



NHS Diagnostic Waiting Times and Activity Data

NHS Diagnostic Waiting Times and Activity Data

November 2015 Monthly Report

Version number: 1

First published: 14th January 2015

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NHS England

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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 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 2015/16.

The 15 key diagnostic tests included in this report are:

Imaging

- Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI)
- Computerised Tomography (CT)
- Non-obstetric Ultrasound
- Barium Enema
- Dual-Energy X-Ray Absorptiometry (DEXA) Scan

Physiological Measurements

- Audiology Assessments
- Echocardiography
- Electrophysiology
- Neurophysiology – peripheral neurophysiology
- Respiratory Physiology – sleep studies
- Urodynamics – pressures & flows

Endoscopy

- 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.

1.1 National Statistics

The UK Statistics Authority has designated these statistics as National Statistics, in accordance with the Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007 and signifying compliance with the Code of Practice for Official Statistics.

Designation can be broadly interpreted to mean that the statistics:

- meet identified user needs;
- are well explained and readily accessible;
- are produced according to sound methods; and
- are managed impartially and objectively in the public interest.

Once statistics have been designated as National Statistics it is a statutory requirement that the Code of Practice shall continue to be observed.

2 November 2015 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 November 2015 was 13,200. This was 1.6% of the total number of patients waiting at the end of the month.
- Nationally, the operational standard of less than 1% of patients waiting 6 weeks or longer was not met this month.
- Compared with November 2014 the total number of patients waiting 6 weeks or longer at the end of the month increased by 3,500, while the proportion of patients waiting 6 weeks or longer increased by 0.4 percentage points.
- In the last twelve months, the proportion of patients waiting 6 weeks or longer at the end of a month has varied between 1.5% (in February 2015) and 2.4% (in January 2015).
- At the end of November 2015, the test with the smallest proportion of patients waiting 6 weeks or longer was Barium Enema with 0.3% of patients waiting 6 weeks or longer. The test with the highest proportion was Urodynamics, with 7.4% of patients waiting 6 weeks or longer.
- An alternative measure of diagnostic waiting times is the average (median) waiting time. The estimated average time that a patient had been waiting for a diagnostic test was 1.9 weeks at the end of November 2015.
- There were 838,600 patients waiting for a key diagnostic test at the end of November 2015. This is an increase of 45,000 from November 2014. In the last twelve months the total number of patients waiting for a diagnostic test has continued to increase with an average monthly increase of 0.5%.
- A total of 1,729,300 diagnostic tests were undertaken in November 2015. This is an increase of 159,100 from November 2014. In the last twelve months activity has continued to increase with an average monthly increase of 0.8%.
- Great Ormond Street Hospital for Children NHS Foundation Trust did not submit data this month.

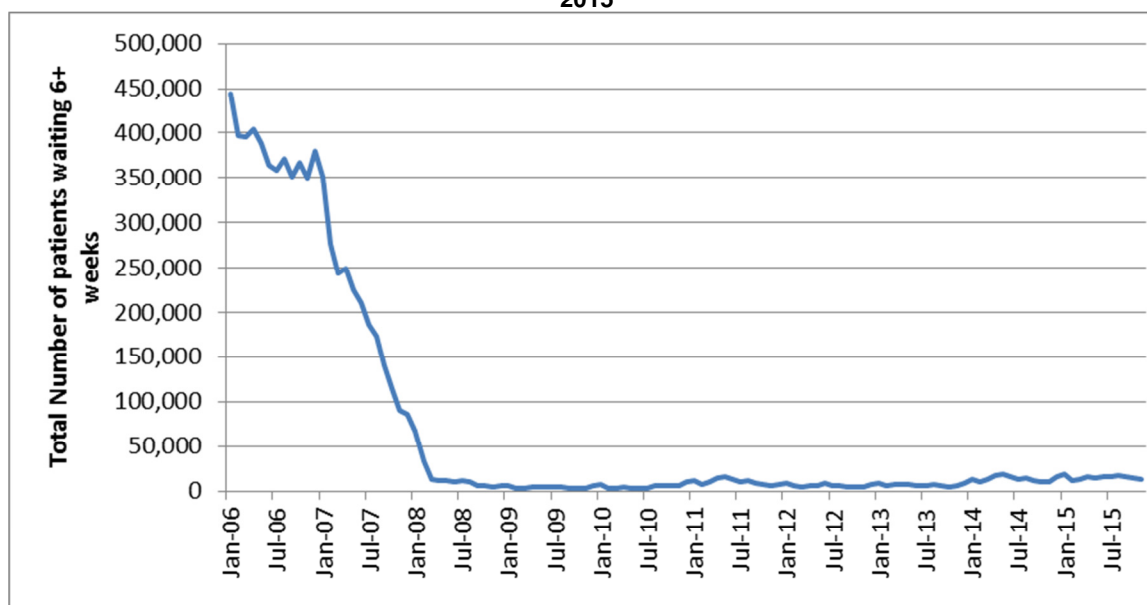
3 National Trends

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

3.1 6+ Week Waits

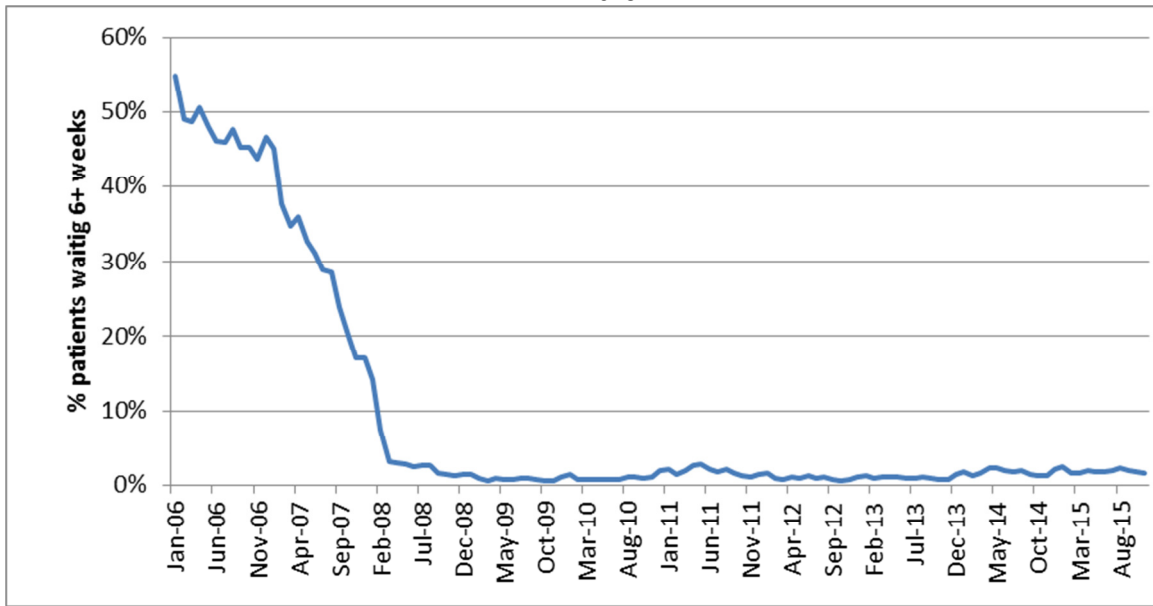
- 3.1.1. The total number of patients waiting 6 weeks or longer dropped sharply between January 2007 and March 2008, before maintaining a slight average monthly reduction (Chart 1). This reduction is most likely the result of Trusts working towards the NHS Improvement Plan (June 2004) milestone that no one should wait longer than 6 weeks for a diagnostic test by March 2008.
- 3.1.2. Since March 2008 there have been fluctuations in the total number of patients waiting 6 weeks or longer. Between October 2013 and May 2014 there was a significant increase in the number of patients waiting 6 weeks or longer. That number has since continued to fluctuate. In November 2015 there was a decrease in the number of patients waiting 6 weeks or longer.

Chart 1: Total number of patients waiting 6+ weeks at month end for all tests – January 2006 to November 2015



- 3.1.3. 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). In the last twelve months, the proportion of patients waiting 6 weeks or longer at the end of a month has varied between 1.5% (in February 2015) and 2.4% (in January 2015). The 1% operational standard was last met in November 2013.

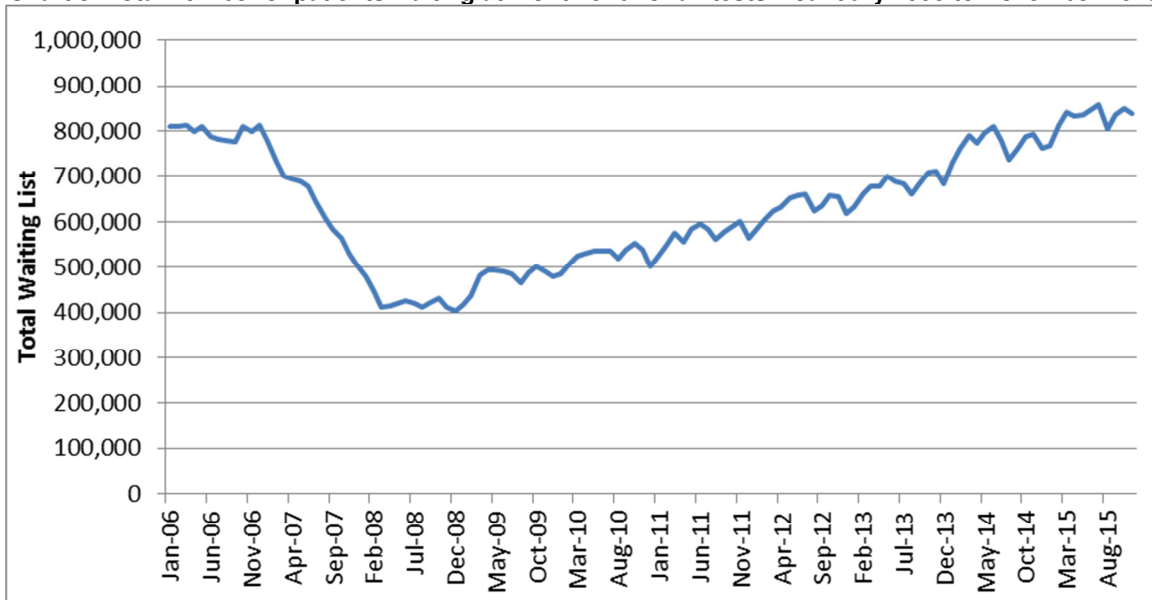
Chart 2: Percentage of patients waiting 6+ weeks at month end for all tests – January 2006 to November 2015



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 0.5%

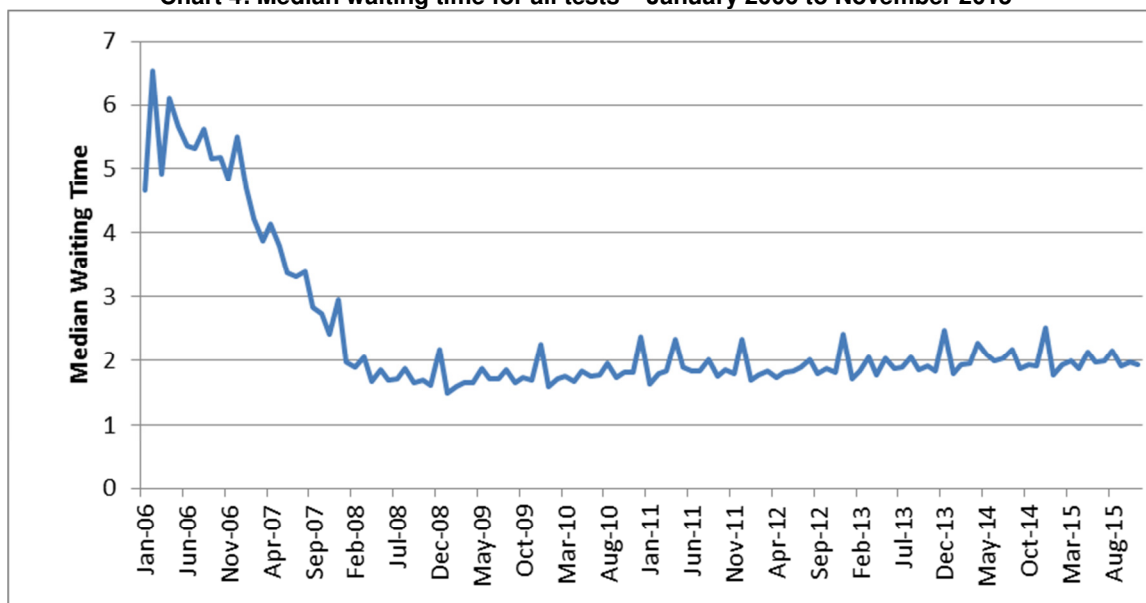
Chart 3: Total number of patients waiting at month end for all tests – January 2006 to November 2015



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. 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 2014) and a low of 1.8 weeks (January 2015).

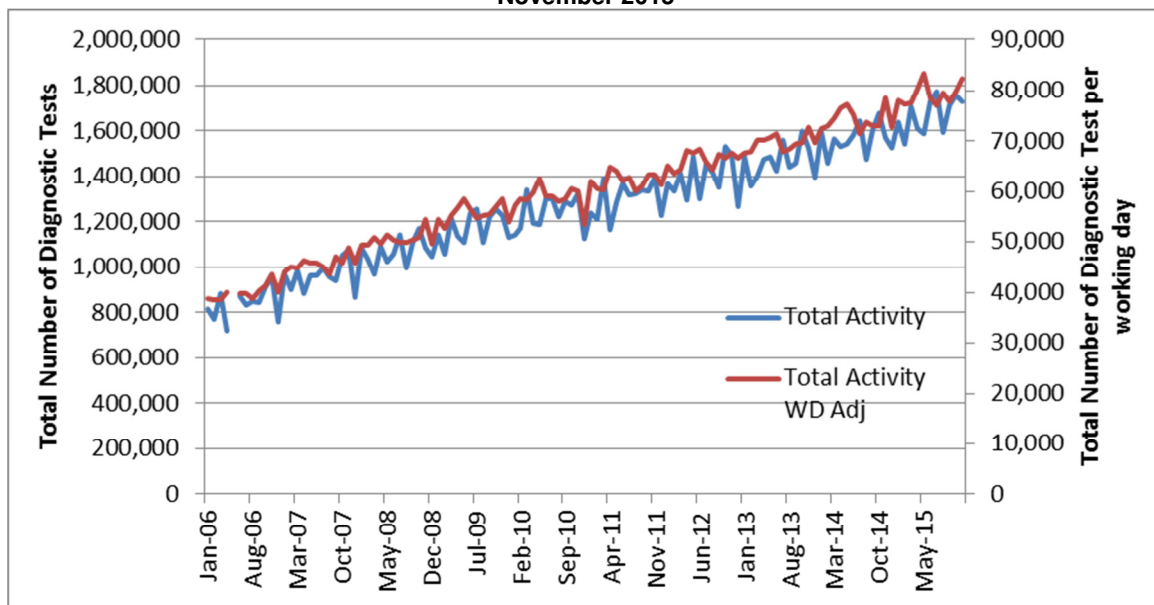
Chart 4: Median waiting time for all tests – January 2006 to November 2015



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).
- 3.4.2. Monthly activity has increased over the last 12 months. The average monthly increase in activity was 0.8%, while the average monthly increase in activity per working day was 0.4%.

Chart 5: Total activity and working day adjusted activity per month for all tests – January 2006 to November 2015



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

- 3.4.3. In the previous twelve months, individual tests have shown slight changes in activity. The largest changes have been for Sleep Studies, where the average monthly increase was 1.7%. The tests with the largest reduction in activity were Barium Enemas, where the average monthly decrease was 2.1% (Table 1).

Table 1: Total Activity, by test – November 2014 and November 2015

	Nov-14	Nov-15	Average monthly growth
MRI	243,382	270,053	0.9%
CT	377,977	419,570	0.9%
Non Obstetric Ultrasound	543,581	592,615	0.7%
Barium Enema	2,910	2,249	-2.1%
Dexa Scan	31,214	33,658	0.6%
Audiology Assessments	98,892	108,445	0.8%
Echocardiography	106,168	115,497	0.7%
Electrophysiology	2,553	2,498	-0.2%
Peripheral Neurophysiology	17,140	17,724	0.3%
Sleep Studies	9,661	11,796	1.7%
Urodynamics	6,381	6,850	0.6%
Colonoscopy	36,335	41,217	1.1%
Flexi Sigmoidoscopy	20,097	23,574	1.3%
Cystoscopy	24,500	25,315	0.3%
Gastrosocopy	49,421	58,231	1.4%
All Tests	1,570,212	1,729,292	0.8%

4 November 2015 Data

This section analyses the November 2015 diagnostic waiting times and activity data, and includes comparisons between tests, area teams, providers and commissioners.

4.1 6+ Week Waits

- 4.1.1. At the end of November 2015, there were a total of 13,200 patients waiting 6 weeks or longer from referral for one of the 15 key diagnostic tests. This was 1.6% of the total number of patients waiting at the end of the month.
- 4.1.2. Compared with November 2014, the number of patients waiting 6 weeks or longer increased by 3,500, while the proportion of patients waiting 6 weeks or longer increased by 0.4 percentage points.
- 4.1.3. Compared with November 2014, the test with the largest increase in the proportion of patients waiting 6 weeks or longer was Colonoscopy which increased by 3.6 percentage points. The tests with the largest decrease were Echocardiography, which decreased by 1.1 percentage points.(Table 2)

Table 2: Proportion of patients waiting 6+ weeks, by test – November 2014 and November 2015.

	Nov-14	Nov-15	Difference (%age points)
MRI	0.7%	0.9%	0.2%
CT	0.5%	0.4%	-0.1%
Non Obstetric Ultrasound	0.4%	0.5%	0.0%
Barium Enema	0.2%	0.3%	0.0%
Dexa Scan	0.9%	1.4%	0.5%
Audiology Assessments	1.7%	0.9%	-0.8%
Echocardiography	2.6%	1.5%	-1.1%
Electrophysiology	1.2%	0.3%	-1.0%
Peripheral Neurophysiology	1.8%	4.7%	2.8%
Sleep Studies	2.8%	4.1%	1.4%
Urodynamics	6.6%	7.4%	0.8%
Colonoscopy	3.5%	7.1%	3.6%
Flexi Sigmoidoscopy	3.0%	6.3%	3.3%
Cystoscopy	5.1%	4.4%	-0.7%
Gastroscopy	3.3%	5.9%	2.6%
All Tests	1.2%	1.6%	0.4%

Note: Figures may differ due to rounding.

- 4.1.4. Compared with November 2014, the test type with the largest increase in the proportion of patients waiting 6 weeks or longer was Endoscopy with an increase of 2.6 percentage points. Imaging Tests increased by 0.1 percentage points, while Physiological Measurements decreased by 0.2 percentage points. See section 5.4 for which tests are included under the different test types. (Table 3)

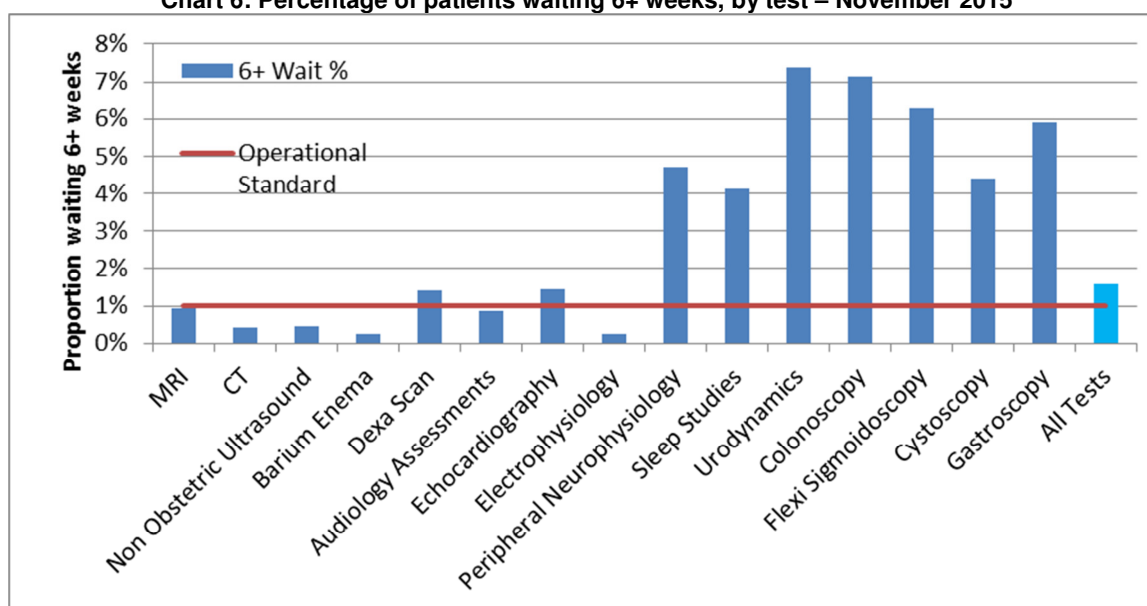
Table 3: Proportion of patients waiting 6+ weeks, by test type – November 2014 and November 2015

	Nov-14	Nov-15	Difference (%age points)
Imaging	0.5%	0.6%	0.1%
Physiological Measurement	2.3%	2.1%	-0.2%
Endoscopy	3.6%	6.2%	2.6%
Total	1.2%	1.6%	0.4%

Note: Figures may differ due to rounding.

- 4.1.5. The operational standard that less than 1% of patients should wait 6 weeks or more from referral for a diagnostic test was met in 6 of the 15 key tests this month. The test with the lowest proportion of patients waiting 6 weeks or longer was Barium Enema (0.3%). The test with the highest proportion of patients waiting 6 weeks or longer was Urodynamics (7.4%). (Chart 6).

Chart 6: Percentage of patients waiting 6+ weeks, by test – November 2015



- 4.1.6. 40 of the 153 Acute Trusts that submitted data for November 2015 failed to meet the 1% operational standard.
- 4.1.7. 82 of the 209 Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCGs) failed to meet the 1% operational standard. This is 6 fewer than the number of CCGs that failed the standard in the previous month, but 7 more than in November 2014.

- 4.1.8. None of the 4 NHS England Regional Teams met the 1% operational standard. The proportion of patients waiting 6 weeks or longer for a diagnostic test varied by region between 1.4% and 1.9% (Table 4).

Table 4: November 2015 Diagnostic Waiting Times and Activity by Regional Team

Region	Number of patients waiting 6 weeks or longer at month end	Percentage of patients waiting 6 weeks or longer at month end	Total number of patients waiting at month end	Total activity undertaken in month	Median waiting time
North	4,000	1.6%	510,088	246,559	1.9
Midlands and East	3,541	1.4%	497,020	244,705	1.9
London	2,510	1.9%	269,733	134,378	1.9
South	3,141	1.5%	438,386	209,087	1.9
England	13,212	1.6%	1,729,292	838,631	1.9

*Includes all independent sector providers.

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

4.2 Total Waiting List

- 4.2.1. At the end of November 2015 there were a total of 838,600 patients still waiting for a diagnostic test. This is an increase of 45,000 (5.7%) from November 2014.
- 4.2.2. The test with the largest waiting list was Non-Obstetric Ultrasound, which accounted for 35.1% of the total waiting list, or 294,400 patients. The test with the smallest waiting list was Electrophysiology, which accounted for 0.1% of the total waiting list, or 1,200 patients (Table 5)
- 4.2.3. There have been large increases in the number of patients waiting for certain tests. The largest growth has been for Sleep Studies where the waiting list increased by 21.7%, compared with November 2014. The largest reduction has been for Electrophysiology, where the waiting list decreased by 27.7%,

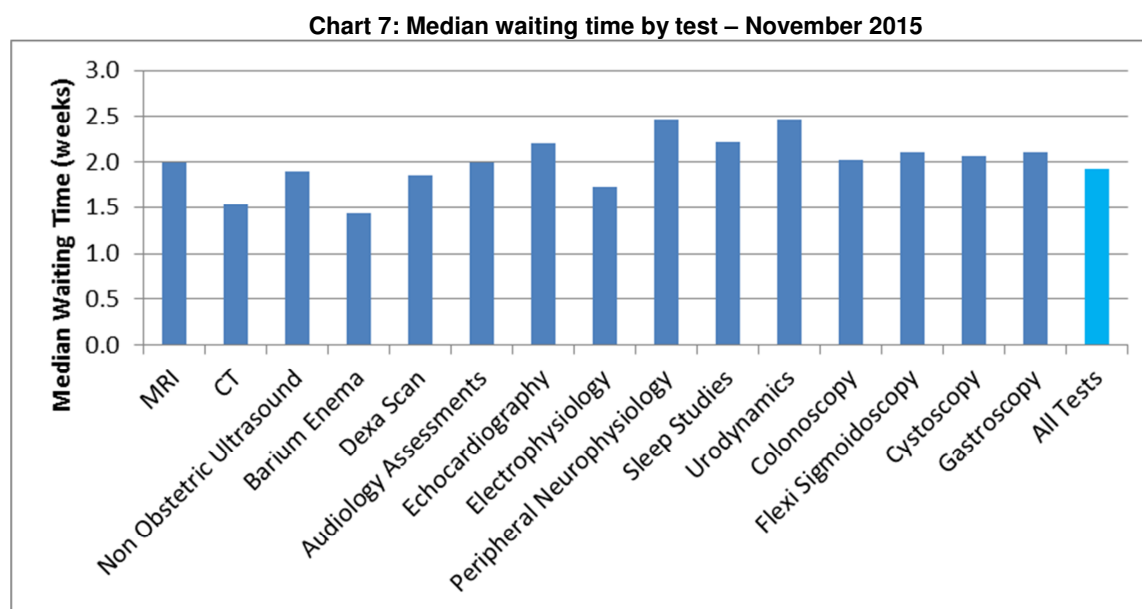
Table 5: Total number of patients waiting at month end, by test – November 2014 and November 2015

	Nov-14	Nov-15	Growth (%age)
MRI	168,324	184,709	9.7%
CT	99,839	102,142	2.3%
Non Obstetric Ultrasound	274,320	294,409	7.3%
Barium Enema	1,482	1,193	-19.5%
Dexa Scan	20,678	23,415	13.2%
Audiology Assessments	42,047	40,595	-3.5%
Echocardiography	52,852	52,421	-0.8%
Electrophysiology	1,640	1,185	-27.7%
Peripheral Neurophysiology	16,871	17,333	2.7%
Sleep Studies	5,853	7,126	21.7%
Urodynamics	4,371	4,316	-1.3%
Colonoscopy	34,147	35,884	5.1%
Flexi Sigmoidoscopy	17,067	17,248	1.1%
Cystoscopy	15,237	13,000	-14.7%
Gastroscopy	38,863	43,655	12.3%
All Tests	793,591	838,631	5.7%

Note: 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. At the end of November 2015 the estimated median waiting time for all 15 diagnostic tests was 1.9 weeks from time of referral. This is 0.1 week fewer than the previous month. The test with the shortest median waiting time was Barium Enemas at 1.4 weeks. The tests with the longest median waiting time were Peripheral Neurophysiology and Urodynamics at 2.5 weeks (Chart 7).



4.4 Total Activity

- 4.4.1. In total 1,729,300 of the 15 key diagnostic tests were performed during November 2015. This is an increase of 159,100 (10.1%) from November 2014 (or 4.9% when adjusted for the number of working days).
- 4.4.2. The test with the highest activity was Non-Obstetric Ultrasound with 592,600 tests taking place. This accounted for 34.3% of all activity in November 2015. The test with the lowest activity was Barium Enema with 2,200 tests taking place. This accounted for 0.1% of all activity this month.
- 4.4.3. The number of tests conducted over the last twelve months has increased by 6.8% from the preceding twelve month period.

Table 6: Total Activity & Growth by test

	Nov-15	Nov-14	YTD 15/16	YTD 14/15	Growth Nov 15 vs Nov 14	Growth YTD 15/16 vs YTD 14/15	Adjusted Growth Nov 15 vs Nov 14	Adjusted Growth YTD 15/16 vs YTD 14/15
MRI	270,053	243,382	2,082,426	1,930,061	11.0%	7.9%	5.7%	7.9%
CT	419,570	377,977	3,327,950	3,079,554	11.0%	8.1%	5.7%	8.1%
Non Obstetric Ultrasound	592,615	543,581	4,609,890	4,376,035	9.0%	5.3%	3.8%	5.3%
Barium Enema	2,249	2,910	21,022	23,565	-22.7%	-10.8%	-26.4%	-10.8%
Dexa Scan	33,658	31,214	269,020	262,593	7.8%	2.4%	2.7%	2.4%
Audiology Assessments	108,445	98,892	840,137	801,248	9.7%	4.9%	4.4%	4.9%
Echocardiography	115,497	106,168	908,025	844,415	8.8%	7.5%	3.6%	7.5%
Electrophysiology	2,498	2,553	19,191	20,010	-2.2%	-4.1%	-6.8%	-4.1%
Peripheral Neurophysiology	17,724	17,140	135,587	129,423	3.4%	4.8%	-1.5%	4.8%
Sleep Studies	11,796	9,661	92,351	78,381	22.1%	17.8%	16.3%	17.8%
Urodynamics	6,850	6,381	52,736	52,572	7.3%	0.3%	2.2%	0.3%
Colonoscopy	41,217	36,335	303,140	277,474	13.4%	9.2%	8.0%	9.2%
Flexi Sigmoidoscopy	23,574	20,097	175,257	157,295	17.3%	11.4%	11.7%	11.4%
Cystoscopy	25,315	24,500	193,915	195,787	3.3%	-1.0%	-1.6%	-1.0%
Gastroscopy	58,231	49,421	459,296	401,837	17.8%	14.3%	12.2%	14.3%
All Tests	1,729,292	1,570,212	13,489,943	12,630,250	10.1%	6.8%	4.9%	6.8%

Note: 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 11th February 2016. [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

The Government Statistical Service (GSS) statistician responsible for producing these data is:

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