) 2016, states that, from April 2016, 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/articles/diagnostic-waiting-times>
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 2017 will be released on Thursday 25th May 2017.

Further information on Diagnostic Waiting Times in Northern Ireland is available from:

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