



NHS Diagnostic Waiting Times and Activity Data

NHS Diagnostic Waiting Times and Activity Data

January 2017 Monthly Report

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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 2016/17.

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 January 2017 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 January 2017 was 14,600. This was 1.7% 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 January 2016 the total number of patients waiting 6 weeks or longer decreased by 2,800, while the proportion of patients waiting 6 weeks or longer decreased 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 1.1% (in November 2016) and 1.8% (in April 2016).
- At the end of January 2017, the test with the smallest proportion of patients waiting 6 weeks or longer was Dexa Scan with 0.4% of patients waiting 6 weeks or longer. The test with the highest proportion was Urodynamics, with 9.4% 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 1.8 weeks at the end of January 2017.
- There were 846,900 patients waiting for a key diagnostic test at the end of January 2017. This is an increase of 28,300 from January 2016. 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 0.3%.
- A total of 1,826,900 diagnostic tests were undertaken in January 2017. This is an increase of 140,900 from January 2016. In the last twelve months activity has continued to increase with an average monthly increase of 0.7%.
- Kettering General Hospital NHS Foundation Trust did not submit due to an ongoing data quality issue.

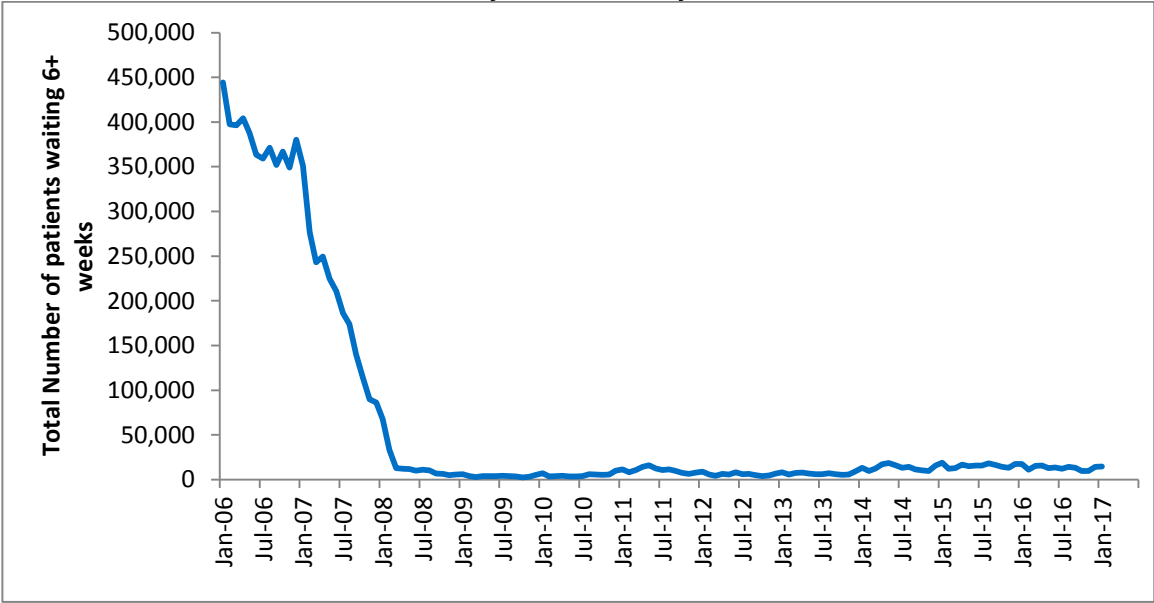
3 National Trends

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

3.1 6+ Week Waits

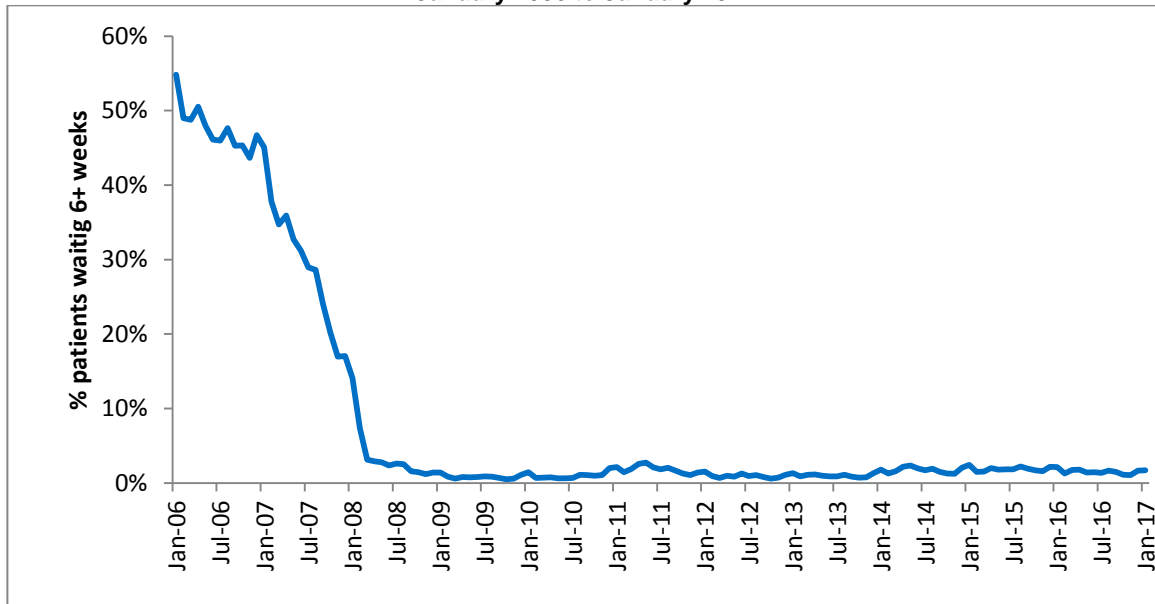
- 3.1.1. The total number of patients waiting 6 weeks or longer dropped sharply between January 2007 and March 2008 and has remained broadly stable since (Chart 1). This reduction is most likely the result of Trusts working towards the NHS Improvement Plan (June 2004) milestone that no one should wait 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 January 2017 there was a increase of 536 in the number of patients waiting 6 weeks or longer from the previous month.

Chart 1: Total number of patients waiting 6+ weeks at month end for all tests January 2006 to January 2017



- 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 1.1% (in November 2016) and 1.8% (April 2016). The 1% operational standard was last met in November 2013.

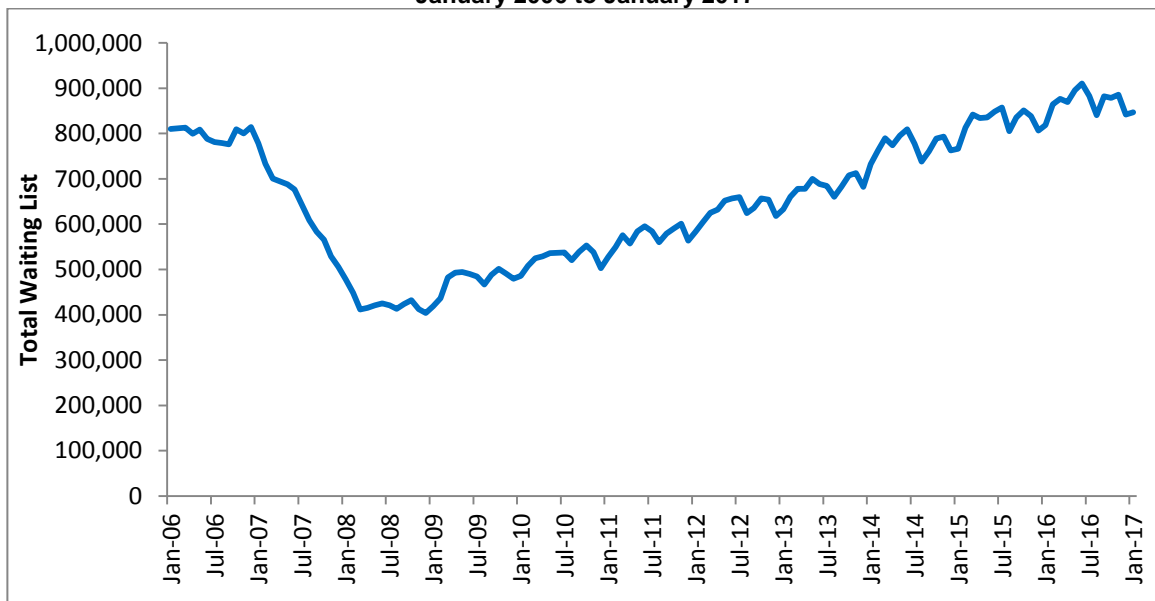
**Chart 2: Percentage of patients waiting 6+ weeks at month end for all tests
January 2006 to January 2017**



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 0.3%.

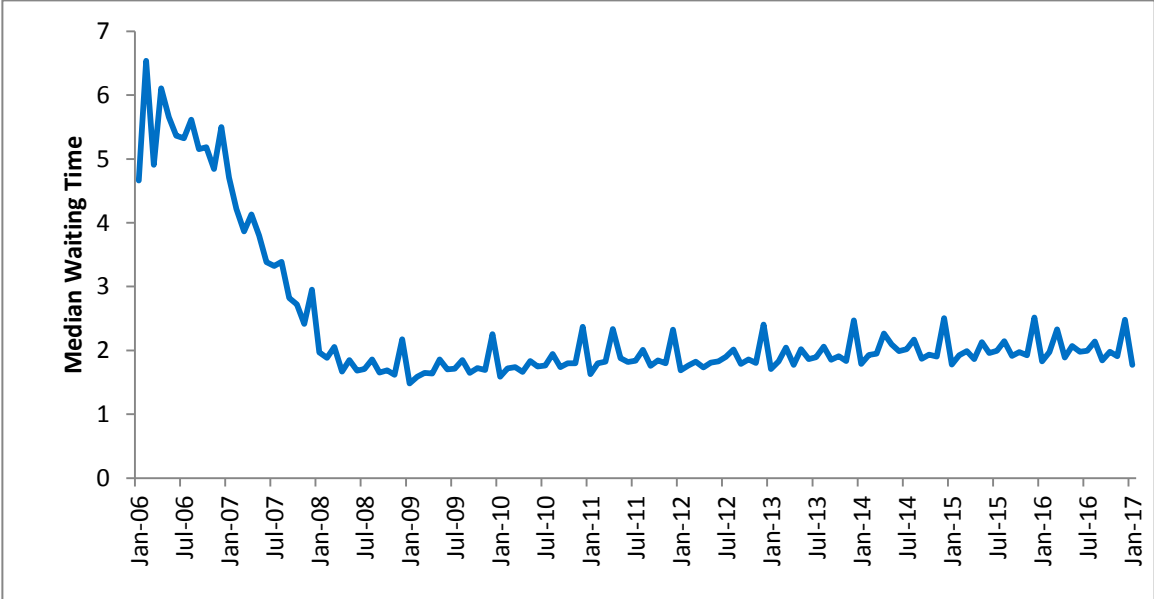
**Chart 3: Total number of patients waiting at month end for all tests
January 2006 to January 2017**



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 2016) and a low of 1.8 weeks (January 2017).

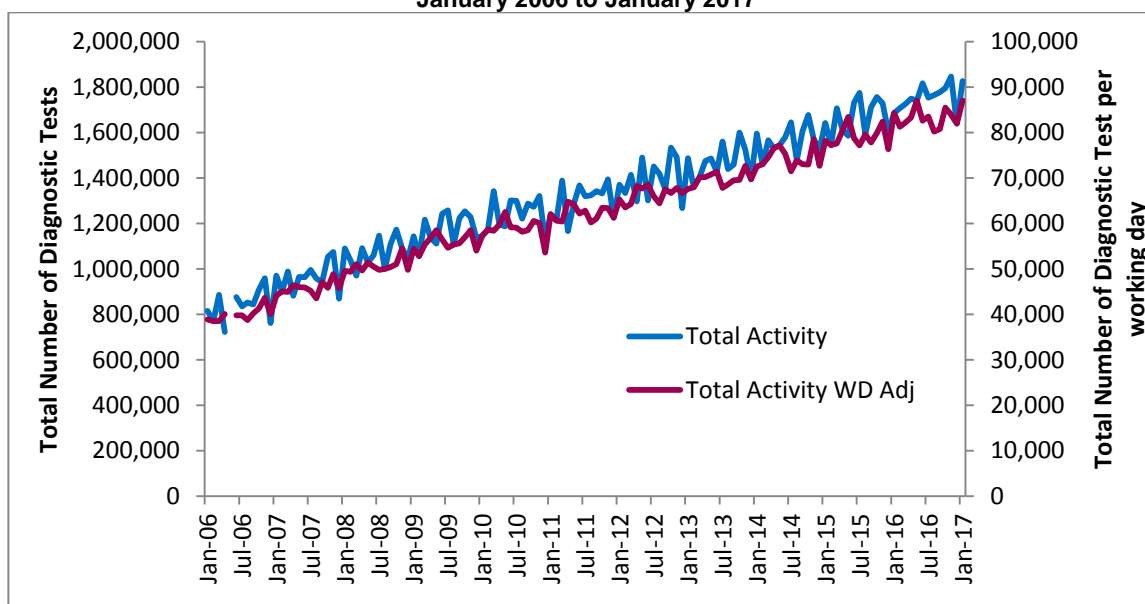
Chart 4: Median waiting time for all tests – January 2006 to January 2017



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 slightly increased over the last 12 months. The average monthly increase in activity was 0.7%, the average monthly change in activity per working day was also an increase of 0.3%.

**Chart 5: Total activity and working day adjusted activity per month for all tests
January 2006 to January 2017**



Note: Activity data was not collected in May 2006 and 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 Electrophysiology, where the average monthly increase was 1.8%. The tests with the largest reduction in activity were Sleep Studies, where the average monthly decrease was 1.1% (Table 1).

Table 1: Total Activity, by test – January 2016 and January 2017

	Jan-16	Jan-17	Average monthly growth
MRI	268,210	292,872	0.7%
CT	424,743	463,450	0.7%
Non Obstetric Ultrasound	558,546	602,663	0.6%
Barium Enema	2,162	1,949	-0.9%
Dexa Scan	32,831	35,155	0.6%
Audiology Assessments	99,873	105,240	0.4%
Echocardiography	116,359	128,243	0.8%
Electrophysiology	2,118	2,633	1.8%
Peripheral Neurophysiology	17,832	20,053	1.0%
Sleep Studies	13,704	11,993	-1.1%
Urodynamics	6,381	7,129	0.9%
Colonoscopy	38,543	44,451	1.2%
Flexi Sigmoidoscopy	24,107	25,415	0.4%
Cystoscopy	23,450	26,593	1.1%
Gastroscopy	57,111	59,047	0.3%
All Tests	1,685,970	1,826,886	0.7%

4 January 2017 Data

This section analyses the January 2017 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 January 2017, there were a total of 14,600 patients waiting 6 weeks or longer from referral for one of the 15 key diagnostic tests. This was 1.7% of the total number of patients waiting at the end of the month.
- 4.1.2. Compared with January 2016, the number of patients waiting 6 weeks or longer decreased by 2,800, while the proportion of patients waiting 6 weeks or longer decreased by 0.4 percentage points.
- 4.1.3. Compared with January 2016, the test with the largest increase in the proportion of patients waiting 6 weeks or longer was Echocardiography which increased by 1.7 percentage points. The test with the largest decrease was Peripheral Neurophysiology, which decreased by 3.8 (Table 2).

Table 2: Proportion of patients waiting 6+ weeks, by test – January 2016 and January 2017

	Jan-16	Jan-17	Difference (%age points)
MRI	2.0%	1.4%	-0.5%
CT	0.6%	1.0%	0.4%
Non Obstetric Ultrasound	0.5%	0.6%	0.1%
Barium Enema	0.5%	0.5%	-0.1%
Dexa Scan	2.5%	0.4%	-2.1%
Audiology Assessments	2.0%	1.5%	-0.5%
Echocardiography	1.5%	3.2%	1.7%
Electrophysiology	1.1%	0.8%	-0.2%
Peripheral Neurophysiology	4.9%	1.0%	-3.8%
Sleep Studies	6.7%	4.3%	-2.4%
Urodynamics	9.7%	9.4%	-0.3%
Colonoscopy	8.0%	6.6%	-1.4%
Flexi Sigmoidoscopy	6.6%	4.7%	-2.0%
Cystoscopy	5.5%	5.9%	0.4%
Gastroscopy	7.6%	4.3%	-3.2%
All Tests	2.1%	1.7%	-0.4%

Note: Figures may differ due to rounding.

4.1.4. Compared with January 2016, the test type with the smallest decrease in the proportion of patients waiting 6 weeks or longer was Physiological Measurements with a decrease of 0.09 percentage points. Endoscopy decreased (by 2.0 percentage points), while Imaging decreased by 0.15 percentage points. See section 5.4 for which tests are included under the different test types (Table 3).

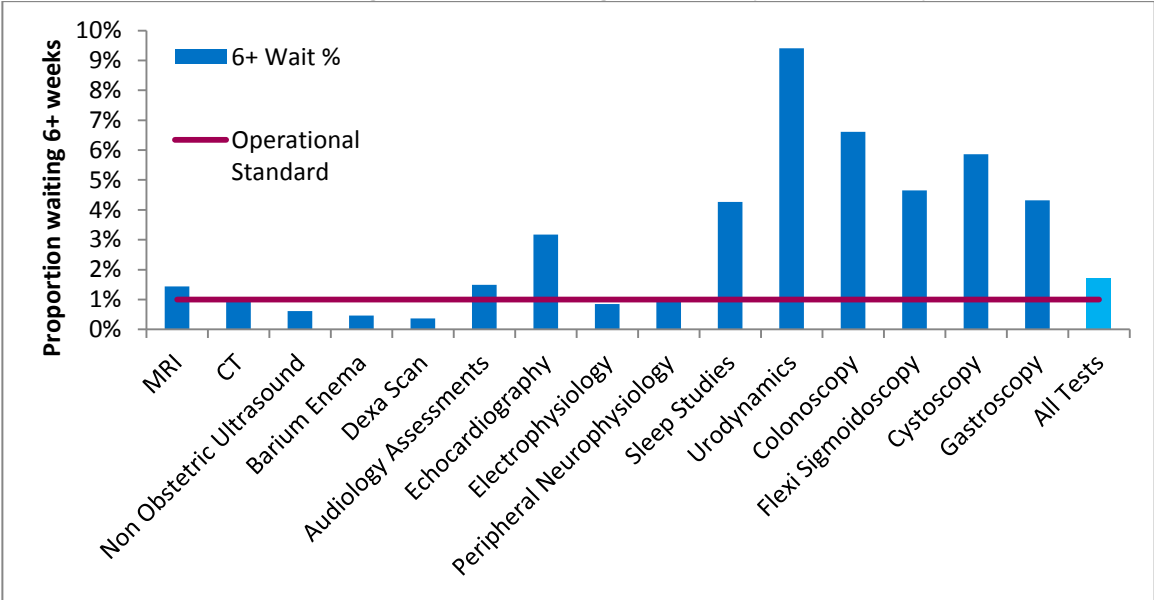
Table 3: Proportion of patients waiting 6+ weeks, by test type – January 2016 and January 2017

	Jan-16	Jan-17	Difference (%age points)
Imaging	1.1%	0.9%	-0.1%
Physiological Measurement	2.7%	2.6%	-0.1%
Endoscopy	7.3%	5.3%	-2.0%
Total	2.1%	1.7%	-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 5 of the 15 key tests this month. The test with the lowest proportion of patients waiting 6 weeks or longer was Dexa Scan (0.4%). The test with the highest proportion of patients waiting 6 weeks or longer was Urodynamics (9.4%) (Chart 6).

Chart 6: Percentage of patients waiting 6+ weeks, by test – January 2017



4.1.6. 54 of the 154 Acute Trusts that submitted data for January 2017 failed to meet the 1% operational standard.

4.1.7. 104 of the 209 Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCGs) failed to meet the 1% operational standard. This is 4 less than the number of CCGs that failed the standard in the previous month and 14 less than in January 2016.

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 1.2% and 2.4% (Table 4).

Table 4: January 2017 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	4,041	1.6%	253,907	537,554	1.8
Midlands and East	3,746	1.6%	236,363	526,941	1.7
London	1,779	1.2%	143,756	286,275	1.7
South	5,015	2.4%	209,789	461,097	1.8
England	14,629	1.7%	846,925	1,826,886	1.8

*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 January 2017 there were a total of 846,900 patients still waiting for a diagnostic test. This is an increase of 28,300 (3.5%) from January 2016.
- 4.2.2. The test with the largest waiting list was Non-Obstetric Ultrasound, which accounted for 33.8% of the total waiting list, or 286,300 patients. The test with the smallest waiting list was Electrophysiology which accounted for 0.1% of the total waiting list, or 1,065 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 Echocardiography where the waiting list increased by 13.6%, compared with January 2016. The largest reduction has been for Electrophysiology, where the waiting list decreased by 11.8%.

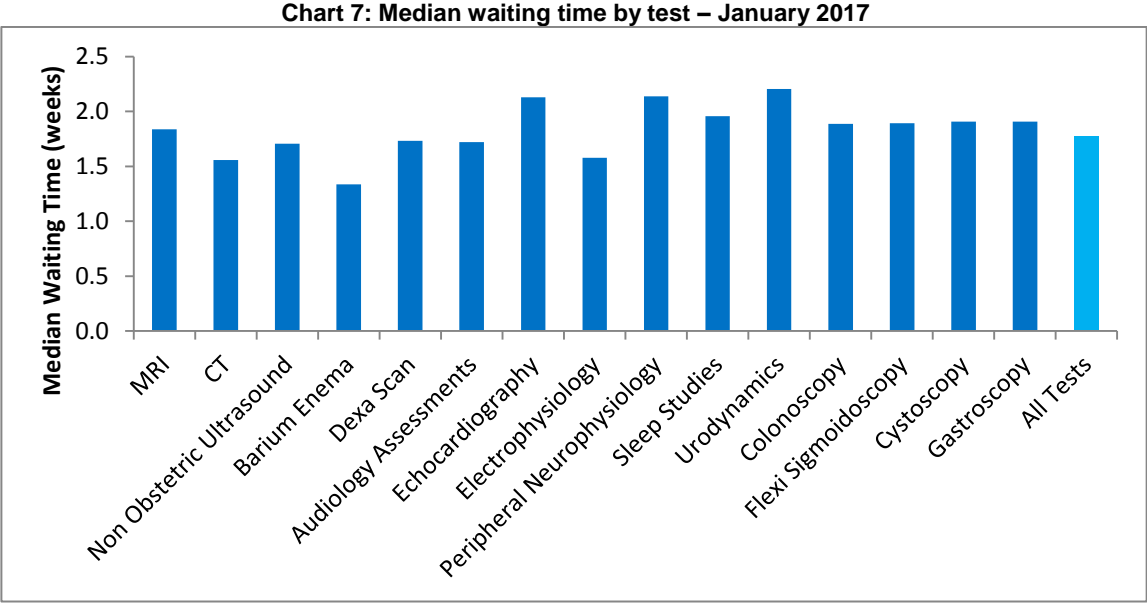
Table 5: Total number of patients waiting at month end, by test – January 2016 and January 2017

	Jan-16	Jan-17	Growth (%)
MRI	172,726	179,829	4.1%
CT	103,977	115,158	10.8%
Non Obstetric Ultrasound	285,135	286,252	0.4%
Barium Enema	1,118	1,075	-3.8%
Dexa Scan	24,025	26,238	9.2%
Audiology Assessments	40,584	41,238	1.6%
Echocardiography	55,086	62,579	13.6%
Electrophysiology	1,207	1,065	-11.8%
Peripheral Neurophysiology	17,152	18,048	5.2%
Sleep Studies	7,819	7,381	-5.6%
Urodynamics	4,468	4,731	5.9%
Colonoscopy	33,365	34,084	2.2%
Flexi Sigmoidoscopy	15,565	15,816	1.6%
Cystoscopy	13,427	12,479	-7.1%
Gastroscopy	42,945	40,952	-4.6%
All Tests	818,599	846,925	3.5%

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 January 2017 the estimated median waiting time for all 15 diagnostic tests was 1.8 weeks from time of referral. This is a decrease of 0.7 weeks compared to the previous month. The test with the shortest median waiting time was Barium Enema at 1.3 weeks. The tests with the longest median waiting times were Urodynamics at 2.2 weeks (Chart 7).



4.4 Total Activity

- 4.4.1. In total 1,826,900 of the 15 key diagnostic tests were performed during January 2017. This is an increase of 140,900 (8.4%) from January 2016.
- 4.4.2. The test with the highest activity was Non-Obstetric Ultrasound with 602,700 tests taking place. This accounted for 33.0% of all activity in January 2017. The test with the lowest activity was Barium Enema with 1,900 tests taking place. This accounted for 0.1% of all activity this month.
- 4.4.3. The number of tests conducted this year to date increased by 5.5% from the same period last year (also 4.5% adjusted for working days).

Table 6: Total Activity & Growth by test

	Jan-17	Jan-16	YTD 16/17	YTD 15/16	Growth Jan 16 vs Jan 15	Growth YTD 16/17 vs YTD 15/16	Adjusted Growth Jan 16 vs Jan 15	Adjusted Growth YTD 16/17 vs YTD 15/16
MRI	292,872	268,210	2,841,647	2,603,419	9.2%	9.2%	4.0%	8.1%
CT	463,450	424,743	4,454,232	4,161,588	9.1%	7.0%	3.9%	6.0%
Non Obstetric Ultrasound	602,663	558,546	5,924,844	5,707,328	7.9%	3.8%	2.8%	2.8%
Barium Enema	1,949	2,162	20,065	25,256	-9.9%	-20.6%	-14.1%	-21.3%
Dexa Scan	35,155	32,831	350,040	331,743	7.1%	5.5%	2.0%	4.5%
Audiology Assessments	105,240	99,873	1,014,896	1,034,001	5.4%	-1.8%	0.4%	-2.8%
Echocardiography	128,243	116,359	1,224,309	1,133,375	10.2%	8.0%	5.0%	7.0%
Electrophysiology	2,633	2,118	22,838	23,455	24.3%	-2.6%	18.4%	-3.5%
Peripheral Neurophysiology	20,053	17,832	186,923	169,614	12.5%	10.2%	7.1%	9.2%
Sleep Studies	11,993	13,704	123,320	116,162	-12.5%	6.2%	-16.7%	5.2%
Urodynamics	7,129	6,381	67,879	65,246	11.7%	4.0%	6.4%	3.1%
Colonoscopy	44,451	38,543	412,253	377,548	15.3%	9.2%	9.8%	8.2%
Flexi Sigmoidoscopy	25,415	24,107	236,603	219,540	5.4%	7.8%	0.4%	6.8%
Cystoscopy	26,593	23,450	256,432	239,990	13.4%	6.9%	8.0%	5.8%
Gastroscopy	59,047	57,111	572,483	570,590	3.4%	0.3%	-1.5%	-0.6%
All Tests	1,826,886	1,685,970	17,708,764	16,778,855	8.4%	5.5%	3.2%	4.5%

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 Revisions

5.1. Data was revised for the months April 2016 to November 2016. These revisions have had a small impact on the national data (Table 7).

Table 7: Revisions published on 9th March 2017

Month	Total Activity			Total Waiting List			Total 6+ week waits		
	Original	Revisions	Change	Original	Revisions	Change	Original	Revisions	Change
APR	1,748,555	1,748,717	162	869,577	869,220	- 357	15,700	15,700	-
MAY	1,740,135	1,740,231	96	895,892	895,489	- 403	12,747	12,741	- 6
JUNE	1,816,434	1,816,353	- 81	910,672	910,308	- 364	13,397	13,394	- 3
JULY	1,753,221	1,753,213	- 8	883,618	883,206	- 412	12,011	12,009	- 2
AUG	1,763,409	1,764,457	1,048	840,443	840,942	499	14,103	14,108	5
SEPT	1,776,131	1,777,486	1,355	882,312	882,311	- 1	13,065	13,065	-
NOV	1,846,729	1,846,729	-	885,774	886,075	301	9,587	9,588	1

5.2. These revisions have had minimal impact on the national proportion of patients waiting six weeks or more or the median waiting times for each of these 6 months.

6 Annex

6.1 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](#).

6.2 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](#).

6.3 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 13th April 2017. [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](#).

6.4 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.

6.5 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.

6.6 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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