



NHS Diagnostic Waiting Times and Activity Data

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May 2014 Monthly Report

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1 Executive summary

This report presents a monthly summary of diagnostic waiting times and activity across the NHS in England. This monthly report is part of a routine series of publications produced by NHS England.

The data presented in this report measures the current waiting times of patients still waiting for any of 15 key diagnostic tests or procedures at the month end. This data is split by number of weeks waiting, and by test. The waiting times reported are for those patients who have been referred for a test, but whose test had not taken place by the end of the reporting period. Referrals may be from a variety of sources including GPs.

One of the main measurements covered in this report is the number and proportion of patients waiting six weeks or longer for a diagnostic test, from time of referral.

This six week diagnostic wait was initially introduced as a 'milestone' from March 2008 towards achieving the standard Referral to Treatment wait of 18 weeks by December 2008, but diagnostic waiting times now form part of the 2013/14 NHS Constitution. This gives patients the legal right to treatment within 18 weeks of referral (18 week RTT) and as part of this, pledges that patients should not be required to wait 6 weeks or longer for a diagnostic test.

NHS England's planning guidance states that there is a threshold of 99% for this pledge. The financial penalty for non-delivery of the standard is set out in the NHS Standard Contract 2014/15.

The 15 key diagnostic tests included in this report are:

- Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI)
- Computerised Tomography (CT)
- Non-obstetric Ultrasound
- Barium Enema
- Dual-Energy X-Ray Absorptiometry (DEXA) Scan
- Audiology Assessments
- Echocardiography
- Electrophysiology
- Neurophysiology – peripheral neurophysiology
- Respiratory Physiology – sleep studies
- Urodynamics – pressures & flows
- Gastroscopy
- Colonoscopy
- Flexible Sigmoidoscopy
- Cystoscopy

For detailed descriptions of each diagnostic test please see the [collection guidance document](#).

Some of the key terms used throughout this report are outlined below:

- **6+ Waits**
A count of the number of patients waiting 6 weeks or longer for a diagnostic test at month end from referral.
- **Activity**
A count of the number of diagnostic tests undertaken during the month.
- **Diagnostic Test**
A test or procedure of which the primary function is to identify a patient's disease or condition to allow a medical diagnosis to be made.
- **Waiting List**
A count of the number of patients that are waiting for a diagnostic test at the end of the month.

A more comprehensive glossary is available in the Annex.

All England figures quoted are commissioner based. Commissioner based returns reflect data for patients for whom English commissioners are responsible.

2 May 2014 Key Findings

- The total number of patients waiting 6 weeks or longer from referral for one of the 15 key diagnostic tests at the end of May was 18,700. This represents 2.3% of the total number of patients waiting for a diagnostic test at the end of the month. Nationally, the operational standard of less than 1% of patients waiting 6 weeks or longer was not met.
- The total number of patients waiting 6 weeks or longer has shown an increase of 11,800 from the end of May 2013.
- The percentage of patients waiting 6 weeks or longer has increased by 1.4 percentage points from the same period last year. In between these periods the percentage has shown an upward trend, with a high of 2.3% (May 2014) and low of 0.7% (October 2013).
- The test with the highest proportion of patients waiting 6 weeks or longer in May 2014 was Urodynamics with 6.3% of all patients waiting 6 weeks or longer. The test with the smallest proportion was Barium Enema with 0.1%.
- An alternative measure of diagnostic waiting times is the average (median) waiting time. The average patient waiting for a diagnostic test had been waiting 2.1 weeks at the end of May 2014.
- There were 795,000 patients still waiting for a diagnostic test at the end of May 2014. This is an increase of 95,000 from May 2013. In the past twelve months the total number of patients waiting for a diagnostic test has been gradually increasing with an average monthly increase of 1.1%, which is higher than the rise seen in total activity.
- A total of 1,544,000 diagnostic tests were undertaken in May 2014. This is an increase of 3.9% from the same period last year (9.1% when adjusted for working days). In the previous twelve months activity has increased very slightly with an average monthly increase of 0.3% (0.7% adjusted).

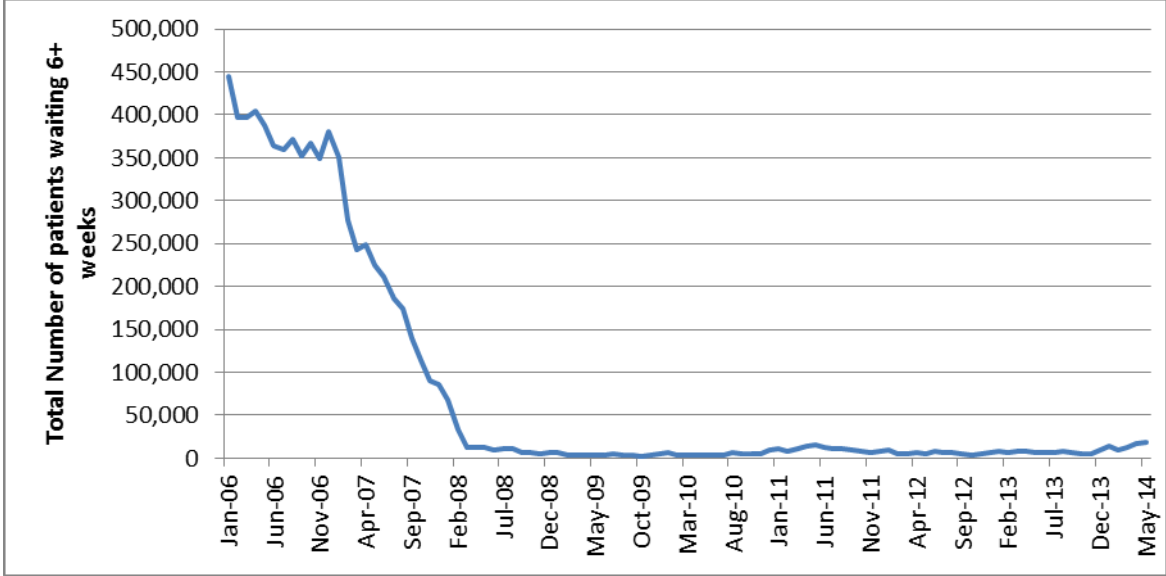
3 National Trends

This section analyses trends in monthly diagnostic waiting times and activity data that has been collected since January 2006.

3.1 6+ Week Waits

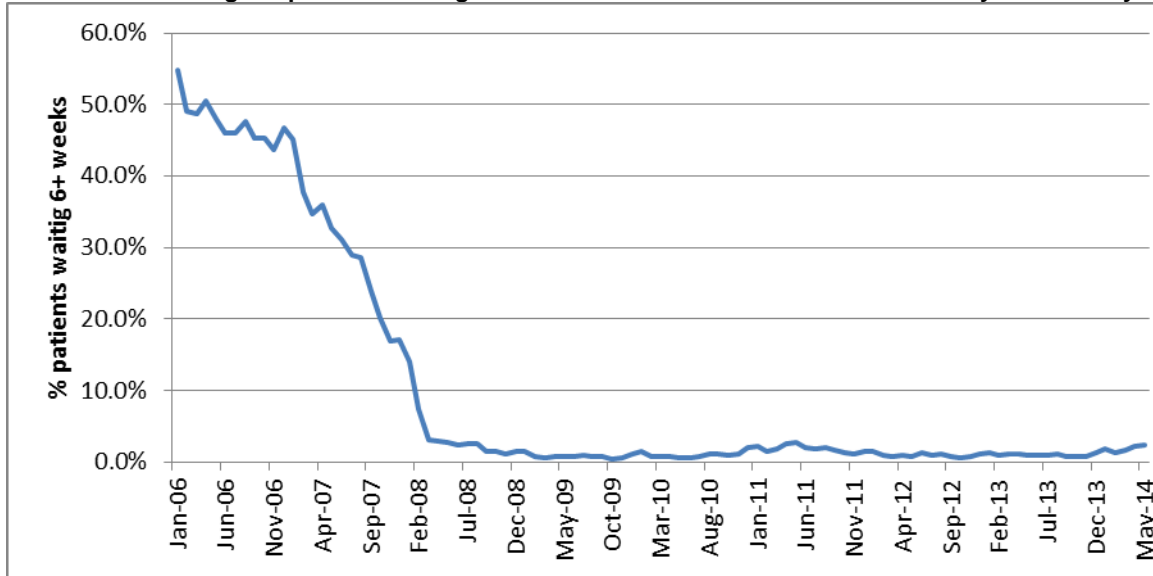
3.1.1. The total number of patients waiting 6 weeks or longer dropped sharply between January 2007 and March 2008, before maintaining a slight average monthly reduction (Chart 1). This reduction is most likely the result of Trusts working towards the NHS Improvement Plan (June 2004) milestone that no one should wait longer than 6 weeks for a diagnostic test by March 2008. Since that point the total number of patients waiting 6 weeks or longer was showing a steady reduction until to October 2013. Since October the number of patients waiting 6 weeks or longer has increased significantly.

Chart 1: Total number of patients waiting 6+ weeks at month end for all tests – January 2006 – May 2014



- 3.1.2. The proportion of patients waiting 6 weeks or longer shows a similar drop between January 2007 and the 6 week milestone in March 2008 before stabilising (Chart 2). However, over the past 12 months it has shown an increase, with a low of 0.7% (October 2013) and a high of 2.3% (May 2014). The 1% operational standard was last met in November 2013.

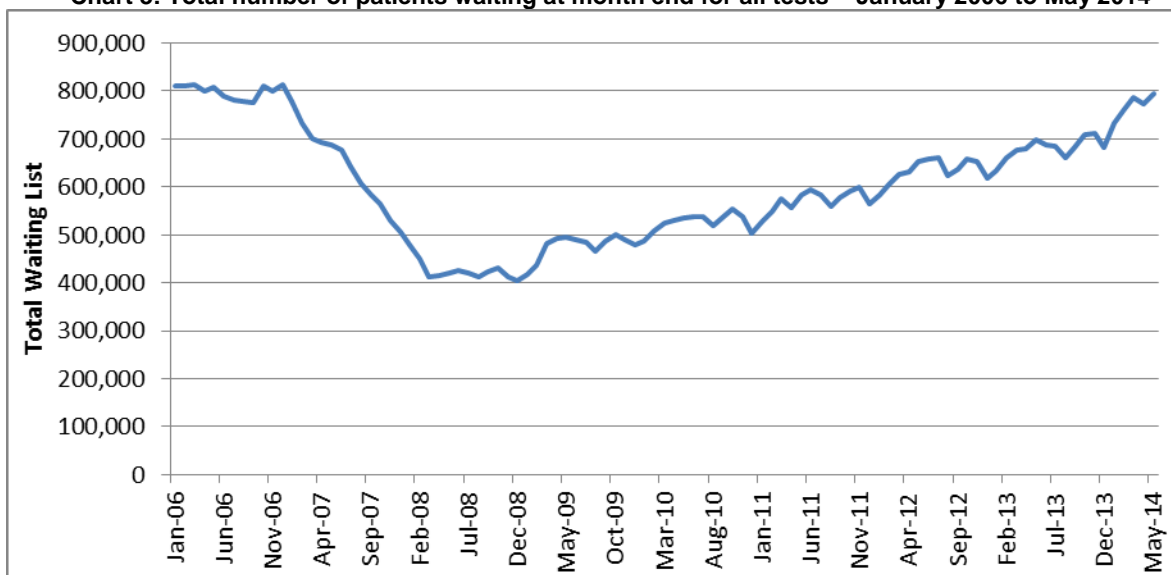
Chart 2: Percentage of patients waiting 6+ weeks at month end for all tests – January 2006 to May 2014



3.2 Total Waiting List

- 3.2.1. As seen with the number and proportion of patients waiting 6 weeks or longer, the total number of patients waiting at the month end dropped dramatically between January 2007 and the 6 week milestone in March 2008 (Chart 3). Between March 2008 and January 2009 the total waiting list remained stable, after which the underlying trend has shown an increase. In the last twelve months the average monthly increase was 1.1%.

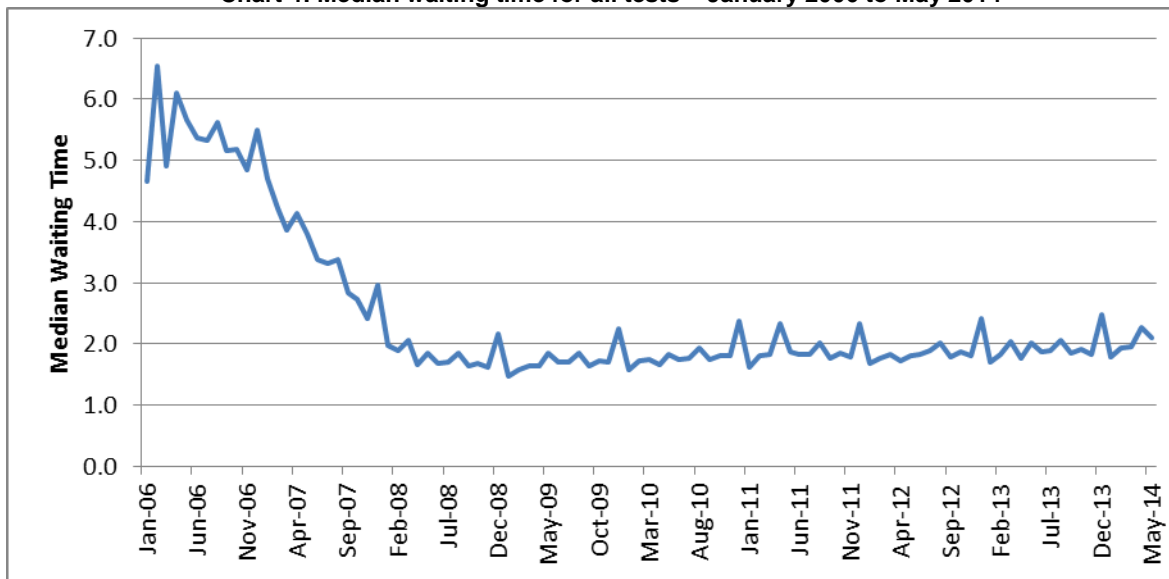
Chart 3: Total number of patients waiting at month end for all tests – January 2006 to May 2014



3.3 Median Waiting Time

3.3.1. The average (median) waiting time displays a similar trend to the total waiting list and 6+ waits. After a rapid decrease in the first two years leading to the 6 week milestone, the median waiting time has remained stable (Chart 4). The data shows significant increases during December every year, as a result of the increased number of bank holidays and resulting staff shortages. However, in the last twelve months, the median waiting time has remained stable at around 2.0 weeks, with a high of 2.5 weeks (December 2013) and a low of 1.8 weeks (January 2014).

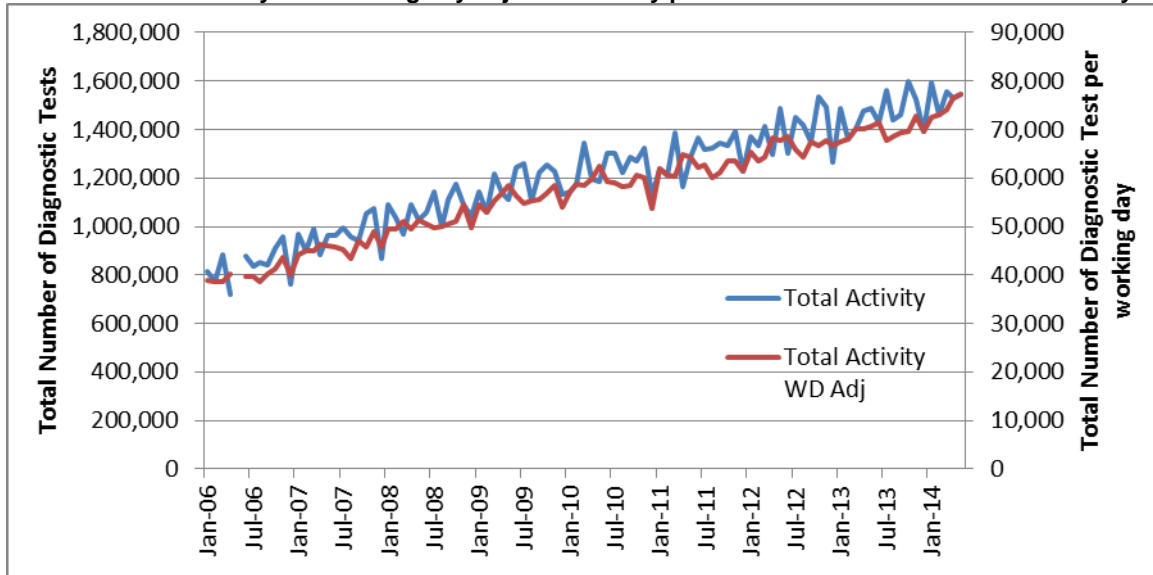
Chart 4: Median waiting time for all tests – January 2006 to May 2014



3.4 Total Activity

- 3.4.1. The monthly activity figure can fluctuate significantly month to month, with particularly notable decreases in December due to the bank holidays. However, the underlying trend has shown an increase since January 2006. If the data is adjusted to show activity per working day, the monthly variation becomes less pronounced. (Chart 5)

Chart 5: Total activity and working day adjusted activity per month for all tests – Jan 2006 to May 2014



Please note that activity data was not collected in May 2006 and as a result all activity time series graphs will show missing values for that month

- 3.4.2. Monthly activity has increased slightly over the last 12 months with an average monthly increase of 0.3% (0.7% when adjusted for working days).
- 3.4.3. In the previous twelve months individual tests are showing small changes in activity (<1%) with the exception of Barium Enema, which has shown an average monthly decrease of 2.2%.

4 May 2014 Data

This section analyses the May 2014 diagnostic waiting times and activity data including, comparisons between tests, area teams, providers and commissioners.

4.1 6+ Week Waits

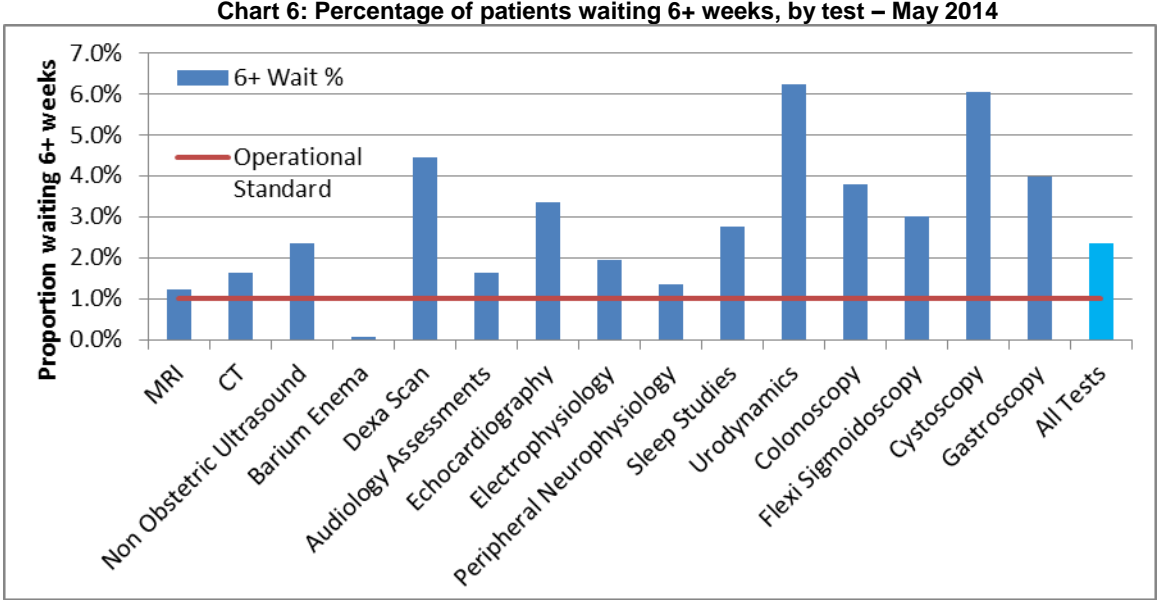
- 4.1.1. At the end of May 2014, there were a total of 18,700 patients waiting 6 weeks or longer from referral for one of the 15 key diagnostic tests. This represents 2.3% of the total number of patients waiting at the end of the month. The number of patients waiting 6 weeks or longer has shown an increase of 11,800 from the same period last year. The proportion of patients waiting 6 weeks or longer has increased by 1.4 percentage points from May 2013.
- 4.1.2. Compared to May 2013, DEXA Scan has shown the largest increase in the proportion of patients waiting 6 weeks or longer for a diagnostic test (4.2 percentage points). Audiology Assessments has shown the largest decrease from May 2013 (-0.5 percentage points). (Table 1)

Table 1: Proportion of patients waiting 6+ weeks, by test – May 2013 & May 2014.

	May-13	May-14	Difference (%age points)
MRI	1.3%	1.3%	0.0%
CT	0.2%	1.6%	1.4%
Non Obstetric Ultrasound	0.5%	2.4%	1.9%
Barium Enema	0.1%	0.1%	0.0%
Dexa Scan	0.3%	4.5%	4.2%
Audiology Assessments	2.1%	1.7%	-0.5%
Echocardiography	1.3%	3.4%	2.0%
Electrophysiology	1.5%	2.0%	0.5%
Peripheral Neurophysiology	0.9%	1.4%	0.5%
Sleep Studies	2.0%	2.8%	0.7%
Urodynamics	4.4%	6.3%	1.9%
Colonoscopy	2.2%	3.8%	1.7%
Flexi Sigmoidoscopy	1.4%	3.0%	1.6%
Cystoscopy	2.8%	6.0%	3.2%
Gastroscopy	1.7%	4.0%	2.3%
All Tests	1.0%	2.3%	1.4%

Note: Figures may differ due to rounding.

4.1.3. This month, the 2013/14 operational standard that less than 1% of patients should wait more than 6 weeks from referral for a diagnostic test was met in 1 out of 15 tests. The test with the lowest proportion of patients waiting 6 weeks or longer was Barium Enema (0.1%) and the test with the highest proportion was Urodynamics (6.3%). (Chart 6)



4.1.4. Out of 160 Acute Trusts that submitted this month, 53 providers (33.1%) failed to meet the 1% operational standard.

4.1.5. Of the 211 CCGs, 114 commissioners (54.0%) failed to meet the 1% operational standard.

4.1.6. In total 23 area teams failed to meet the 1% operational standard. South Yorkshire and Bassetlaw Area Team reported the highest proportion of patients waiting 6 weeks or longer (7.5%) and Essex Area Team the lowest (0.5%). (Table 2)

4.1.7. Feedback from NHS trusts has indicated that variations can exist between different area teams due to a variety of reasons from machines breaking down to staff shortages in trusts that usually only affect one area team.

Table 2: May 2014 Diagnostic Waiting Times and Activity by Area Team, Commissioner based data

Region	Area Team	Number of patients waiting 6 weeks or longer at month end	Percentage of patients waiting 6+ weeks at month end	Total number of patients waiting at month end	Total activity undertaken in month	Median Waiting Time
North	South Yorkshire and Bassetlaw	1,413	7.5%	18,760	47,852	2.2
South	Thames Valley	1,505	6.1%	24,799	51,564	2.2
South	Devon, Cornwall and Isles of Scilly	1,283	5.0%	25,793	50,846	2.1
South	Wessex	1,440	3.7%	39,165	77,472	2.2
North	Cumbria, Northumberland, Tyne and Wear	1,182	3.6%	32,479	63,125	2.2
South	Bristol, North Somerset, Somerset and South Gloucestershire	892	3.5%	25,501	43,144	2.4
North	Merseyside	568	3.1%	18,199	42,262	1.9
Midlands & East	Leicestershire and Lincolnshire	793	3.0%	26,741	39,207	2.3
Midlands & East	Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire	638	2.6%	24,422	52,521	1.8
London	London	2,955	2.4%	124,516	232,343	2.1
North	Cheshire, Warrington and Wirral	491	2.3%	21,472	40,229	2.1
South	Surrey and Sussex	671	1.9%	34,982	75,036	1.9
North	West Yorkshire	615	1.7%	36,233	65,155	2.1
North	North Yorkshire and Humber	432	1.6%	26,284	49,639	2.0
Midlands & East	Shropshire and Staffordshire	369	1.6%	22,935	48,108	2.0
North	Greater Manchester	651	1.5%	43,215	80,734	2.2
Midlands & East	Arden, Herefordshire and Worcestershire	384	1.4%	27,168	48,731	2.0
Midlands & East	Birmingham and The Black Country	512	1.4%	36,455	66,854	2.3
North	Durham, Darlington and Tees	283	1.4%	20,581	42,113	2.2
Midlands & East	East Anglia	385	1.3%	30,179	63,148	2.1
Midlands & East	Hertfordshire and The South Midlands	422	1.1%	37,321	70,262	2.0
South	Bath, Gloucestershire, Swindon and Wiltshire	245	1.1%	22,355	38,498	2.1
North	Lancashire	226	1.0%	21,685	41,086	1.9
South	Kent and Medway	168	0.6%	29,378	53,068	2.1
Midlands & East	Essex	107	0.5%	22,629	51,061	2.0
England (including all Independent Sector Providers)		18,664	2.3%	794,838	1,543,591	2.1

4.2 Total Waiting List

4.2.1. At the end of May 2014 there were a total of 795,000 patients still waiting for a diagnostic test. This is an increase of 95,000 (13.6%) from May 2013. The test with the largest waiting list was Non Obstetric Ultrasound (290,764) accounting for 36.6% of all patients waiting. The test with the smallest waiting list was Barium Enema (1,436) accounting for 0.2% of all patients waiting. (Table 3)

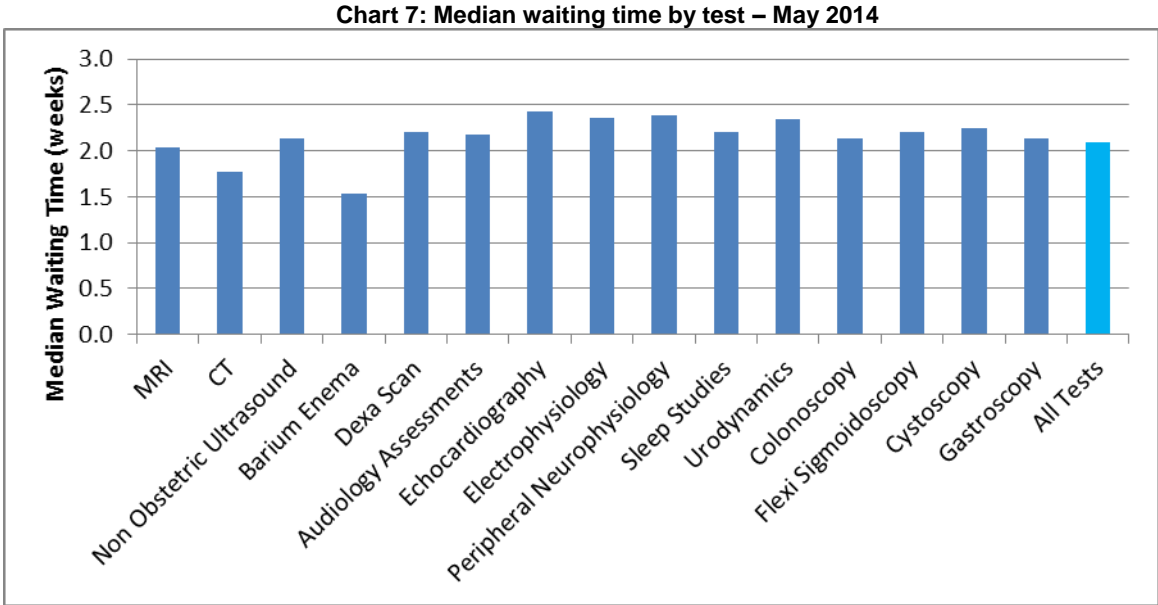
Table 3: Total number of patients waiting at month end, by test – May 2013 & May 2014

	May-13	May-14	Growth (%age)
MRI	141,613	156,799	10.7%
CT	85,674	99,046	15.6%
Non Obstetric Ultrasound	246,376	290,764	18.0%
Barium Enema	1,855	1,436	-22.6%
Dexa Scan	20,666	24,623	19.1%
Audiology Assessments	41,507	43,573	5.0%
Echocardiography	48,634	56,624	16.4%
Electrophysiology	2,114	1,690	-20.1%
Peripheral Neurophysiology	14,338	15,556	8.5%
Sleep Studies	5,302	5,672	7.0%
Urodynamics	4,452	4,158	-6.6%
Colonoscopy	27,894	29,619	6.2%
Flexi Sigmoidoscopy	14,307	15,107	5.6%
Cystoscopy	12,698	13,858	9.1%
Gastroscopy	32,248	36,313	12.6%
All Tests	699,678	794,838	13.6%

Please note that Barium Enema is a test that should be replaced by colonoscopy or CT Colonography, so the number of tests undertaken should be reducing.

4.3 Median Waiting Times

4.3.1. In May 2014 the estimated median waiting time for all 15 diagnostic tests was 2.1 weeks from time of referral, which is an increase of 0.1 weeks from May 2013. The test with the shortest median waiting time was Barium Enema (1.5 weeks), and the test with the longest waiting time was Echocardiography (2.4 weeks). (Chart 7)



4.3.2. The area team with the shortest median waiting time Derbyshire & Nottinghamshire Area Team (1.8 weeks). The area team with the longest median waiting time was Bristol, North Somerset, Somerset and South Gloucestershire (2.4 weeks). (Table 2)

4.4 Total Activity

4.4.1. In total 1,544,000 of the 15 key diagnostic tests were performed during May 2014. This is an increase of 58,000 (3.9%) from the same period last year (9.1% adjusted for working days), (Table 4).

4.4.2. Non Obstetric Ultrasound was the test with the highest activity (534,699 tests), accounting for 34.6% of all activity in May 2014. Electrophysiology was the test with the lowest reported activity (2,485 tests) accounting for 0.2% of all activity.

Table 4: Total Activity & Growth by test

	May-14	May-13	YTD 14/15	YTD 13/14	Growth May 14 vs May 13	Growth YTD 14/15 vs YTD 13/14	Adjusted Growth May 14 vs May 13	Adjusted Growth YTD 14/15 vs YTD 13/14
MRI	236,462	212,450	468,325	422,308	11.3%	10.9%	16.9%	16.4%
CT	377,233	352,341	748,608	700,058	7.1%	6.9%	12.4%	12.3%
Non Obstetric Ultrasound	534,699	529,788	1,067,387	1,052,810	0.9%	1.4%	6.0%	6.5%
Barium Enema	2,772	3,599	5,643	7,212	-23.0%	-21.8%	-19.1%	-17.8%
Dexa Scan	33,101	30,943	66,303	62,012	7.0%	6.9%	12.3%	12.3%
Audiology Assessments	98,660	101,305	197,847	203,771	-2.6%	-2.9%	2.3%	1.9%
Echocardiography	102,127	98,533	202,542	196,891	3.6%	2.9%	8.8%	8.0%
Electrophysiology	2,485	2,663	5,104	5,313	-6.7%	-3.9%	-2.0%	0.9%
Peripheral Neurophysiology	15,895	15,260	31,127	30,732	4.2%	1.3%	9.4%	6.3%
Sleep Studies	8,939	8,456	18,186	17,153	5.7%	6.0%	11.0%	11.3%
Urodynamics	6,425	7,016	13,056	14,350	-8.4%	-9.0%	-3.8%	-4.5%
Colonoscopy	32,794	32,317	64,533	65,475	1.5%	-1.4%	6.5%	3.5%
Flexi Sigmoidoscopy	19,189	18,736	38,221	38,007	2.4%	0.6%	7.5%	5.6%
Cystoscopy	23,544	24,490	47,596	49,104	-3.9%	-3.1%	0.9%	1.8%
Gastroscopy	49,266	48,138	99,476	95,386	2.3%	4.3%	7.5%	9.5%
All Tests	1,543,591	1,486,035	3,073,954	2,960,582	3.9%	3.8%	9.1%	9.0%

Please note that Barium Enema is a test that should be replaced by colonoscopy or CT Colonography, so the number of tests undertaken should be reducing.

5 Annex

5.1 Methodology

5.1.1. NHS England compiles diagnostic waiting time and activity data through a central return. Data collected includes:

- The number of patients waiting at the month end, split by test and week.
- Total activity classified as either; Waiting List tests (excluding planned), Planned tests, or Unscheduled Tests.

5.1.2. Providers submit data to NHS England via Unify2 where it checked and signed off by commissioners. For further details on how the data is collected and the Unify2 system, please refer to the [Data Quality and Methodology Statement](#).

5.2 Data Revision

5.2.1. Revisions to published figures are released on a six-monthly basis and in accordance with the NHS England Analytical Services (Operations) team's revision policy. For more information on the revision policy please refer to the [Unify2 Revisions Policy Document](#).

5.3 Data Availability

5.3.1. Monthly diagnostic waiting time and activity data is published on a monthly timetable. The next publication of this report and accompanying data will be 6th August 2014. [A full calendar of all statistical publications can be found here.](#)

5.3.2. In addition to monthly publication, diagnostic waiting time and activity data is also published in a quarterly census and annual report.

5.3.3. [Quarterly census data can be found here.](#)

5.3.4. [Annual Imaging and Radiodiagnostics data can be found here.](#)

5.4 Glossary

Area Team

A geographical area of NHS England with direct commissioning responsibilities for GP services, dental services, pharmacy, and certain aspects of optical services.

Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG)

A group of GP practices, which working with other healthcare professionals and in partnership with local communities and local authorities, commission NHS services for patients with in their local communities.

Endoscopy

A categorisation of diagnostic tests that include; Colonoscopy; Flexi sigmoidoscopy; Cystoscopy and Gastroscopy.

Imaging

A categorisation of diagnostic tests that include; Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI); Computed Tomography (CT); Non-obstetric ultrasound; Barium Enema and DEXA Scan.

Median Waiting Time

A measurement of the average time a patient is required to wait for a diagnostic test. The median is the middle value when waiting times are put in numerical order. 50% of patients will wait less than the median. The median is the preferred measurement of average waiting time as it is less susceptible to extreme values than the mean.

Physiological Measurement

A categorisation of diagnostic tests that include; Audiology Assessments; Echocardiology; Electrophysiology: Peripheral Neurophysiology; Sleep Studies and Urodynamics.

Provider

An organisation that provides NHS treatment or care, for example, an NHS Acute Trust, Mental Health Trust, Community provider, or an Independent Sector organisation.

5.5 Feedback welcomed

We welcome feedback on the content and presentation of statistics within this report and those published on the NHS England website.

If you have any comments on this, or any other issues regarding these statistics, then please email unify2@dh.gsi.gov.uk

Alternatively, we welcome your comments via our user feedback form.

Feedback about the user's experiences of using these statistics is available here.

5.6 Additional Information

[Full details of diagnostics data for individual organisations are available here.](#)

For press enquiries please contact the NHS England media team on 0113 825 0958 or 0113 825 0959. Email enquiries should be directed to nhsengland.media@nhs.net

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