

NHS Diagnostic Waiting Times and **Activity Data**

NHS Diagnostic Waiting Times and Activity Data July 2024 Monthly Report

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Prepared by: Data and Analytics: Operational Insights - Diagnostics

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 more 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 more for a diagnostic test.

The NHS Standard Contract 2022/23 states that there is a standard threshold of 1% for this pledge. NHS England's planning guidance for 2023/24 requests that progress should be made towards a threshold of at least 5% by March 2025.

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 documentation.

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

• 6+ Week Waits

A count of the number of patients waiting six weeks or more 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 Accredited Official Statistics

The UK Statistics Authority has designated these statistics as Accredited Official Statistics, in accordance with the Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007 and signifying compliance with the Code of Practice for Accredited 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 Accredited Official Statistics it is a statutory requirement that the Code of Practice shall continue to be observed.

2 July 2024 Key Findings

- The total number of patients waiting six weeks or more from referral for one of the 15 key diagnostic tests at the end of July 2024 was 364,500. This was 22.4% 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 more was not met this month.
- Compared with July 2023 the total number of patients waiting six weeks or more decreased by 41,400 while the proportion of patients waiting six weeks or more decreased by 3.0 percentage points.
- In the last 12 months, the proportion of patients waiting six weeks or more at the end of a month has varied between 20.8% (February 2024) and 27.5% (August 2023).
- At the end of July 2024, the test with the smallest proportion of patients waiting six weeks or more was CT with 10.8%. The test with the highest proportion was Electrophysiology, with 49.1% of patients waiting six weeks or more.
- 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 2.9 weeks at the end of July 2024.
- There were 1,625,100 patients waiting for a key diagnostic test at the end of July 2024. This is an increase of 26,900 from July 2023.
- A total of 2,485,800 diagnostic tests were undertaken in July 2024. This is an increase of 256,300 from July 2023.

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 more dropped sharply between January 2007 and March 2008 (Chart 1), as Trusts worked towards the NHS Improvement Plan (June 2004) milestone that no one should wait six weeks or more for a diagnostic test by March 2008. Since March 2008 there were fluctuations in the total number of patients waiting six weeks or more, with a significant rise between December 2013 and May 2014.
- 3.1.2. The number of patients waiting six weeks or more rose sharply in April 2020 due to the impact of COVID-19. In July 2024 there was a decrease of 10,900 in the number of patients waiting six weeks or more from the previous month.

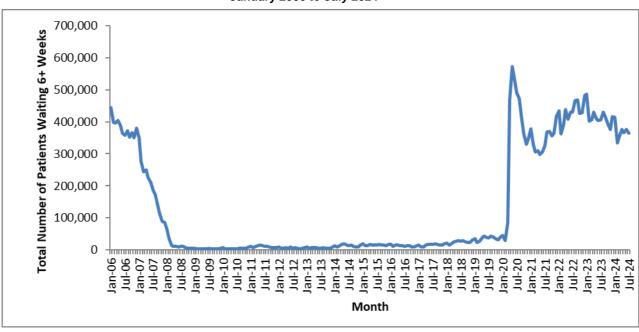


Chart 1: Total number of patients waiting 6+ weeks at month end for all tests
January 2006 to July 2024

3.1.3. The proportion of patients waiting six weeks or more shows a similar pattern (Chart 2). In the last 12 months, the proportion of patients waiting six weeks or more at the end of a month has varied between 20.8% (February 2024) and 27.5% (August 2023). The 1% operational standard was last met in November 2013.

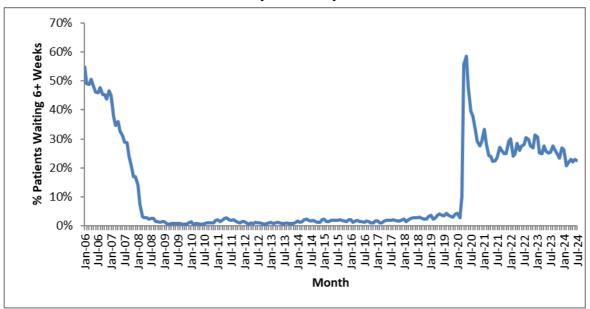


Chart 2: Percentage of patients waiting 6+ weeks at month end for all tests
January 2006 to July 2024

3.2 Total Waiting List

3.2.1. As with the number and proportion of patients waiting six weeks or more, the total number of patients waiting at the month end fell between January 2007 and the 6-week milestone in March 2008 (Chart 3). Following a period with a stable total waiting list between March 2008 and January 2009, the underlying trend showed a steady increase before dropping sharply in March 2020 due to the impact of COVID-19 and subsequently rising.

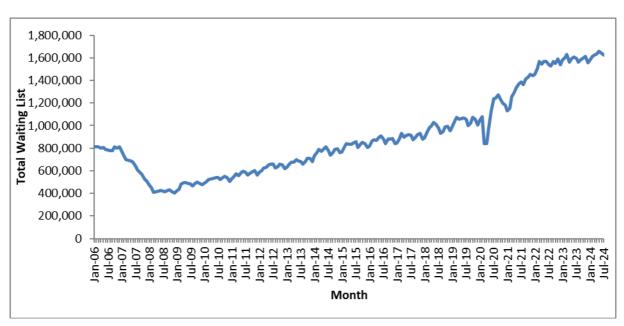


Chart 3: Total number of patients waiting at month end for all tests January 2006 to July 2024

3.3 Median Waiting Time

3.3.1. The average (median) waiting time displays a similar trend to the total waiting list and 6 weeks or more waits. After a rapid decrease in the two years leading to the 6-week milestone, the median waiting time remained stable until the COVID-19 period (Chart 4). The data shows significant increases during December every year as a result of the higher number of bank holidays and resulting lower activity. In the last 12 months, the median waiting time had a high of 3.5 weeks (December 2023) and a low of 2.6 weeks (January 2024). The median waiting time in July 2024 was 2.9 weeks.

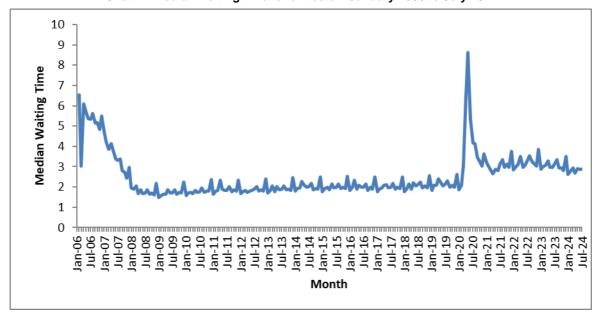


Chart 4: Median waiting time for all tests - January 2006 to July 2024

3.4 Total Activity

- 3.4.1. The monthly activity figure can significantly fluctuate month to month, with particularly notable decreases in December due to the bank holidays. If the data is adjusted to show activity per working day, the monthly variation becomes less pronounced (Chart 5).
- 3.4.2. The underlying trend showed an increase from January 2006 to the COVID-19 period when total activity in April 2020 fell by 68% compared to April 2019. Monthly activity subsequently started to rise again.

Total Activity Working Day

Total Number of Diagnostic Tests

140,000

120,000

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Chart 5: Total activity and working day adjusted activity per month for all tests
January 2006 to July 2024

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 differing changes in activity. The test with the largest proportional increase in activity was Sleep Studies, where July 2024 activity was 2.8% higher per month than July 2023. (Table 1).

Table 1: Total activity, by test - July 2023 and July 2024

	Jul-23	Jul-24	Average monthly growth
MRI	367,245	404,213	0.8%
CT	682,578	742,896	0.7%
Non-obstetric Ultrasound	685,858	764,287	0.9%
Barium Enema	3,072	4,176	2.6%
Dexa Scan	45,190	52,326	1.2%
Audiology Assessments	94,476	117,528	1.8%
Echocardiography	150,018	174,428	1.3%
Electrophysiology	594	747	1.9%
Peripheral Neurophysiolog	20,285	22,843	1.0%
Sleep Studies	14,140	19,636	2.8%
Urodynamics	5,577	6,763	1.6%
Colonoscopy	54,885	57,415	0.4%
Flexi Sigmoidoscopy	16,907	17,490	0.3%
Cystoscopy	27,518	32,989	1.5%
Gastroscopy	61,116	68,015	0.9%
All Tests	2,229,459	2,485,752	0.9%

4 July 2024 Data

This section analyses the July 2024 diagnostic waiting times and activity data and includes comparisons between tests, regions, providers and commissioners.

4.1 6+ Week Waits

- 4.1.1. At the end of July 2024, there were a total of 364,500 patients waiting six weeks or more from referral for one of the 15 key diagnostic tests. This was 22.4% of the total number of patients waiting at the end of the month.
- 4.1.2. Compared with July 2023, the number of patients waiting six weeks or more decreased by 41,400, while the proportion of patients waiting six weeks or more decreased by 3.0 percentage points.
- Compared with July 2023, the test with the largest increase in the proportion of patients waiting six weeks or more was Electrophysiology, which increased by 13.2 percentage points. The test with the largest decrease was Colonoscopy, which decreased by 12.8 percentage points (Table 2).

Table 2: Proportion of patients waiting 6+ weeks, by test - July 2023 and July 2024

	Jul-23	Jul-24	Difference (%age points)
MRI	19.7%	19.8%	0.1
СТ	16.2%	10.8%	-5.5
Non-obstetric Ultrasound	21.2%	17.8%	-3.4
Barium Enema	4.6%	11.4%	6.7
Dexa Scan	31.3%	20.2%	-11.1
Audiology Assessments	35.3%	45.4%	10.0
Echocardiography	36.2%	32.4%	-3.8
Electrophysiology	35.9%	49.1%	13.2
Peripheral Neurophysiolog	23.8%	31.1%	7.3
Sleep Studies	38.6%	32.7%	-5.9
Urodynamics	44.6%	42.1%	-2.5
Colonoscopy	38.6%	25.8%	-12.8
Flexi Sigmoidoscopy	42.1%	32.0%	-10.1
Cystoscopy	35.8%	26.8%	-9.0
Gastroscopy	32.5%	24.5%	-8.0
All Tests	25.4%	22.4%	-3.0

Note: Figures may differ due to rounding.

4.1.4. Compared with July 2023, the test type with the smallest change in the proportion of patients waiting six weeks or more was Physiological Measurement with an increase of 1.6 percentage points. Imaging decreased by 3.2 percentage points, while Endoscopy decreased by 10.4 percentage points (Table 3). See section 5.4 for which tests are included under the different test types.

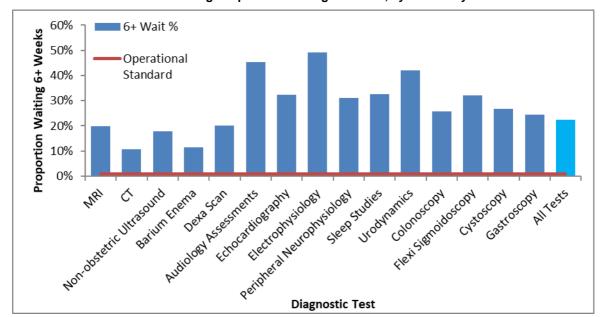
Table 3: Proportion of patients waiting 6+ weeks, by test type - July 2023 and July 2024

	Jul-23	Jul-24	Difference (%age points)
Imaging	20.6%	17.4%	-3.2
Physiological Measurement	35.2%	36.8%	1.6
Endoscopy	36.7%	26.3%	-10.4
Total	25.4%	22.4%	-3.0

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 none of the 15 key tests this month. The test with the lowest proportion of patients waiting six weeks or more was CT (10.8%), whilst the test with the highest proportion was Electrophysiology (49.1%) (Chart 6).

Chart 6: Percentage of patients waiting 6+ weeks, by test - July 2024



- 4.1.6. 130 of the 134 acute trusts that submitted data for July 2024 failed to meet the 1% operational standard.
- 4.1.7. All 42 Commissioners (ICBs) failed to meet the 1% operational standard.
- 4.1.8. None of the seven NHS England Regions met the 1% operational standard. The proportion of patients waiting six weeks or more for a diagnostic test varied by region between 17.9% (North East and Yorkshire, and the Northwest region) and 32.7% (East of England) (Table 4).

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 region.

Region	Number of patients waiting six weeks or more at month end	Percentage of patients waiting six weeks or more at month end	Total number of patients waiting at month end	Total activity undertaken in month	Median waiting time
London	59,786	20.0%	299,170	411,319	2.9
South West	34,512	22.6%	152,585	236,136	2.7
South East	45,790	20.5%	223,600	375,513	2.7
Midlands	80,358	24.9%	322,732	461,509	3.0
East of England	69,809	32.7%	213,448	281,848	3.6
North West	34,256	17.9%	191,081	337,159	2.6
North East and Yorkshire	39,244	17.9%	219,492	372,404	2.7
England	364,544	22.4%	1,625,099	2,475,888	2.9

^{*}Includes all independent sector providers and excludes centrally commissioned.

4.2 Total Waiting List

- 4.2.1. At the end of July 2024 there were a total of 1,625,100 patients still waiting for a diagnostic test. This is an increase of 26,900 (1.7%) from July 2023.
- 4.2.2. The test with the largest waiting list was Non-obstetric Ultrasound, which accounted for 34.8% of the total waiting list, or 565,800 patients. The test with the smallest waiting list was Electrophysiology, which accounted for 0.05% of the total waiting list, or 800 patients (Table 5).

Table 5: Total number of patients waiting at month end, by test - July 2023 and July 2024

	Jul-23	Jul-24	Growth (%age)
MRI	280,857	318,189	13.3%
СТ	179,394	170,405	-5.0%
Non-obstetric Ultrasound	561,839	565,770	0.7%
Barium Enema	2,158	3,057	41.7%
Dexa Scan	65,829	57,905	-12.0%
Audiology Assessments	89,386	113,049	26.5%
Echocardiography	162,575	156,456	-3.8%
Electrophysiology	538	831	54.5%
Peripheral Neurophysiology	30,330	36,544	20.5%
Sleep Studies	27,320	28,736	5.2%
Urodynamics	8,036	8,859	10.2%
Colonoscopy	74,987	61,435	-18.1%
Flexi Sigmoidoscopy	26,673	21,525	-19.3%
Cystoscopy	25,178	22,270	-11.5%
Gastroscopy	63,054	60,068	-4.7%
All Tests	1,598,154	1,625,099	1.7%

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

4.2.3. The largest increase in the number of patients waiting by test has been for Electrophysiology where the reported waiting list grew by 54.5% compared with July 2023.

4.3 Median Waiting Times

4.3.1. At the end of July 2024, the estimated median waiting time for all 15 diagnostic tests was 2.9 weeks from the time of referral, with no change from the previous month. The test with the shortest median waiting time was CT at 1.7 weeks. The test with the longest median waiting time was Electrophysiology at 5.8 weeks (Chart 7).

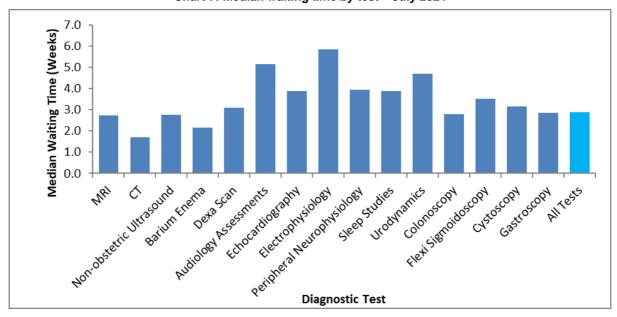


Chart 7: Median waiting time by test - July 2024

4.4 Total Activity

- 4.4.1. In total 2,485,800 of the 15 key diagnostic tests were performed during July 2024. This is an increase of 256,300 (11.5%) from July 2023 and an increase of 1.8% when adjusted for working days (Table 6).
- 4.4.2. The test with the highest activity was Non-obstetric Ultrasound with 764,300 tests taking place. This accounted for 30.7% of all activity in July 2024. The test with the lowest activity was Electrophysiology with 700 tests taking place. This accounted for 0.03% of all activity this month.
- 4.4.3. The number of tests conducted over the last 12 months has increased by 8.8% from the same period last year, or 8.4% when adjusted for working days.

Table 6: Total activity and growth, by test – July 2023 and July 2024

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

	Jul-24	Jul-23	YTD 24/25	YTD 23/24	Growth Jul 24 vs Jul 23	Growth YTD 24/25 vs YTD 23/24	Adjusted Growth Jul 24 vs Jul 23	Adjusted Growth YTD 24/25 vs YTD 23/24
MRI	404,213	367,245	1,560,995	1,416,792	10.1%	10.2%	0.5%	5.0%
СТ	742,896	682,578	2,891,775	2,654,012	8.8%	9.0%	-0.6%	3.8%
Non-obstetric Ultrasound	764,287	685,858	2,928,657	2,699,081	11.4%	8.5%	1.7%	3.4%
Barium Enema	4,176	3,072	15,944	12,563	35.9%	26.9%	24.1%	20.9%
Dexa Scan	52,326	45,190	196,981	177,889	15.8%	10.7%	5.7%	5.5%
Audiology Assessments	117,528	94,476	449,674	366,614	24.4%	22.7%	13.6%	16.9%
Echocardiography	174,428	150,018	658,230	586,892	16.3%	12.2%	6.2%	6.9%
Electrophysiology	747	594	2,669	2,317	25.8%	15.2%	14.8%	9.8%
Peripheral Neurophysiology	22,843	20,285	85,542	78,295	12.6%	9.3%	2.8%	4.1%
Sleep Studies	19,636	14,140	74,971	54,370	38.9%	37.9%	26.8%	31.4%
Urodynamics	6,763	5,577	25,677	21,522	21.3%	19.3%	10.7%	13.7%
Colonoscopy	57,415	54,885	221,467	218,009	4.6%	1.6%	-4.5%	-3.2%
Flexi Sigmoidoscopy	17,490	16,907	66,733	67,878	3.4%	-1.7%	-5.5%	-6.3%
Cystoscopy	32,989	27,518	125,282	107,636	19.9%	16.4%	9.5%	10.9%
Gastroscopy	68,015	61,116	258,594	241,160	11.3%	7.2%	1.6%	2.2%
All Tests	2,485,752	2,229,459	9,563,191	8,705,030	11.5%	9.9%	1.8%	4.7%

5 Community Diagnostic Centre July 2024 Data

This section analyses the July 2024 activity data for Community Diagnostic Centres (CDCs) and includes comparisons with the main July 2024 activity data. Activity data for CDCs includes all the activity they have performed in the month for 15 diagnostic tests (which comprise around half of the diagnostic tests they provide); no waiting list data is collected for CDCs. The CDC activity is also included in the main activity report, since that covers diagnostic tests in all settings, but is only identified as CDC activity in the separate tables.

5.1 CDC activity

5.1.1. In July 2024, CDCs performed 241,000 diagnostic tests, 9.7% of the total. The most common were imaging tests and the highest percentage of imaging tests by CDCs was for Magnetic Resonance Imaging (14.1%), see Table 7.

Table 7: Total and CDC activity, by test - July 2024

Test	All providers	CDCs	% by CDC
Magnetic Resonance Imaging	404,213	56,951	14.1%
Computed Tomography	742,896	75,359	10.1%
Non-obstetric Ultrasound	764,287	76,725	10.0%
Barium Enema	4,176	19	0.5%
DEXA Scan	52,326	5,563	10.6%
Audiology - Audiology Assessments	117,528	2,218	1.9%
Cardiology - Echocardiography	174,428	12,463	7.1%
Cardiology - Electrophysiology	747	520	69.6%
Neurophysiology - Peripheral Neurophysiology	22,843	574	2.5%
Respiratory physiology - Sleep Studies	19,636	2,179	11.1%
Urodynamics - Pressures & Flows	6,763	232	3.4%
Colonoscopy	57,415	3,565	6.2%
Flexi Sigmoidoscopy	17,490	896	5.1%
Cystoscopy	32,989	345	1.0%
Gastroscopy	68,015	3,432	5.0%
All tests	2,485,752	241,041	9.7%

CDC Electrophysiology activity erroneously includes other physiology test types

5.1.2. In July 2024, the region with the highest diagnostic activity in CDCs was the Midlands, with 51,400 tests (11.1% of their total). The region with the highest percentage of tests by CDCs, was the South West, with 30,600 tests (13.0% of their total), see Table 8.

Table 8: Total and CDC activity, by commissioning region - July 2024

Test	All providers	CDCs	% by CDC
London	411,319	32,160	7.8%
South West	236,136	30,641	13.0%
South East	375,513	43,853	11.7%
Midlands	461,509	51,410	11.1%
East of England	281,848	19,444	6.9%
North West	337,159	34,910	10.4%
North East and Yorkshire	372,404	27,680	7.4%
England	2,485,752	241,041	9.7%

5.2 CDC data completeness

5.2.1. In July 2024, 155 CDC sites (including spoke sites now counted separately) were invited to submit activity data and 153 are included in the activity counts (99% response rate). The activity is CDC-funded and should exclude services that have moved to the CDC from existing sites, making it additional activity.

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 SDCS where it is checked and signed off by commissioners. For further details on how the data is collected and the SDCS system, please refer to the NHSE Collection Guidance.

6.2 Data Revisions

5.2.1. Revisions to published figures are released on a six-monthly basis and in accordance with the NHS England's revision policy. For more information on the revision policy please refer to the SDCS Revisions Policy Document. Revisions were last published in September 2023 for the months January 2022 through to April 2023.

6.3 Data Availability

5.3.1. Monthly diagnostic waiting time and activity data is published on a monthly timetable. A full calendar of all statistical publications can be found here.

6.4 Glossary

Community Diagnostic Centre

Community diagnostic centres (CDCs) provide a broad range of elective diagnostics (including checks, scans and tests) away from acute facilities, so reducing pressure on hospitals, providing quicker access to tests and greater convenience to patients. The earliest CDCs were started in 2021 and the list of sites and their services continues to expand. CDCs may use a range of spoke sites and submit aggregated activity data for them. They are hosted by acute Trusts but may receive patients from other Trusts.

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.

Integrated Care Board (ICB)

Integrated care boards (ICBs) replaced clinical commissioning groups (CCGs) in the NHS in England from 1 April 2023. ICBs oversee partnerships of organisations that come together to plan and deliver joined up health and care services.

Median Waiting Time

A measurement of the average time patients have been waiting for a diagnostic test. The median is the middle value when waiting times are put in numerical order. 50% of patients have been waiting 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.

Region

One of seven geographical areas of NHS England responsible for the quality, financial and operational performance of all NHS organisations in their region.

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 england.nhsdata@nhs.net

6.6 Consultation

Between 8 February 2018 and 5 April 2018, NHS England consulted on the future of the Quarterly Diagnostics Census and Monthly Diagnostics Waiting Times and Activity Returns. The outcome document for the consultation was published 30 March 2020 and confirmed the decision to stop collecting the Quarterly Diagnostics Census on a permanent basis and to continue the monthly diagnostics waiting times and activity return (DM01) in its current form. Find out more at: https://www.engage.england.nhs.uk/consultation/diagnostics-census-waiting-timesactivity-return

6.7 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 nhs.net

The NHS England analyst responsible for producing these data is:

Sheila Dixon

Diagnostics, Operational Insights, NHS England

Email: england.nhsdata@nhs.net