



NHS Diagnostic Waiting Times and Activity Data

NHS Diagnostic Waiting Times and Activity Data

April 2018 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 1% for this pledge. The financial penalty for non-delivery of the standard is set out in the NHS Standard Contract 2017/18 – 2018/19.

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 April 2018 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 April 2018 was 24,700. This was 2.5% of the total number of patients waiting at the end of the month. This was the worst performance in the last 12 months and since May 2011.
- Nationally, the operational standard of less than 1% of patients waiting six weeks or longer was not met this month.
- Compared with April 2017 the total number of patients waiting six weeks or longer increased by 8,700, while the proportion of patients waiting six weeks or longer increased by 0.7 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 1.6% (February 2018) and 2.5% (April 2018).
- At the end of April 2018, the test with the smallest proportion of patients waiting six weeks or longer was Barium Enema with 0.3%. The test with the highest proportion was Urodynamics, with 9.6% 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 1.9 weeks at the end of April 2018.
- There were 997,700 patients waiting for a key diagnostic test at the end of April 2018. This is an increase of 97,600 from April 2017. In the last 12 months the total number of patients waiting for a diagnostic test continues to show an increasing trend with an average monthly increase of 0.9%.
- A total of 1,819,500 diagnostic tests were undertaken in April 2018. This is an increase of 133,900 from April 2017. In the last 12 months activity continues to show an increasing trend with an average monthly increase of 0.6% (an average monthly decrease of 0.2% adjusted for working days).
- East and North Hertfordshire NHS Trust did not submit data this month due to an update of their patient administration system.
- St Helens and Knowsley Hospital Services NHS Trust did not submit data this month due to an update of their patient administration system.
- Bradford Teaching Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust submitted a partial return that excluded data for Endoscopy due to implementation of a new EPR system.

- University College London Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust submitted a partial return that excluded activity data for Imaging due to implementation of a new radiological information system.

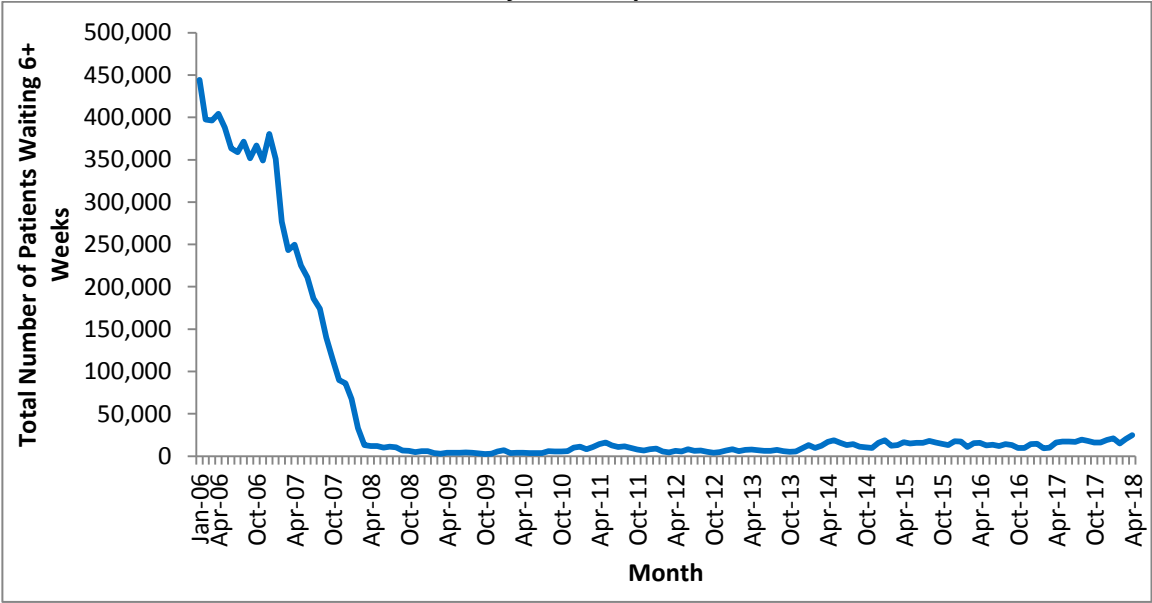
3 National Trends

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

3.1 6+ Week Waits

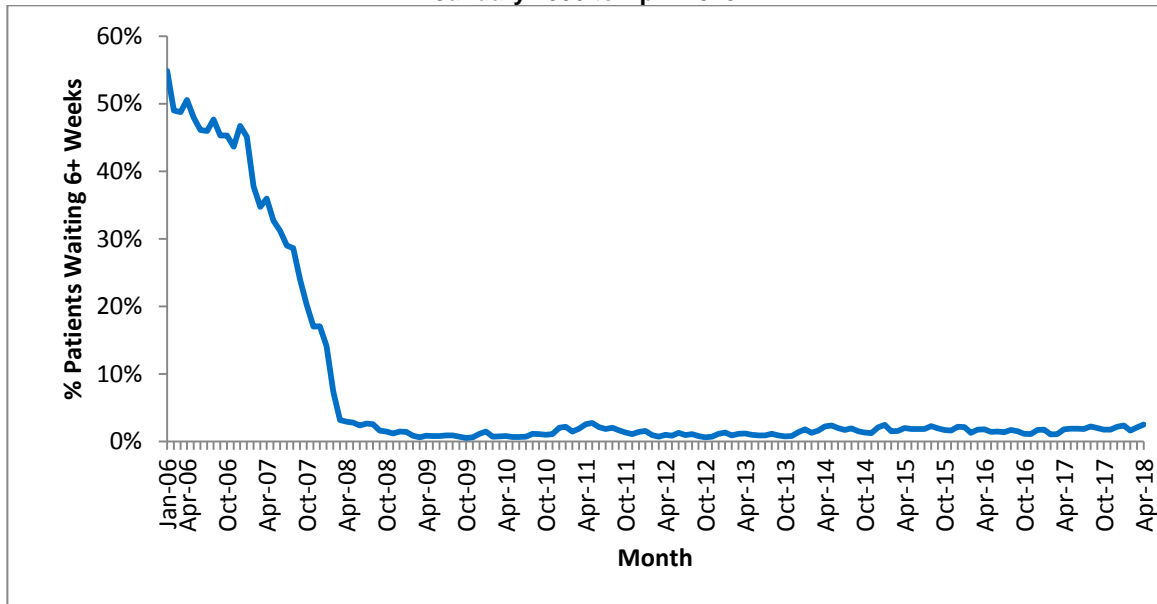
- 3.1.1. The total number of patients waiting six weeks or longer dropped sharply between January 2007 and March 2008 and has remained broadly stable since (Chart 1). This reduction is most likely the result of Trusts working towards the NHS Improvement Plan (June 2004) milestone that no one should wait 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 April 2018 there was an increase of 4,400 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 April 2018



- 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 1.6% (February 2018) and 2.5% (April 2018). The 1% operational standard was last met in November 2013. 2.5% in April 2018 was the worst performance in the last 12 months and since May 2011.

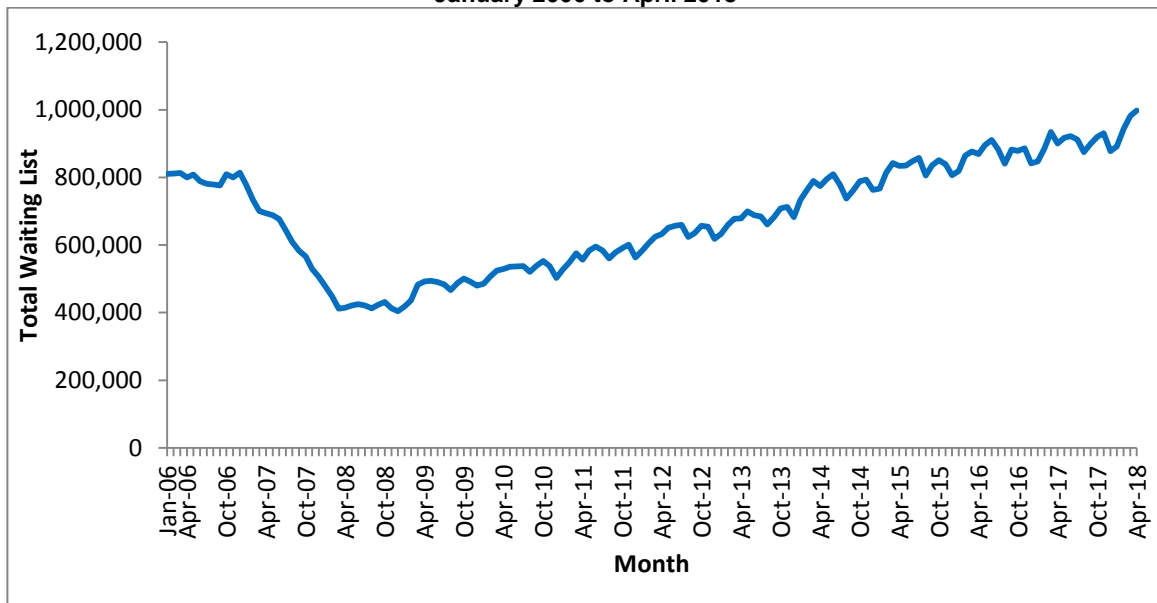
**Chart 2: Percentage of patients waiting 6+ weeks at month end for all tests
January 2006 to April 2018**



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 0.9%.

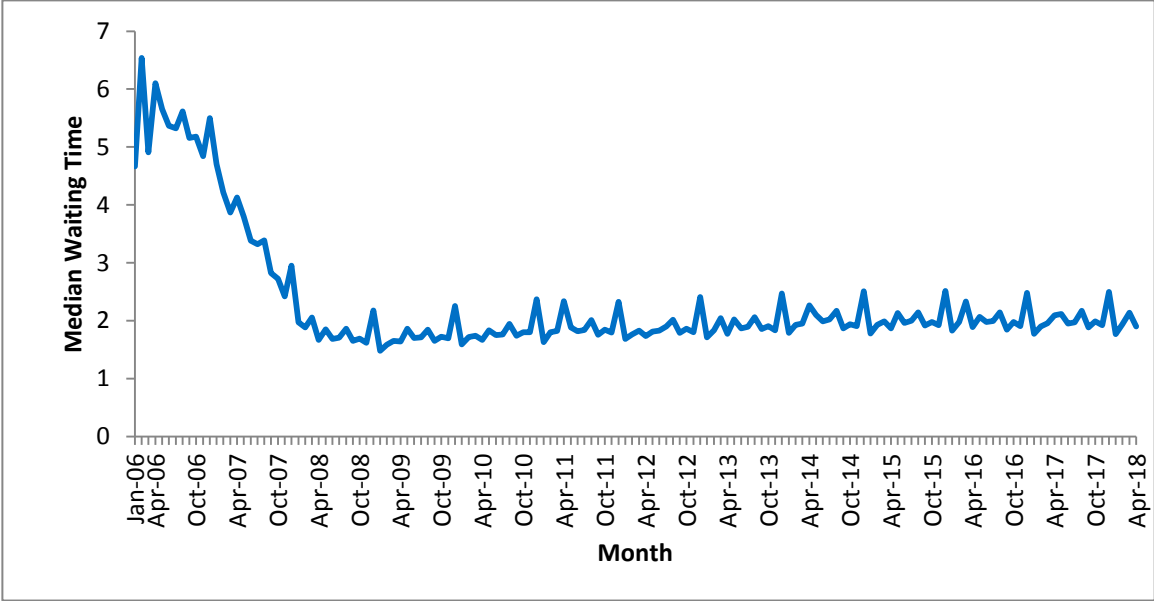
**Chart 3: Total number of patients waiting at month end for all tests
January 2006 to April 2018**



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 2017) and a low of 1.8 weeks (January 2018).

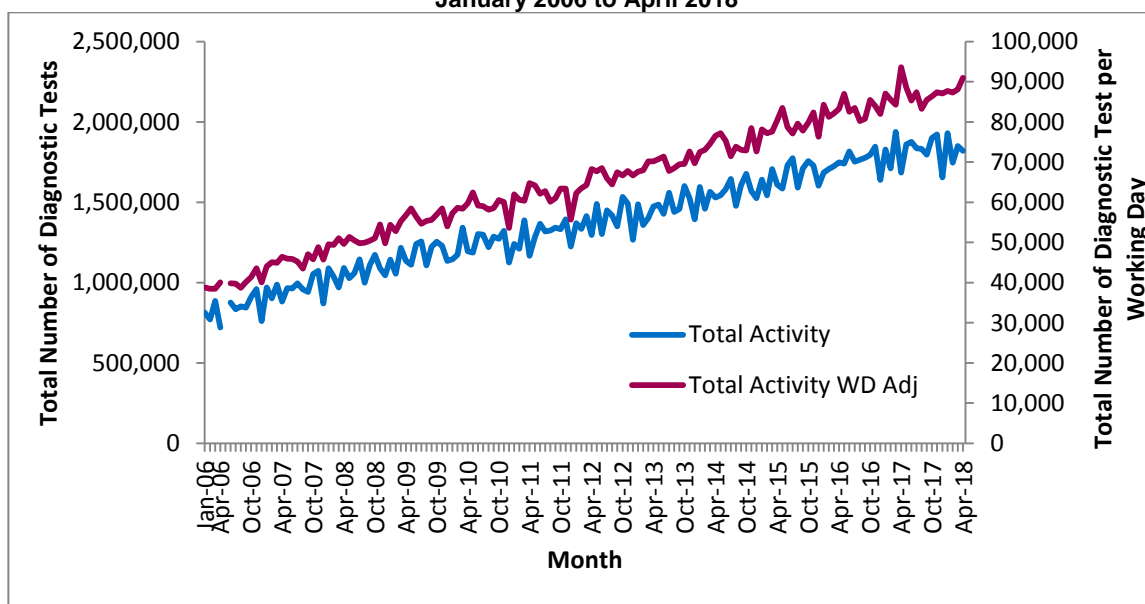
Chart 4: Median waiting time for all tests – January 2006 to April 2018



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 0.6%; the average monthly change in activity per working day was a decrease of 0.2%.

**Chart 5: Total activity and working day adjusted activity per month for all tests
January 2006 to April 2018**



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 3.7%. The test with the largest reduction in activity was Gastroscopy, where the average monthly decrease was 0.1% (Table 1).

Table 1: Total activity, by test – April 2017 and April 2018

	Apr-17	Apr-18	Average monthly growth
MRI	277,235	285,478	0.2%
CT	440,427	478,783	0.7%
Non Obstetric Ultrasound	544,674	601,778	0.8%
Barium Enema	1,803	1,971	0.7%
Dexa Scan	32,465	36,645	1.0%
Audiology Assessments	93,903	104,630	0.9%
Echocardiography	113,412	125,866	0.9%
Electrophysiology	1,933	2,984	3.7%
Peripheral Neurophysiology	17,712	18,045	0.2%
Sleep Studies	10,952	10,882	-0.1%
Urodynamics	6,095	6,082	0.0%
Colonoscopy	41,000	41,032	0.0%
Flexi Sigmoidoscopy	23,311	25,031	0.6%
Cystoscopy	24,227	24,437	0.1%
Gastroscopy	56,424	55,809	-0.1%
All Tests	1,685,573	1,819,453	0.6%

4 April 2018 Data

This section analyses the April 2018 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 April 2018, there were a total of 24,700 patients waiting six weeks or longer from referral for one of the 15 key diagnostic tests. This was 2.5% of the total number of patients waiting at the end of the month.
- 4.1.2. Compared with April 2017, the number of patients waiting six weeks or longer increased by 8,700, while the proportion of patients waiting six weeks or longer increased by 0.7 percentage points.
- 4.1.3. Compared with April 2017, the test with the largest increase in the proportion of patients waiting six weeks or longer was Sleep Studies, which increased by 3.0 percentage points. The test with the largest decrease was Urodynamics, which decreased by 1.8 percentage points (Table 2).

Table 2: Proportion of patients waiting 6+ weeks, by test – April 2017 and April 2018

	Apr-17	Apr-18	Difference (%age points)
MRI	0.9%	2.6%	1.7
CT	1.5%	2.3%	0.8
Non Obstetric Ultrasound	0.8%	1.3%	0.5
Barium Enema	0.3%	0.3%	0.0
Dexa Scan	0.8%	1.2%	0.5
Audiology Assessments	1.7%	2.9%	1.2
Echocardiography	4.0%	2.9%	-1.1
Electrophysiology	1.5%	1.0%	-0.5
Peripheral Neurophysiology	1.3%	2.4%	1.1
Sleep Studies	2.6%	5.6%	3.0
Urodynamics	11.4%	9.6%	-1.8
Colonoscopy	5.3%	6.6%	1.3
Flexi Sigmoidoscopy	4.4%	4.7%	0.2
Cystoscopy	6.9%	6.7%	-0.2
Gastroscopy	4.4%	4.7%	0.3
All Tests	1.8%	2.5%	0.7

Note: Figures may differ due to rounding.

4.1.4. Compared with April 2017, the test type with the largest increase in the proportion of patients waiting six weeks or longer was Imaging with an increase of 0.9 percentage points. Endoscopy increased by 0.5 percentage points, while Physiological Measurement increased by 0.1 percentage points (Table 3). See section 5.4 for which tests are included under the different test types.

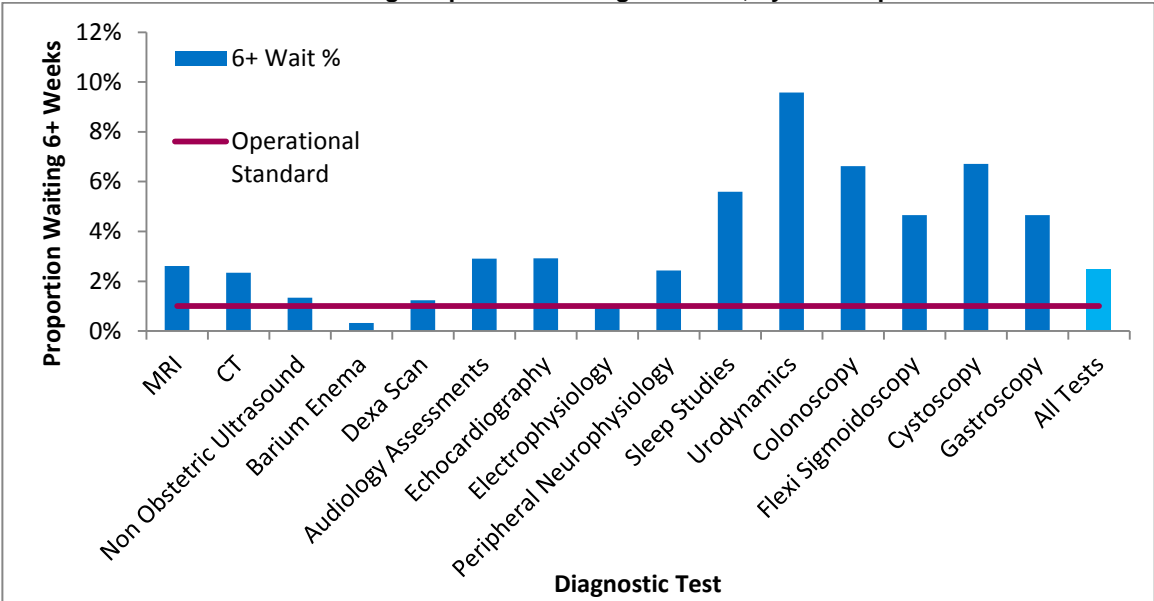
Table 3: Proportion of patients waiting 6+ weeks, by test type – April 2017 and April 2018

	Apr-17	Apr-18	Difference (percentage points)
Imaging	1.0%	1.9%	0.9
Physiological Measurement	3.1%	3.2%	0.1
Endoscopy	5.0%	5.6%	0.5
Total	1.8%	2.5%	0.7

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 1 of the 15 key tests this month. The test with the lowest proportion of patients waiting six weeks or longer was Barium Enema (0.3%). The test with the highest proportion of patients waiting six weeks or longer was Urodynamics (9.6%) (Chart 6).

Chart 6: Percentage of patients waiting 6+ weeks, by test – April 2018



4.1.6. 64 of the 149 acute trusts that submitted data for April 2018 failed to meet the 1% operational standard. Two acute trusts did not submit data.

4.1.7. 114 of the 196 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 18 more than in April 2017.

¹ Includes NHS England

4.1.8. One of the five 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 0.99% and 6.5% (Table 4).

Table 4: April 2018 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	7,317	2.6%	286,067	529,887	1.9
Midlands and East	6,070	2.1%	287,104	528,235	1.9
London	1,694	0.99%	171,740	288,172	1.9
South West	6,892	6.5%	105,614	181,233	2.1
South East	2,657	1.9%	143,325	277,359	1.8
England	24,716	2.5%	997,738	1,819,453	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 April 2018 there were a total of 997,700 patients still waiting for a diagnostic test. This is an increase of 97,600 (10.8%) from April 2017.
- 4.2.2. The test with the largest waiting list was Non-Obstetric Ultrasound, which accounted for 36.8% of the total waiting list, or 367,100 patients. The test with the smallest waiting list was Barium Enema, which accounted for 0.1% of the total waiting list, or 1,300 patients (Table 5).

Table 5: Total number of patients waiting at month end, by test – April 2017 and April 2018

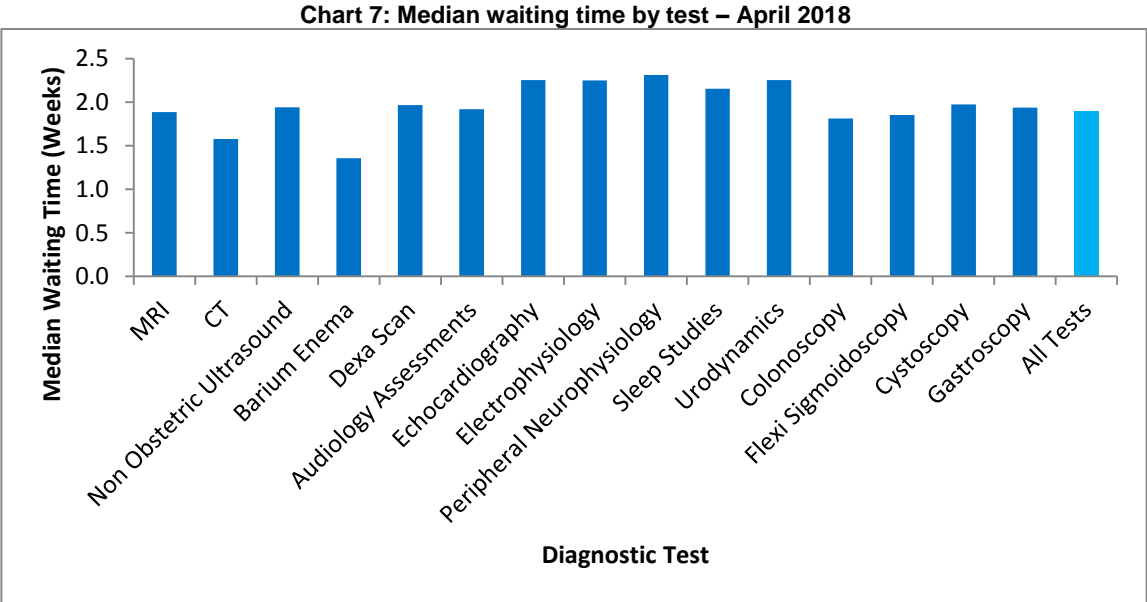
	Apr-17	Apr-18	Growth (%age)
MRI	173,110	201,301	16.3%
CT	116,735	130,510	11.8%
Non Obstetric Ultrasound	328,904	367,127	11.6%
Barium Enema	1,201	1,250	4.1%
Dexa Scan	27,754	32,594	17.4%
Audiology Assessments	45,799	47,407	3.5%
Echocardiography	67,637	71,531	5.8%
Electrophysiology	1,163	1,591	36.8%
Peripheral Neurophysiology	18,622	19,736	6.0%
Sleep Studies	7,863	8,540	8.6%
Urodynamics	4,643	4,183	-9.9%
Colonoscopy	35,255	36,616	3.9%
Flexi Sigmoidoscopy	15,846	17,402	9.8%
Cystoscopy	12,450	13,813	10.9%
Gastroscopy	43,154	44,137	2.3%
All Tests	900,136	997,738	10.8%

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

- 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 36.8% compared with April 2017. The only reduction has been for Urodynamics, where the waiting list decreased by 9.9%.

4.3 Median Waiting Times

4.3.1. At the end of April 2018 the estimated median waiting time for all 15 diagnostic tests was 1.9 weeks from the time of referral. This is a decrease of 0.2 compared to the previous month. The test with the shortest median waiting time was Barium Enema at 1.4 weeks. The test with the longest median waiting time was Peripheral Neurophysiology at 2.3 weeks (Chart 7).



4.4 Total Activity

- 4.4.1. In total 1,819,500 of the 15 key diagnostic tests were performed during April 2018. This is an increase of 133,900 (7.9%) from April 2017 (a decrease of 2.9% adjusted for working days) (Table 6).
- 4.4.2. The test with the highest activity was Non-Obstetric Ultrasound with 601,800 tests taking place. This accounted for 33.1% of all activity in April 2018. 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 3.4% from the same period last year (2.9% adjusted for working days).

Table 6: Total activity and growth, by test – April 2017 and April 2018

	Apr-18	Apr-17	YTD 18/19	YTD 17/18	Growth Apr 18 vs Apr 17	Growth YTD 18/19 vs YTD 17/18	Adjusted Growth Apr 18 vs Apr 17	Adjusted Growth YTD 18/19 vs YTD 17/18
MRI	285,478	277,235	285,478	277,235	3.0%	3.0%	-7.3%	-7.3%
CT	478,783	440,427	478,783	440,427	8.7%	8.7%	-2.2%	-2.2%
Non Obstetric Ultrasound	601,778	544,674	601,778	544,674	10.5%	10.5%	-0.6%	-0.6%
Barium Enema	1,971	1,803	1,971	1,803	9.3%	9.3%	-1.6%	-1.6%
Dexa Scan	36,645	32,465	36,645	32,465	12.9%	12.9%	1.6%	1.6%
Audiology Assessments	104,630	93,903	104,630	93,903	11.4%	11.4%	0.3%	0.3%
Echocardiography	125,866	113,412	125,866	113,412	11.0%	11.0%	-0.1%	-0.1%
Electrophysiology	2,984	1,933	2,984	1,933	54.4%	54.4%	38.9%	38.9%
Peripheral Neurophysiology	18,045	17,712	18,045	17,712	1.9%	1.9%	-8.3%	-8.3%
Sleep Studies	10,882	10,952	10,882	10,952	-0.6%	-0.6%	-10.6%	-10.6%
Urodynamics	6,082	6,095	6,082	6,095	-0.2%	-0.2%	-10.2%	-10.2%
Colonoscopy	41,032	41,000	41,032	41,000	0.1%	0.1%	-9.9%	-9.9%
Flexi Sigmoidoscopy	25,031	23,311	25,031	23,311	7.4%	7.4%	-3.4%	-3.4%
Cystoscopy	24,437	24,227	24,437	24,227	0.9%	0.9%	-9.2%	-9.2%
Gastroscopy	55,809	56,424	55,809	56,424	-1.1%	-1.1%	-11.0%	-11.0%
All Tests	1,819,453	1,685,573	1,819,453	1,685,573	7.9%	7.9%	-2.9%	-2.9%

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 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](#).

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](#).

Revisions were last published in May 2018 for the months November 2017 to December 2017 prior to the decommissioning of Unify2.

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 12th July 2018. [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 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.

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 england.nhsdata@nhs.net

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 Consultation

The Quarterly Diagnostics Census and Monthly Diagnostics Waiting Times and Activity Returns are under consultation. Find out more at: <https://www.engage.england.nhs.uk/consultation/diagnostics-census-waiting-times-activity-return>

The consultation closed on 5th April 2018. NHS England will publish a response to the feedback received as part of this consultation once results have been analysed and next steps identified. In the meantime, the Q1 2018/19 collection of the Diagnostics Census will be suspended and providers will not be required to submit data at this stage.

5.7 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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