

NHS Diagnostic Waiting Times and Activity Data

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October 2024 Monthly Report

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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 October 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 October 2024 was 337,200. This was 20.7% of the total number of patients waiting at the end of the month.
- Nationally, the operational standard of less than 1% of patients waiting six weeks or more was not met this month.
- Compared with October 2023 the total number of patients waiting six weeks or more decreased by 56,800 while the proportion of patients waiting six weeks or more decreased by 4.0 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 20.7% (October 2024) and 26.8% (December 2023).
- At the end of October 2024, the test with the smallest proportion of patients waiting six weeks or more was CT with 7.9%. The test with the highest proportion was Audiology Assessments, with 41.7% 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 2.7 weeks at the end of October 2024.
- There were 1,630,100 patients waiting for a key diagnostic test at the end of October 2024. This is an increase of 33,800 from October 2023.
- A total of 2,544,800 diagnostic tests were undertaken in October 2024. This is an increase of 232,800 from October 2023.

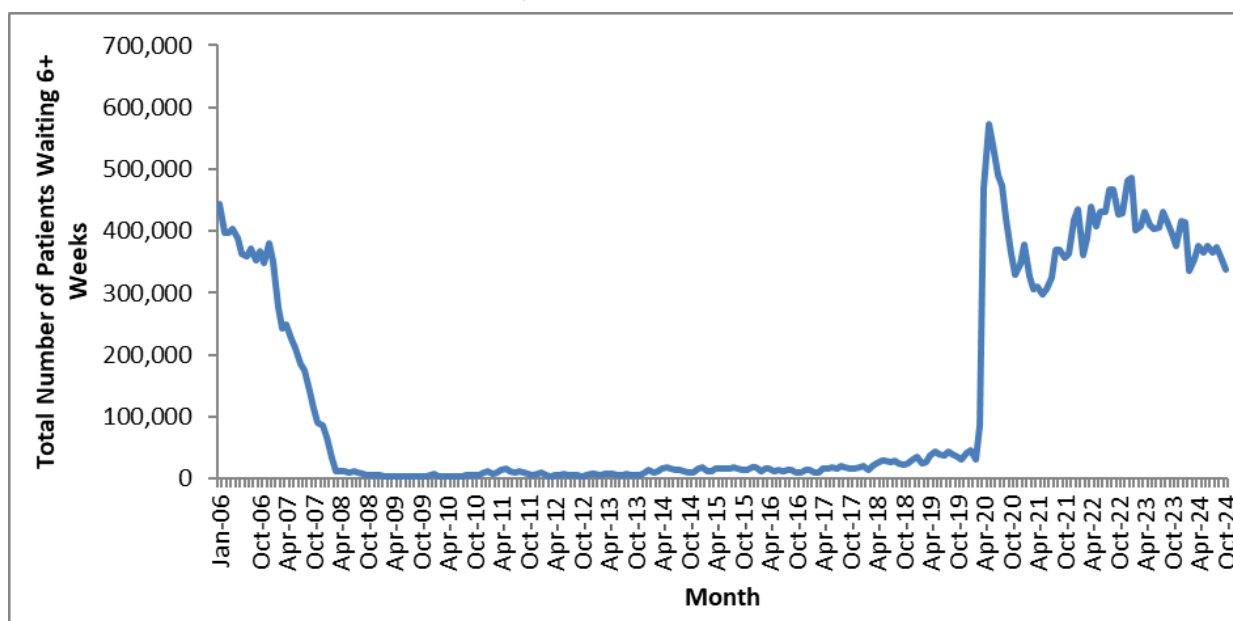
3 National Trends

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

3.1 6+ Week Waits

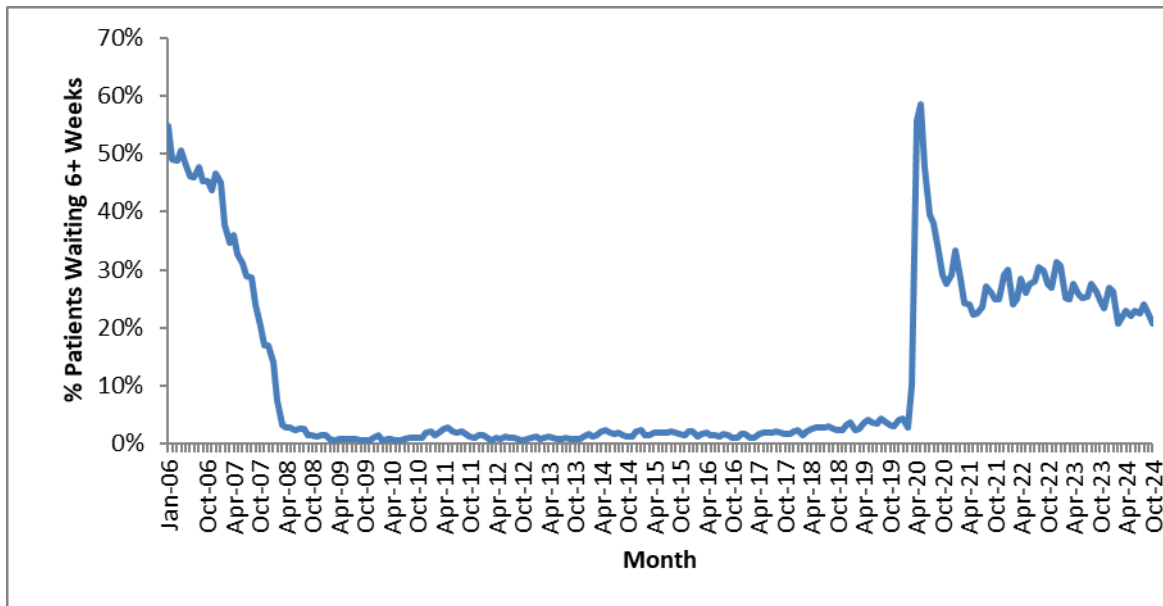
- 3.1.1. The total number of patients waiting six weeks or more dropped sharply between January 2007 and March 2008 (Chart 1), as Trusts worked towards the NHS Improvement Plan (June 2004) milestone that no one should wait six weeks or more for a diagnostic test by March 2008. Since March 2008 there 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 October 2024 there was a decrease of 22,700 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 October 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 20.7% (October 2024) and 26.8% (December 2023). The 1% operational standard was last met in November 2013.

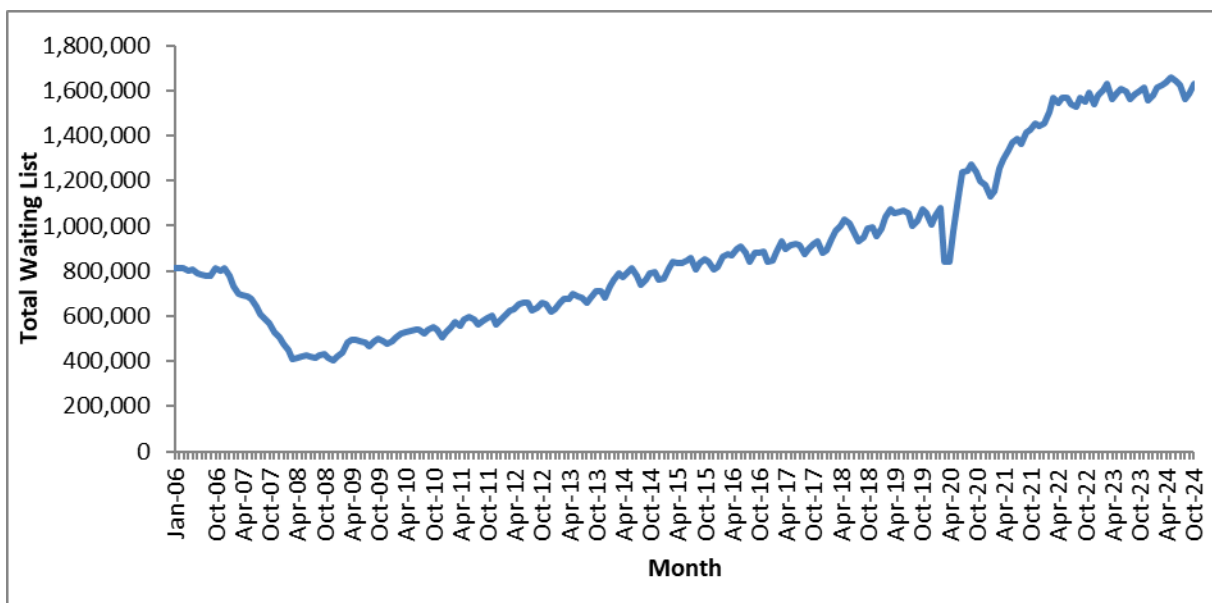
**Chart 2: Percentage of patients waiting 6+ weeks at month end for all tests
January 2006 to October 2024**



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.

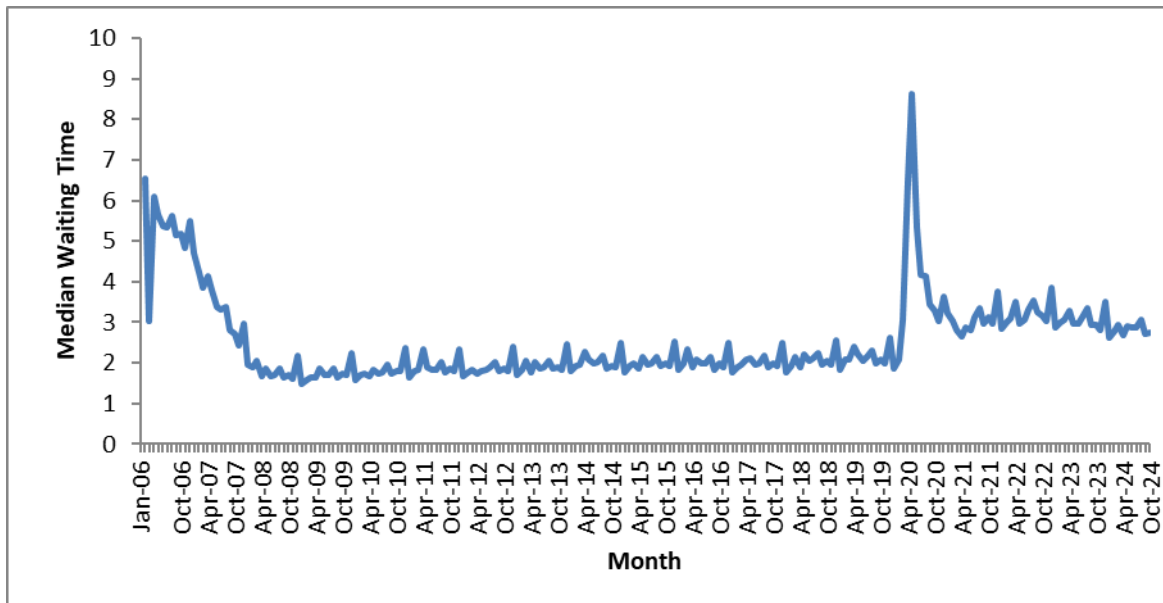
**Chart 3: Total number of patients waiting at month end for all tests
January 2006 to October 2024**



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 October 2024 was 2.7 weeks.

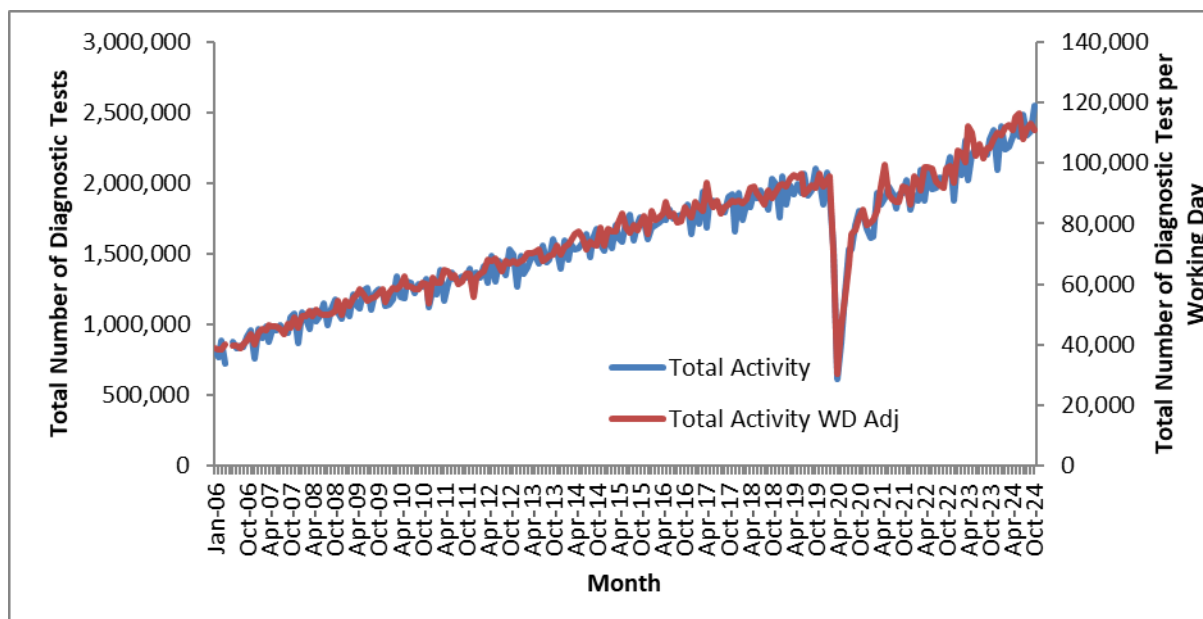
Chart 4: Median waiting time for all tests – January 2006 to October 2024



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.

**Chart 5: Total activity and working day adjusted activity per month for all tests
January 2006 to October 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 Barium Enema, where October 2024 activity was 7.9% higher per month than October 2023 (however this looks anomalous). (Table 1).

Table 1: Total activity, by test – October 2023 and October 2024

	Oct-23	Oct-24	Average monthly growth
MRI	373,771	412,150	0.8%
CT	705,725	759,456	0.6%
Non-obstetric Ultrasound	717,340	780,154	0.7%
Barium Enema	3,347	8,339	7.9%
Dexa Scan	46,350	51,824	0.9%
Audiology Assessments	96,430	122,512	2.0%
Echocardiography	158,703	179,929	1.1%
Electrophysiology	612	1,015	4.3%
Peripheral Neurophysiology	20,244	22,566	0.9%
Sleep Studies	15,509	21,209	2.6%
Urodynamics	5,815	6,726	1.2%
Colonoscopy	57,453	60,213	0.4%
Flexi Sigmoidoscopy	17,439	17,158	-0.1%
Cystoscopy	30,946	32,940	0.5%
Gastroscopy	62,346	68,618	0.8%
All Tests	2,312,030	2,544,809	0.8%

4 October 2024 Data

This section analyses the October 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 October 2024, there were a total of 337,200 patients waiting six weeks or more from referral for one of the 15 key diagnostic tests. This was 20.7% of the total number of patients waiting at the end of the month.
- 4.1.2. Compared with October 2023, the number of patients waiting six weeks or more decreased by 56,800, while the proportion of patients waiting six weeks or more decreased by 4.0 percentage points.
- 4.1.3. Compared with October 2023, the test with the largest increase in the proportion of patients waiting six weeks or more was Audiology Assessments, which increased by 5.1 percentage points. The test with the largest decrease was Dexa Scan, which decreased by 14.2 percentage points (Table 2).

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

	Oct-23	Oct-24	Difference (%age points)
MRI	18.0%	16.3%	-1.6
CT	15.3%	7.9%	-7.3
Non-obstetric Ultrasound	21.3%	17.1%	-4.2
Barium Enema	8.3%	9.1%	0.8
Dexa Scan	31.5%	17.4%	-14.2
Audiology Assessments	36.6%	41.7%	5.1
Echocardiography	35.3%	31.3%	-3.9
Electrophysiology	33.6%	23.0%	-10.6
Peripheral Neurophysiology	29.7%	31.1%	1.5
Sleep Studies	38.2%	35.5%	-2.7
Urodynamics	41.6%	40.8%	-0.8
Colonoscopy	35.7%	26.7%	-9.0
Flexi Sigmoidoscopy	40.5%	26.9%	-13.5
Cystoscopy	32.8%	25.4%	-7.5
Gastroscopy	31.0%	22.6%	-8.4
All Tests	24.7%	20.7%	-4.0

Note: Figures may differ due to rounding.

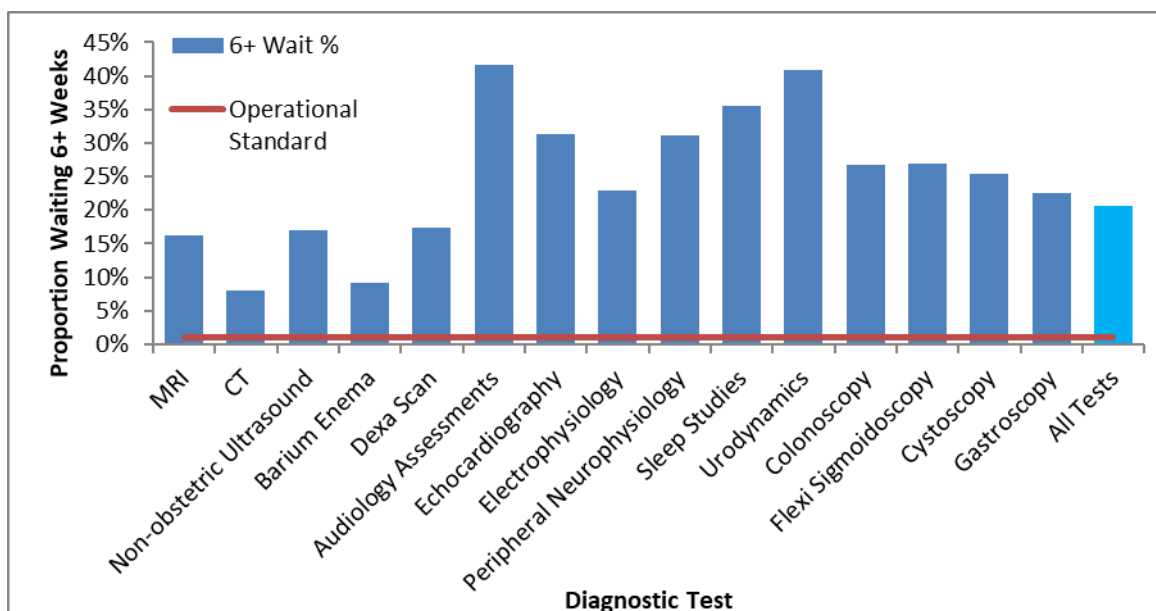
- 4.1.4. Compared with October 2023, the test type with the smallest change in the proportion of patients waiting six weeks or more was Physiological Measurement with a decrease of 0.1 percentage points. Imaging decreased by 4.5 percentage points, while Endoscopy decreased by 9.4 percentage points (Table 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 – October 2023 and October 2024

	Oct-23	Oct-24	Difference (%age points)
Imaging	19.9%	15.5%	-4.5
Physiological Measurement	35.5%	35.4%	-0.1
Endoscopy	34.4%	25.1%	-9.4
Total	24.7%	20.7%	-4.0

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 (7.9%), whilst the test with the highest proportion was Audiology Assessments (41.7%) (Chart 6).

Chart 6: Percentage of patients waiting 6+ weeks, by test – October 2024

- 4.1.6. 126 of the 134 acute trusts that submitted data for October 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 15.8% (Northwest region) and 31.3% (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.

Table 4: October 2024 Diagnostic Waiting Times and Activity by Regional Team*

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	52,191	17.6%	297,104	426,251	2.6
South West	29,965	19.8%	151,247	247,558	2.7
South East	48,564	21.0%	231,795	376,215	2.7
Midlands	73,991	22.9%	323,426	474,905	2.9
East of England	65,359	31.3%	209,005	287,237	3.5
North West	30,424	15.8%	192,414	338,800	2.4
North East and Yorkshire	36,130	16.3%	221,499	383,312	2.5
England	337,227	20.7%	1,630,141	2,534,278	2.7

*Includes all independent sector providers and excludes centrally commissioned.

4.2 Total Waiting List

4.2.1. At the end of October 2024 there were a total of 1,630,100 patients still waiting for a diagnostic test. This is an increase of 33,800 (2.1%) from October 2023.

4.2.2. The test with the largest waiting list was Non-obstetric Ultrasound, which accounted for 35.2% of the total waiting list, or 574,200 patients. The test with the smallest waiting list was Electrophysiology, which accounted for 0.02% of the total waiting list, or 300 patients (Table 5).

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

	Oct-23	Oct-24	Growth (%age)
MRI	292,806	311,382	6.3%
CT	180,793	169,009	-6.5%
Non-obstetric Ultrasound	559,929	574,207	2.5%
Barium Enema	2,445	2,992	22.4%
Dexa Scan	61,366	56,701	-7.6%
Audiology Assessments	89,602	114,773	28.1%
Echocardiography	155,942	153,769	-1.4%
Electrophysiology	584	335	-42.6%
Peripheral Neuropsychology	32,116	35,391	10.2%
Sleep Studies	25,940	31,454	21.3%
Urodynamics	8,652	9,306	7.6%
Colonoscopy	72,727	64,432	-11.4%
Flexi Sigmoidoscopy	26,076	21,240	-18.5%
Cystoscopy	26,141	22,480	-14.0%
Gastroscopy	61,267	62,670	2.3%
All Tests	1,596,386	1,630,141	2.1%

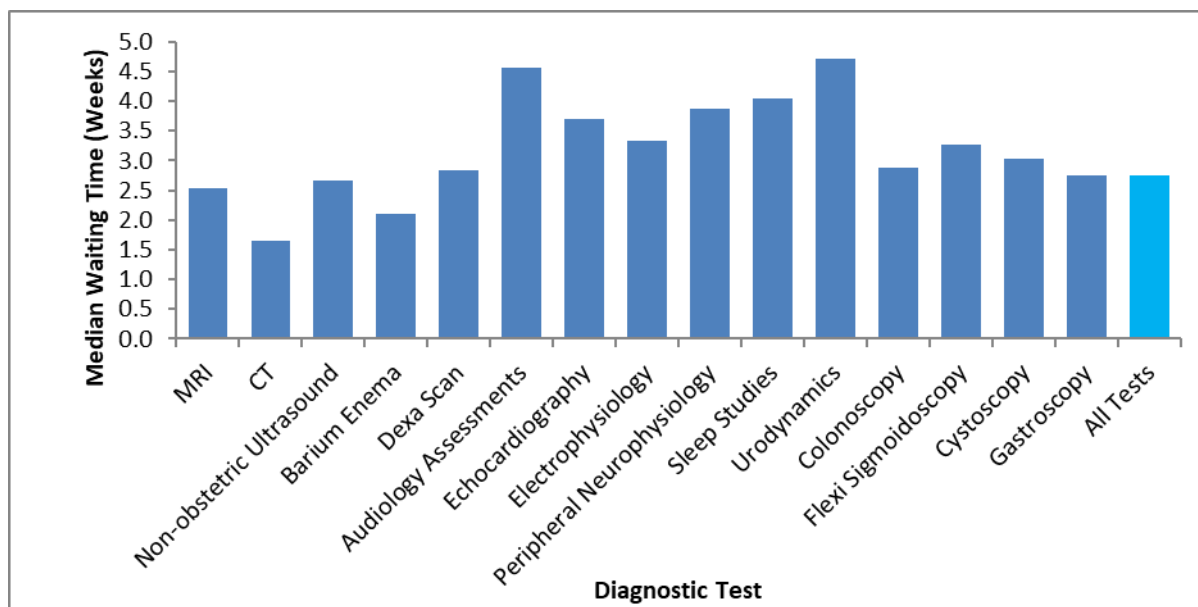
Note: Barium Enema is a test that should be replaced by Colonoscopy or CT Colonography, so the number of tests undertaken should be reducing.

4.2.3. The largest increase in the number of patients waiting by test has been for Audiology Assessments where the reported waiting list grew by 28.1% compared with October 2023.

4.3 Median Waiting Times

- 4.3.1. At the end of October 2024, the estimated median waiting time for all 15 diagnostic tests was 2.7 weeks from the time of referral, the same as the previous month. The test with the shortest median waiting time was CT at 1.6 weeks. The test with the longest median waiting time was Urodynamics at 4.7 weeks (Chart 7).

Chart 7: Median waiting time by test – October 2024



4.4 Total Activity

- 4.4.1. In total 2,544,800 of the 15 key diagnostic tests were performed during October 2024. This is an increase of 232,800 (10.1%) from October 2023, 5.3% when adjusted for working days (Table 6).
- 4.4.2. The test with the highest activity was Non Obstetric Ultrasound with 780,200 tests taking place. This accounted for 30.7% of all activity in October 2024. The test with the lowest activity was Electrophysiology with 1,000 tests taking place. This accounted for 0.04% of all activity this month.
- 4.4.3. The number of tests conducted over the last 12 months has increased by 8.1% from the same period last year, and remains 7.7% when adjusted for working days.

Accredited Official Statistics

Table 6: Total activity and growth, by test – October 2023 and October 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.

	Oct-24	Oct-23	YTD 24/25	YTD 23/24	Growth Oct 24 vs Oct 23	Growth YTD 24/25 vs YTD 23/24	Adjusted Growth Oct 24 vs Oct 23	Adjusted Growth YTD 24/25 vs YTD 23/24
MRI	412,150	373,771	2,763,342	2,511,574	10.3%	10.0%	5.5%	7.1%
CT	759,456	705,725	5,088,232	4,722,430	7.6%	7.7%	2.9%	4.9%
Non-obstetric Ultrasound	780,154	717,340	5,127,576	4,783,045	8.8%	7.2%	4.0%	4.3%
Barium Enema	8,339	3,347	31,854	22,303	149.1%	42.8%	138.3%	39.0%
Dexa Scan	51,824	46,350	344,884	314,063	11.8%	9.8%	6.9%	6.9%
Audiology Assessments	122,512	96,430	790,386	646,600	27.0%	22.2%	21.5%	19.0%
Echocardiography	179,929	158,703	1,157,441	1,046,008	13.4%	10.7%	8.4%	7.7%
Electrophysiology	1,015	612	5,251	4,173	65.8%	25.8%	58.6%	22.5%
Peripheral Neurophysiology	22,566	20,244	149,903	138,687	11.5%	8.1%	6.6%	5.2%
Sleep Studies	21,209	15,509	132,017	100,277	36.8%	31.7%	30.8%	28.1%
Urodynamics	6,726	5,815	44,444	38,085	15.7%	16.7%	10.6%	13.6%
Colonoscopy	60,213	57,453	392,776	385,234	4.8%	2.0%	0.2%	-0.8%
Flexi Sigmoidoscopy	17,158	17,439	115,914	119,077	-1.6%	-2.7%	-5.9%	-5.3%
Cystoscopy	32,940	30,946	216,732	194,164	6.4%	11.6%	1.8%	8.6%
Gastroscopy	68,618	62,346	456,066	424,609	10.1%	7.4%	5.3%	4.5%
All Tests	2,544,809	2,312,030	16,816,818	15,450,329	10.1%	8.8%	5.3%	5.9%

5 Community Diagnostic Centre October 2024 Data

This section analyses the October 2024 activity data for Community Diagnostic Centres (CDCs) and includes comparisons with the main October 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 October 2024, CDCs performed 280,400 diagnostic tests, 11.0% of the total. The most common were imaging tests and the highest percentage of imaging tests by CDCs was for Magnetic Resonance Imaging (15.9%), see Table 7.

Table 7: Total and CDC activity, by test – October 2024

Test	All providers	CDCs	% by CDC
Magnetic Resonance Imaging	412,150	65,389	15.9%
Computed Tomography	759,456	87,863	11.6%
Non-obstetric Ultrasound	780,154	89,431	11.5%
Barium Enema	8,339	18	0.2%
DEXA Scan	51,824	6,802	13.1%
Audiology - Audiology Assessments	122,512	2,120	1.7%
Cardiology - Echocardiography	179,929	16,448	9.1%
Cardiology - Electrophysiology	1,015	784	77.2%
Neurophysiology - Peripheral Neurophysiology	22,566	324	1.4%
Respiratory physiology - Sleep Studies	21,209	2,664	12.6%
Urodynamics - Pressures & Flows	6,726	305	4.5%
Colonoscopy	60,213	3,597	6.0%
Flexi Sigmoidoscopy	17,158	756	4.4%
Cystoscopy	32,940	500	1.5%
Gastroscopy	68,618	3,432	5.0%
All tests	2,544,809	280,433	11.0%

CDC Electrophysiology activity erroneously includes other physiology test types

5.1.2. In October 2024, the region with the highest diagnostic activity in CDCs was the Midlands, with 55,600 tests (11.7% of their total). The region with the highest percentage of tests by CDCs, was the South West, with 34,200 tests (13.8% of their total), see Table 8.

Table 8: Total and CDC activity, by commissioning region – October 2024

Test	All providers	CDCs	% by CDC
London	426,251	42,587	10.0%
South West	247,558	34,191	13.8%
South East	376,215	49,503	13.2%
Midlands	474,905	55,622	11.7%
East of England	287,237	26,726	9.3%
North West	338,800	38,219	11.3%
North East and Yorkshire	383,312	32,526	8.5%
England	2,544,809	280,433	11.0%

5.2 CDC data completeness

5.2.1. In October 2024, 164 CDC sites were invited to submit activity data and 160 are included in the activity counts (98% 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 October 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-times-activity-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 nhsengland.media@nhs.net

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