



NHS Diagnostic Waiting Times and Activity Data

NHS Diagnostic Waiting Times and Activity Data

July 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 six 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 2017/18.

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 six 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 July 2017 Key Findings

- The total number of patients waiting six weeks or longer from referral for one of the 15 key diagnostic tests at the end of July 2017 was 16,700. This was 1.8% of the total number of patients waiting at the end of the month.
- Nationally, the operational standard of less than 1% of patients waiting six weeks or longer was not met this month.
- Compared with July 2016 the total number of patients waiting six weeks or longer increased by 4,700, while the proportion of patients waiting six weeks or longer increased by 0.5 percentage points.
- In the last 12 months, the proportion of patients waiting six weeks or longer at the end of a month has varied between 1.0% (February 2017) and 1.9% (May 2017).
- At the end of July 2017, the test with the smallest proportion of patients waiting six weeks or longer was Barium Enema with 0.5%. The test with the highest proportion was Urodynamics, with 10.0% of patients waiting six 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 2.0 weeks at the end of July 2017.
- There were 911,800 patients waiting for a key diagnostic test at the end of July 2017. This is an increase of 28,600 from July 2016. In the last 12 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 1,848,200 diagnostic tests were undertaken in July 2017. This is an increase of 95,000 from July 2016. In the last 12 months activity has continued to increase with an average monthly increase of 0.4%.
- Mid Essex Hospital Services NHS Trust did not submit data this month due to recently updating their patient administration system.

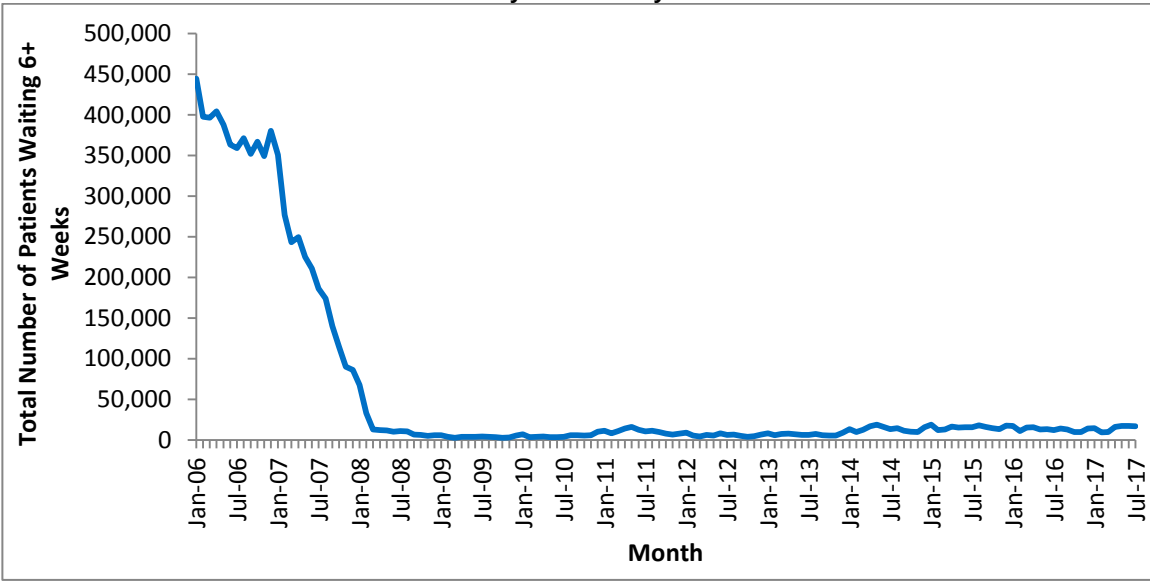
3 National Trends

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

3.1 6+ Week Waits

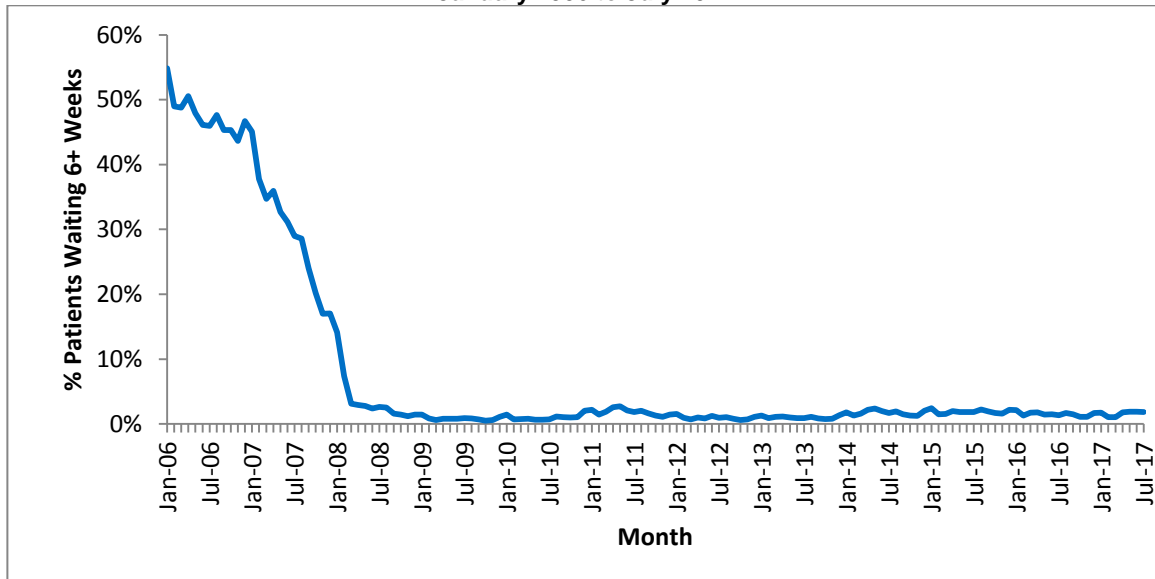
- 3.1.1. The total number of patients waiting six weeks or longer dropped sharply between January 2007 and March 2008 and has remained broadly stable since (Chart 1). This reduction is most likely the result of Trusts working towards the NHS Improvement Plan (June 2004) milestone that no one should wait longer than six 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 six weeks or longer. Between October 2013 and May 2014 there was a significant increase in the number of patients waiting six weeks or longer. That number has since continued to fluctuate. In July 2017 there was a decrease of 535 in the number of patients waiting six 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 July 2017



- 3.1.3. The proportion of patients waiting six 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 12 months, the proportion of patients waiting six weeks or longer at the end of a month has varied between 1.0% (February 2017) and 1.9% (May 2017). The 1% operational standard was last met in November 2013.

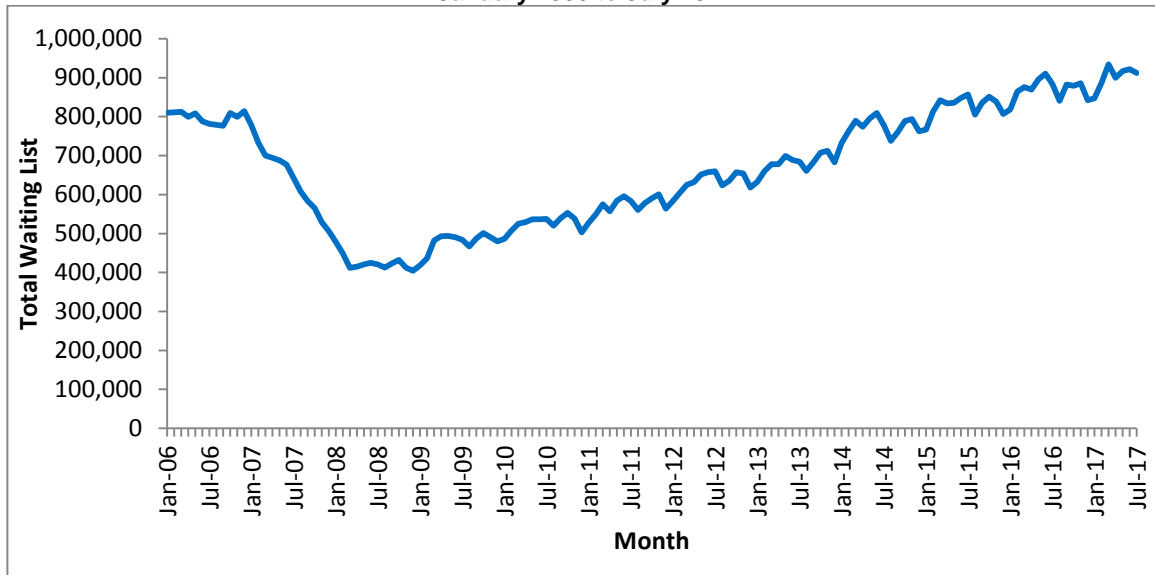
**Chart 2: Percentage of patients waiting 6+ weeks at month end for all tests
January 2006 to July 2017**



3.2 Total Waiting List

3.2.1. As seen with the number and proportion of patients waiting six 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 12 months the average monthly increase was 0.3%.

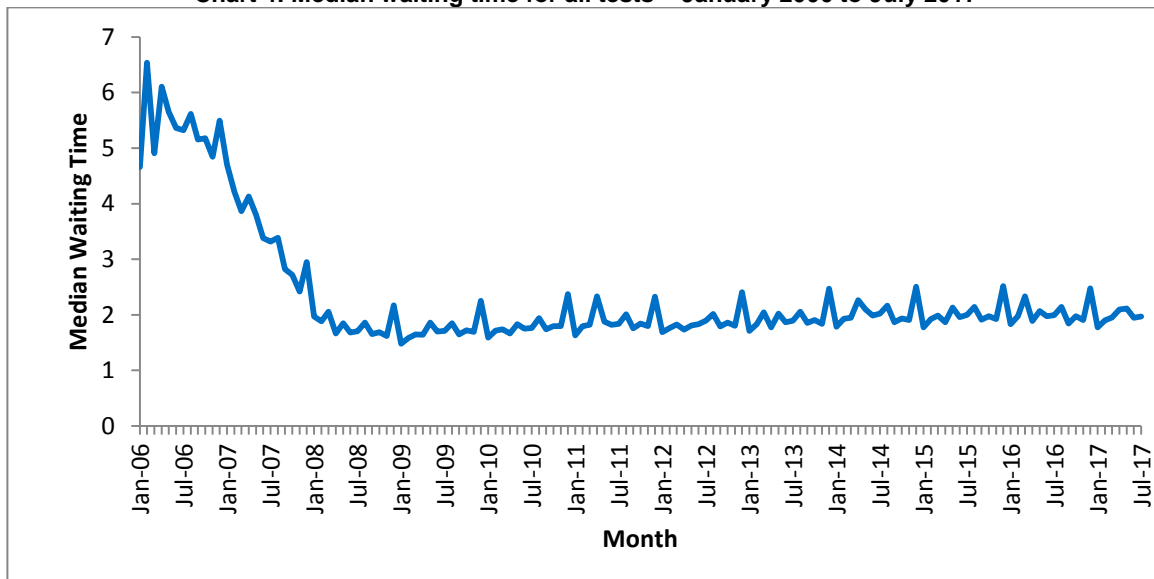
**Chart 3: Total number of patients waiting at month end for all tests
January 2006 to July 2017**



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 12 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).

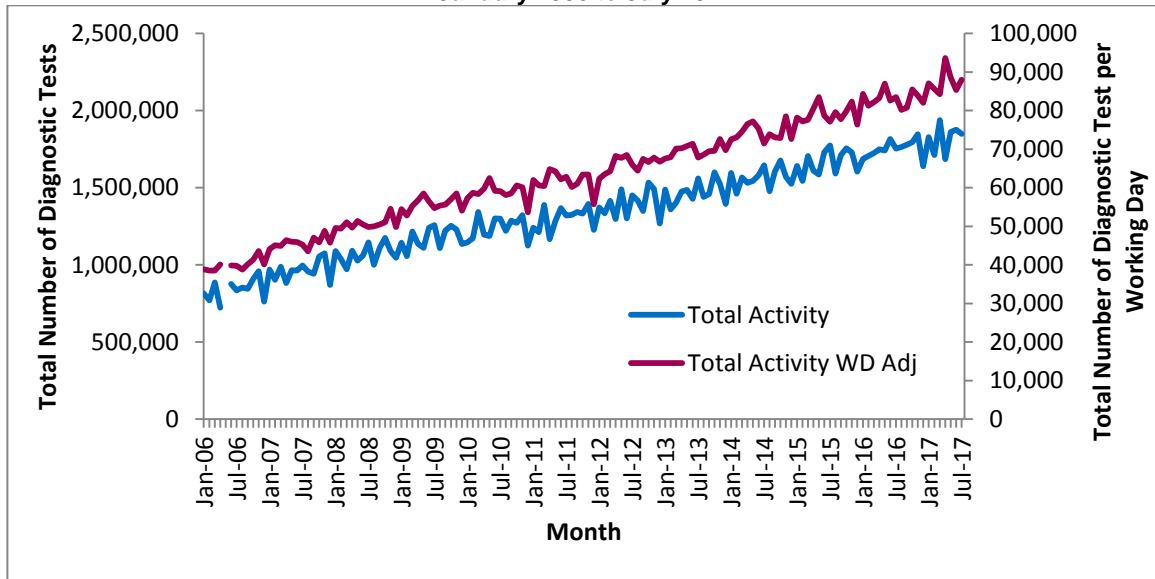
Chart 4: Median waiting time for all tests – January 2006 to July 2017



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 0.4%.

**Chart 5: Total activity and working day adjusted activity per month for all tests
January 2006 to July 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 12 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 test with the largest reduction in activity was Sleep Studies, where the average monthly decrease was 0.3% (Table 1).

Table 1: Total activity, by test – July 2016 and July 2017

	Jul-16	Jul-17	Average monthly growth
MRI	285,568	298,642	0.4%
CT	445,708	478,398	0.6%
Non Obstetric Ultrasound	586,404	602,349	0.2%
Barium Enema	2,039	2,008	-0.1%
Dexa Scan	34,216	35,240	0.2%
Audiology Assessments	95,036	103,448	0.7%
Echocardiography	119,744	126,552	0.5%
Electrophysiology	2,088	2,579	1.8%
Peripheral Neurophysiology	18,335	18,765	0.2%
Sleep Studies	12,096	11,683	-0.3%
Urodynamics	6,520	6,888	0.5%
Colonoscopy	40,274	46,821	1.3%
Flexi Sigmoidoscopy	23,342	26,234	1.0%
Cystoscopy	25,189	28,073	0.9%
Gastroscopy	56,654	60,536	0.6%
All Tests	1,753,213	1,848,216	0.4%

4 July 2017 Data

This section analyses the July 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 July 2017, there were a total of 16,700 patients waiting six weeks or longer from referral for one of the 15 key diagnostic tests. This was 1.8% of the total number of patients waiting at the end of the month.
- 4.1.2. Compared with July 2016, the number of patients waiting six weeks or longer increased by 4,700, while the proportion of patients waiting six weeks or longer increased by 0.5 percentage points.
- 4.1.3. Compared with July 2016, the test with the largest increase in the proportion of patients waiting six weeks or longer was Urodynamics, which increased by 3.0 percentage points. The test with the largest decrease was Sleep Studies, which decreased by 1.4 percentage points (Table 2).

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

	Jul-16	Jul-17	Difference (%age points)
MRI	1.4%	1.0%	-0.4%
CT	0.5%	1.6%	1.1%
Non Obstetric Ultrasound	0.5%	0.7%	0.1%
Barium Enema	0.1%	0.5%	0.4%
Dexa Scan	0.5%	0.9%	0.5%
Audiology Assessments	2.3%	2.9%	0.7%
Echocardiography	1.6%	3.5%	1.8%
Electrophysiology	1.7%	1.6%	-0.2%
Peripheral Neurophysiology	1.4%	1.3%	-0.1%
Sleep Studies	4.3%	2.8%	-1.4%
Urodynamics	7.0%	10.0%	3.0%
Colonoscopy	4.3%	6.8%	2.5%
Flexi Sigmoidoscopy	2.5%	4.5%	2.0%
Cystoscopy	5.5%	6.3%	0.9%
Gastroscopy	3.5%	4.1%	0.6%
All Tests	1.4%	1.8%	0.5%

Note: Figures may differ due to rounding.

4.1.4. Compared with July 2016, the test type with the largest increase in the proportion of patients waiting six weeks or longer was Endoscopy with an increase of 1.5 percentage points. Physiological Measurement increased by 1.0 percentage points, while Imaging increased by 0.2 percentage points (Table 3). See section 6.4 for which tests are included under the different test types.

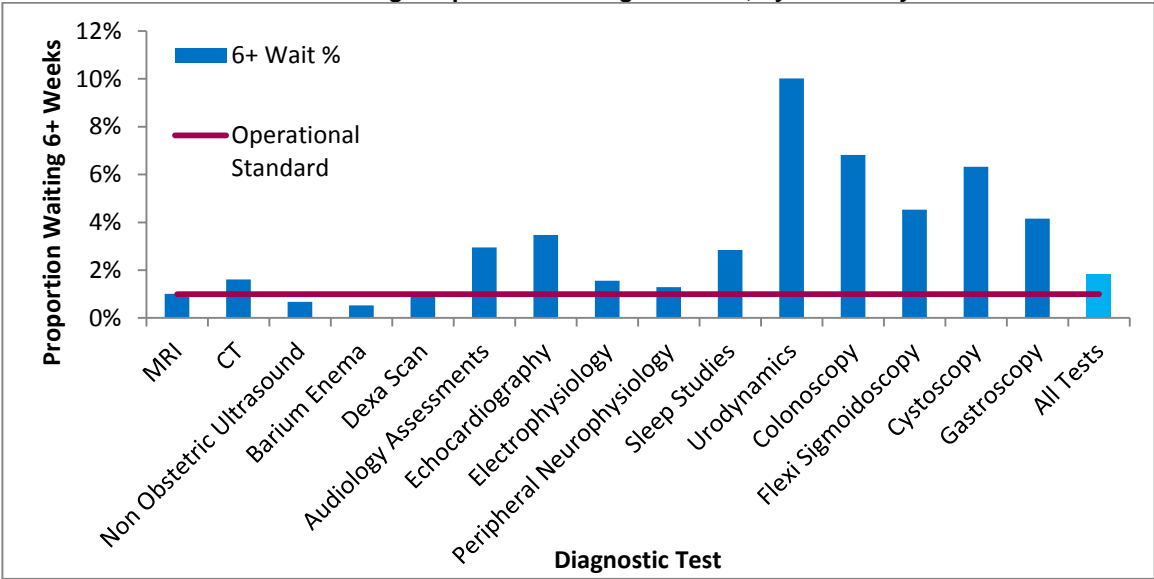
Table 3: Proportion of patients waiting 6+ weeks, by test type – July 2016 and July 2017

	Jul-16	Jul-17	Difference (percentage points)
Imaging	0.8%	0.9%	0.2%
Physiological Measurement	2.1%	3.2%	1.0%
Endoscopy	3.9%	5.4%	1.5%
Total	1.4%	1.8%	0.5%

Note: Figures may differ due to rounding.

4.1.5. The operational standard that less than 1% of patients should wait six weeks or more from referral for a diagnostic test was met in 3 of the 15 key tests this month. The test with the lowest proportion of patients waiting six weeks or longer was Barium Enema (0.5%). The test with the highest proportion of patients waiting six weeks or longer was Urodynamics (10.0%) (Chart 6).

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



4.1.6. 62 of the 151 Acute Trusts that submitted data for July 2017 failed to meet the 1% operational standard. One Acute Trust did not submit data.

4.1.7. 106 of the 208 Commissioners¹ failed to meet the 1% operational standard. This is 7 more than the number of Commissioners that failed the standard in the previous month and 20 more than in July 2016.

¹ Includes NHS England

4.1.8. None of the four NHS England Regional Teams met the 1% operational standard. The proportion of patients waiting six weeks or longer for a diagnostic test varied by region between 1.2% and 2.4% (Table 4).

Table 4: July 2017 Diagnostic Waiting Times and Activity by Regional Team*

Region	Number of patients waiting six weeks or longer at month end	Percentage of patients waiting six weeks or longer at month end	Total number of patients waiting at month end	Total activity undertaken in month	Median waiting time
North	5,232	2.0%	267,498	541,663	2.1
Midlands and East	3,163	1.2%	258,574	529,702	2.1
London	2,902	1.9%	156,184	298,725	2.1
South	5,336	2.4%	226,180	463,720	2.1
England	16,687	1.8%	911,799	1,848,216	2.1

*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 July 2017 there were a total of 911,800 patients still waiting for a diagnostic test. This is an increase of 28,600 (3.2%) from July 2016.
- 4.2.2. The test with the largest waiting list was Non-Obstetric Ultrasound, which accounted for 35.5% of the total waiting list, or 324,000 patients. The test with the smallest waiting list was Barium Enema, which accounted for 0.1% of the total waiting list, or 1,100 patients (Table 5).

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

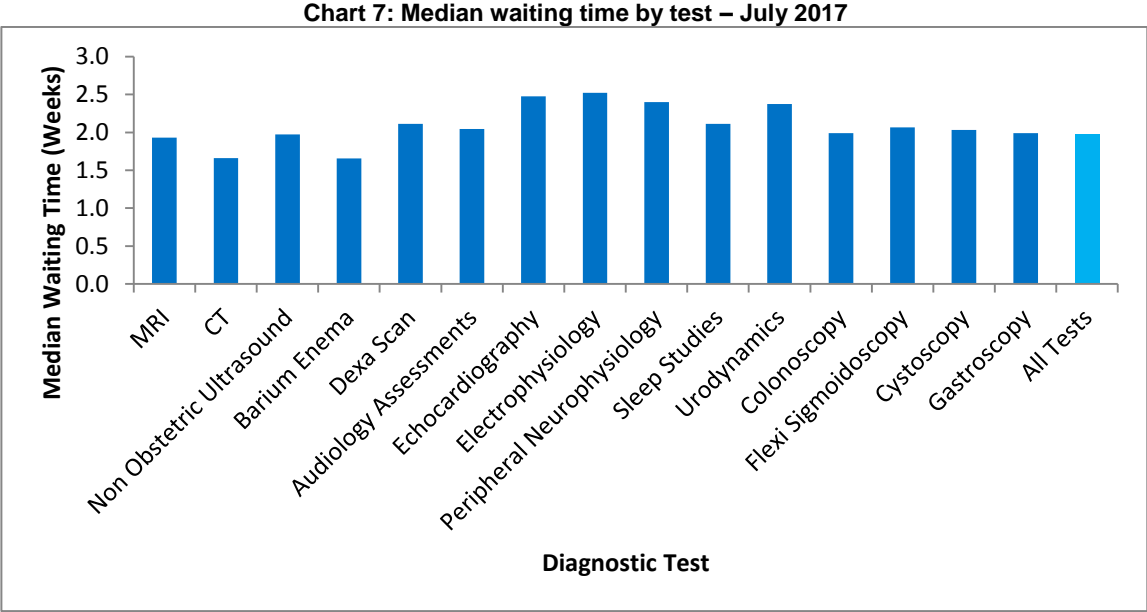
	Jul-16	Jul-17	Growth (%age)
MRI	184,475	183,850	-0.3%
CT	109,524	115,506	5.5%
Non Obstetric Ultrasound	312,815	323,990	3.6%
Barium Enema	1,078	1,129	4.7%
Dexa Scan	26,472	29,586	11.8%
Audiology Assessments	44,399	45,322	2.1%
Echocardiography	65,307	72,306	10.7%
Electrophysiology	1,275	1,476	15.8%
Peripheral Neurophysiology	19,497	19,421	-0.4%
Sleep Studies	8,446	8,081	-4.3%
Urodynamics	4,668	4,423	-5.2%
Colonoscopy	34,812	36,184	3.9%
Flexi Sigmoidoscopy	15,780	16,844	6.7%
Cystoscopy	13,078	12,576	-3.8%
Gastroscopy	41,580	41,105	-1.1%
All Tests	883,206	911,799	3.2%

Note: Barium Enema is a test that should be replaced by Colonoscopy or CT Colonography, so the number of tests undertaken should be reducing.

- 4.2.3. There have been large increases in the number of patients waiting for certain tests. The largest percentage growth has been for Electrophysiology where the waiting list increased by 15.8% compared with July 2016. The largest reduction has been for Urodynamics, where the waiting list decreased by 5.2%.

4.3 Median Waiting Times

4.3.1. At the end of July 2017 the estimated median waiting time for all 15 diagnostic tests was 2.0 weeks from the time of referral. This is an increase of 0.1 weeks compared to the previous month. The test with the shortest median waiting time was Barium Enema at 1.7 weeks. The test with the longest median waiting time was Electrophysiology at 2.5 weeks (Chart 7).



4.4 Total Activity

- 4.4.1. In total 1,848,200 of the 15 key diagnostic tests were performed during July 2017. This is an increase of 95,000 (5.4%) from July 2016 (Table 6).
- 4.4.2. The test with the highest activity was Non-Obstetric Ultrasound with 602,300 tests taking place. This accounted for 32.6% of all activity in July 2017. The test with the lowest activity was Barium Enema with 2,000 tests taking place. This accounted for 0.1% of all activity this month.
- 4.4.3. The number of tests conducted over the last 12 months has increased by 4.9% from the same period last year (4.6% adjusted for working days).

Table 6: Total activity and growth, by test – July 2016 and July 2017

	Jul-17	Jul-16	YTD 17/18	YTD 16/17	Growth Jul 17 vs Jul 16	Growth YTD 17/18 vs YTD 16/17	Adjusted Growth Jul 17 vs Jul 16	Adjusted Growth YTD 17/18 vs YTD 16/17
MRI	298,642	285,568	1,165,388	1,131,661	4.6%	3.0%	4.6%	5.5%
CT	478,398	445,708	1,864,918	1,760,447	7.3%	5.9%	7.3%	8.5%
Non Obstetric Ultrasound	602,349	586,404	2,389,433	2,388,461	2.7%	0.0%	2.7%	2.5%
Barium Enema	2,008	2,039	8,084	8,149	-1.5%	-0.8%	-1.5%	1.6%
Dexa Scan	35,240	34,216	142,825	139,591	3.0%	2.3%	3.0%	4.8%
Audiology Assessments	103,448	95,036	414,741	403,416	8.9%	2.8%	8.9%	5.3%
Echocardiography	126,552	119,744	494,503	483,201	5.7%	2.3%	5.7%	4.8%
Electrophysiology	2,579	2,088	9,330	8,759	23.5%	6.5%	23.5%	9.1%
Peripheral Neurophysiology	18,765	18,335	75,016	74,172	2.3%	1.1%	2.3%	3.6%
Sleep Studies	11,683	12,096	45,152	50,274	-3.4%	-10.2%	-3.4%	-8.0%
Urodynamics	6,888	6,520	27,195	26,752	5.6%	1.7%	5.6%	4.1%
Colonoscopy	46,821	40,274	181,125	160,376	16.3%	12.9%	16.3%	15.7%
Flexi Sigmoidoscopy	26,234	23,342	102,618	92,708	12.4%	10.7%	12.4%	13.4%
Cystoscopy	28,073	25,189	109,341	102,702	11.4%	6.5%	11.4%	9.1%
Gastroscopy	60,536	56,654	241,244	227,845	6.9%	5.9%	6.9%	8.5%
All Tests	1,848,216	1,753,213	7,270,913	7,058,514	5.4%	3.0%	5.4%	5.5%

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 January 2017 to June 2017 although no revisions were requested for February. These revisions have had a small impact on the national data (Table 7).

Table 7: Revisions published on 14th September 2017

Month	Total Activity			Total Waiting List			Total 6+ week waits		
	Original	Revised	Difference	Original	Revised	Difference	Original	Revised	Difference
JANUARY	1,826,886	1,828,893	2,007	846,925	847,244	319	14,629	14,654	25
MARCH	1,937,863	1,938,454	591	934,010	934,010	-	9,868	9,868	-
APRIL	1,647,451	1,685,573	38,122	885,876	900,136	14,260	15,878	16,006	128
MAY	1,864,265	1,860,475	-3,790	916,948	917,257	309	17,324	17,176	-148
JUNE	1,872,569	1,876,649	4,080	921,350	922,261	911	17,168	17,222	54

- 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

6.1.1. 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.

6.1.2. Providers submit data to NHS England via Unify2 where it is 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

6.2.1. 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

6.3.1. Monthly diagnostic waiting time and activity data is published on a monthly timetable. The next publication of this report and accompanying data will be 12th October 2017. [A full calendar of all statistical publications can be found here.](#)

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

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

6.3.4. [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 within 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

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

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