

NHS Diagnostic Waiting Times and Activity Data

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November 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 November 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 November 2024 was 321,800. This was 19.9% 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 November 2023 the total number of patients waiting six weeks or more decreased by 53,700 while the proportion of patients waiting six weeks or more decreased by 3.4 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 19.9% (November 2024) and 26.8% (December 2023).
- At the end of November 2024, the test with the smallest proportion of patients waiting six weeks or more was CT with 8.1%. The test with the highest proportion was Audiology Assessments, with 42.3% 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 2.6 weeks at the end of November 2024.
- There were 1,614,900 patients waiting for a key diagnostic test at the end of November 2024. This is an increase of 4,500 from November 2023.
- A total of 2,442,100 diagnostic tests were undertaken in November 2024. This is an increase of 69,500 from November 2023.

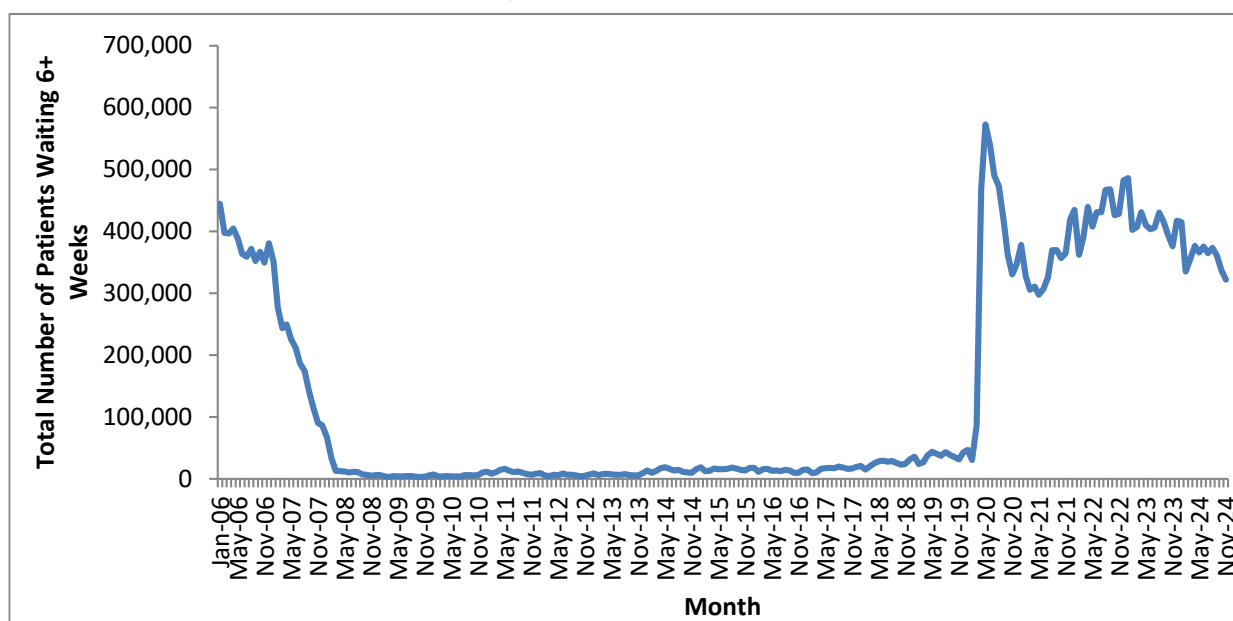
3 National Trends

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

3.1 6+ Week Waits

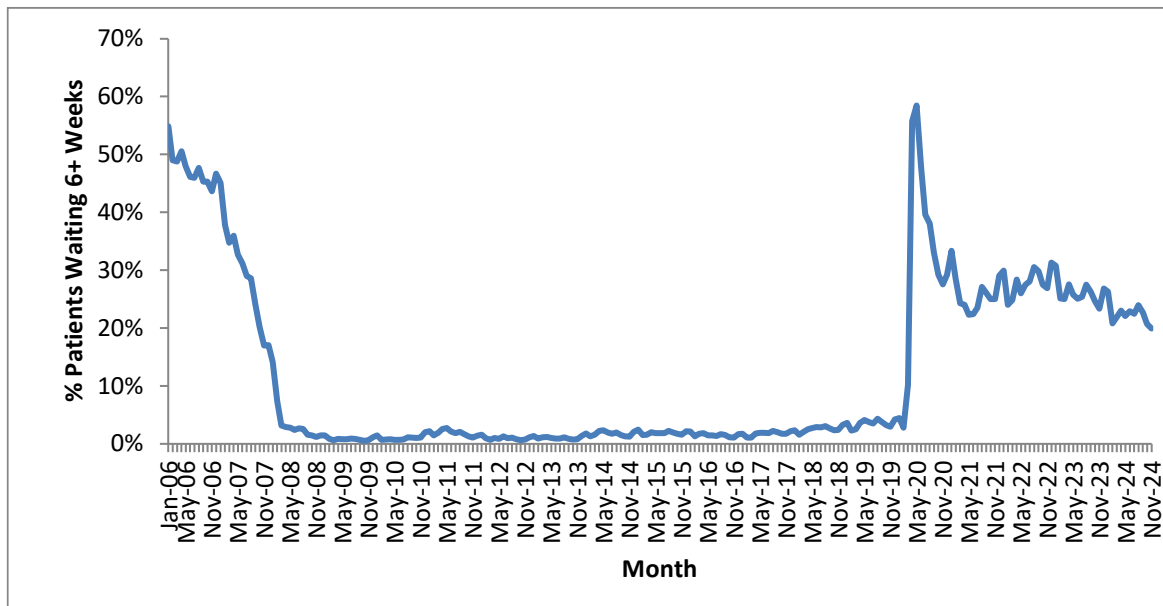
- 3.1.1. The total number of patients waiting six weeks or more dropped sharply between January 2007 and March 2008 (Chart 1), as Trusts worked towards the NHS Improvement Plan (June 2004) milestone that no one should wait six weeks or more for a diagnostic test by March 2008. Since March 2008 there 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 November 2024 there was a decrease of 15,500 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 November 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 19.9% (November 2024) and 26.8% (December 2023). The 1% operational standard was last met in November 2013.

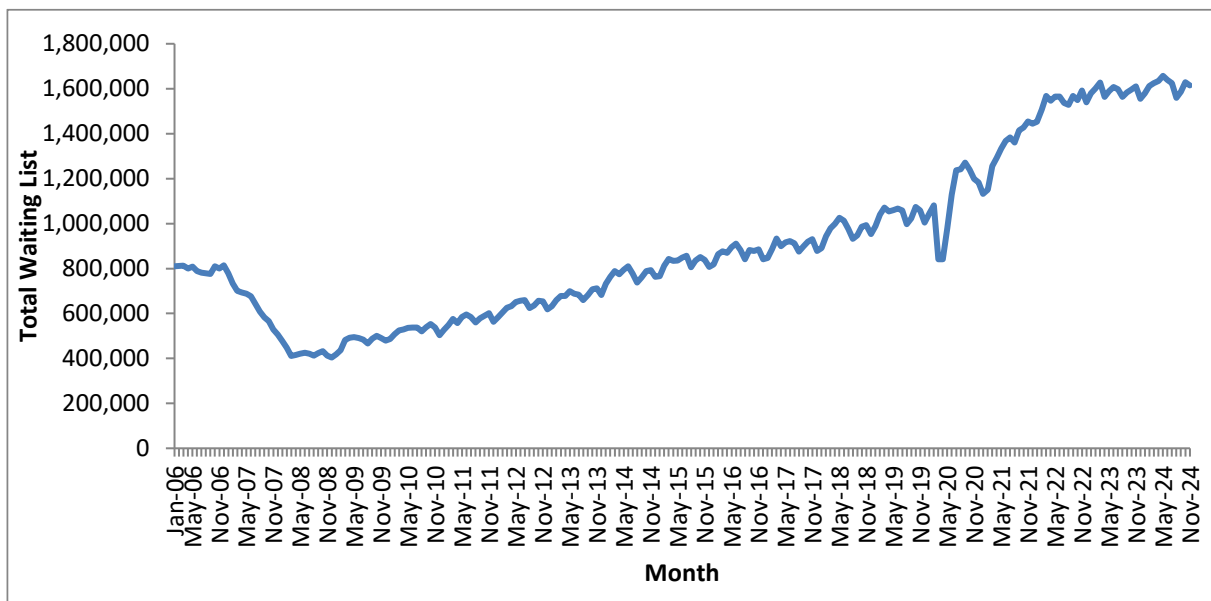
**Chart 2: Percentage of patients waiting 6+ weeks at month end for all tests
January 2006 to November 2024**



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.

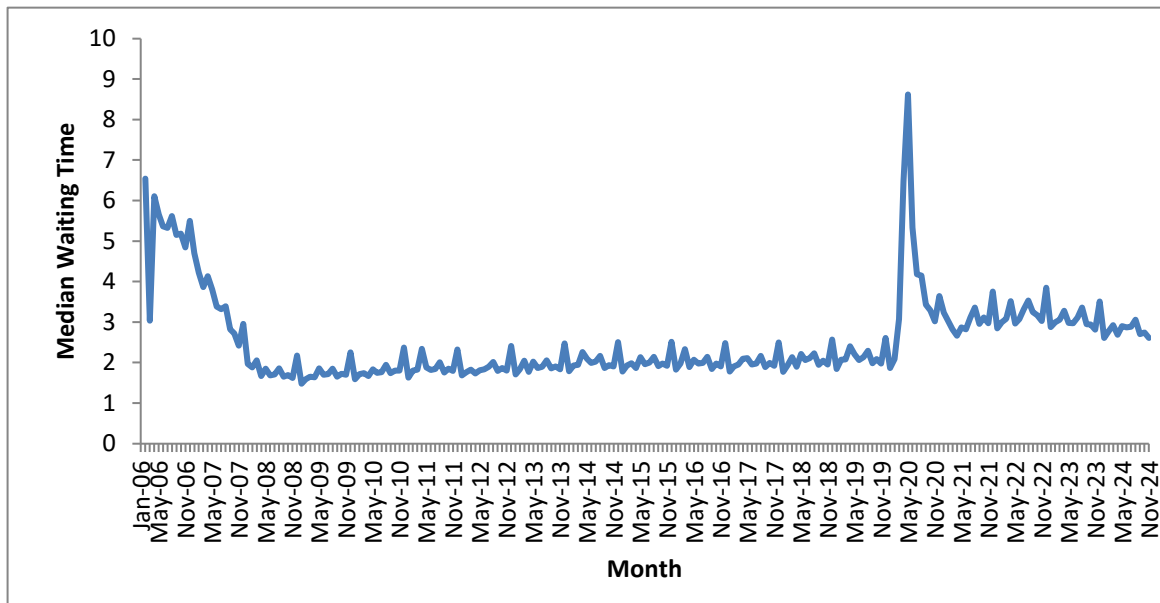
**Chart 3: Total number of patients waiting at month end for all tests
January 2006 to November 2024**



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 & November 2024). The median waiting time in November 2024 was 2.6 weeks.

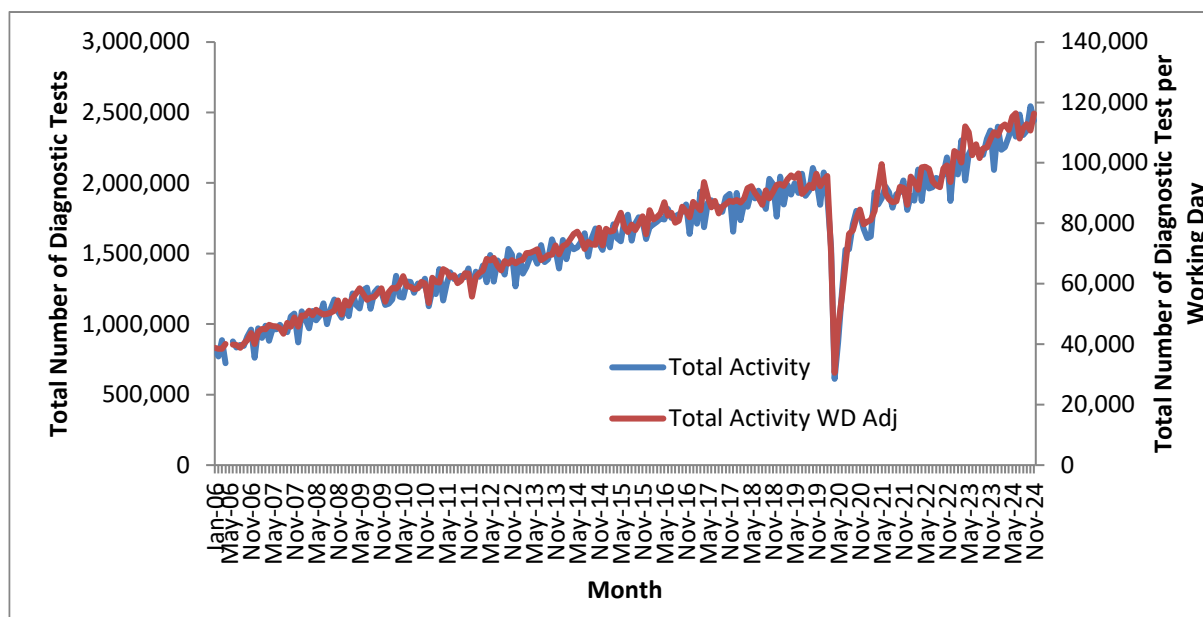
Chart 4: Median waiting time for all tests – January 2006 to November 2024



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 November 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 November 2024 activity was 1.7% higher per month than November 2023 (Table 1).

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

	Nov-23	Nov-24	Average monthly growth
MRI	374,927	400,862	0.6%
CT	702,841	731,325	0.3%
Non-obstetric Ultrasound	748,593	742,517	-0.1%
Barium Enema	3,812	3,973	0.3%
Dexa Scan	47,630	47,801	0.0%
Audiology Assessments	109,193	118,227	0.7%
Echocardiography	165,348	174,227	0.4%
Electrophysiology	603	727	1.6%
Peripheral Neurophysiology	22,158	23,009	0.3%
Sleep Studies	16,209	19,901	1.7%
Urodynamics	6,168	6,205	0.0%
Colonoscopy	60,226	58,511	-0.2%
Flexi Sigmoidoscopy	18,141	17,299	-0.4%
Cystoscopy	32,044	31,275	-0.2%
Gastroscopy	64,681	66,239	0.2%
All Tests	2,372,574	2,442,098	0.2%

4 November 2024 Data

This section analyses the November 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 November 2024, there were a total of 321,800 patients waiting six weeks or more from referral for one of the 15 key diagnostic tests. This was 19.9% of the total number of patients waiting at the end of the month.
- 4.1.2. Compared with November 2023, the number of patients waiting six weeks or more decreased by 53,700, while the proportion of patients waiting six weeks or more decreased by 3.4 percentage points.
- 4.1.3. Compared with November 2023, the test with the largest increase in the proportion of patients waiting six weeks or more was Audiology Assessments, which increased by 5.0 percentage points. The test with the largest decrease was Flexi Sigmoidoscopy, which decreased by 12.6 percentage points (Table 2).

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

	Nov-23	Nov-24	Difference (%age points)
MRI	17.1%	15.9%	-1.1
CT	14.4%	8.1%	-6.3
Non-obstetric Ultrasound	19.9%	16.5%	-3.4
Barium Enema	7.8%	10.5%	2.7
Dexa Scan	29.0%	18.8%	-10.1
Audiology Assessments	37.3%	42.3%	5.0
Echocardiography	33.6%	28.4%	-5.1
Electrophysiology	28.4%	23.3%	-5.1
Peripheral Neurophysiology	27.3%	31.9%	4.6
Sleep Studies	36.7%	33.0%	-3.7
Urodynamics	40.2%	40.9%	0.7
Colonoscopy	34.2%	25.5%	-8.6
Flexi Sigmoidoscopy	38.3%	25.7%	-12.6
Cystoscopy	29.9%	24.2%	-5.7
Gastroscopy	28.9%	21.8%	-7.1
All Tests	23.3%	19.9%	-3.4

Note: Figures may differ due to rounding.

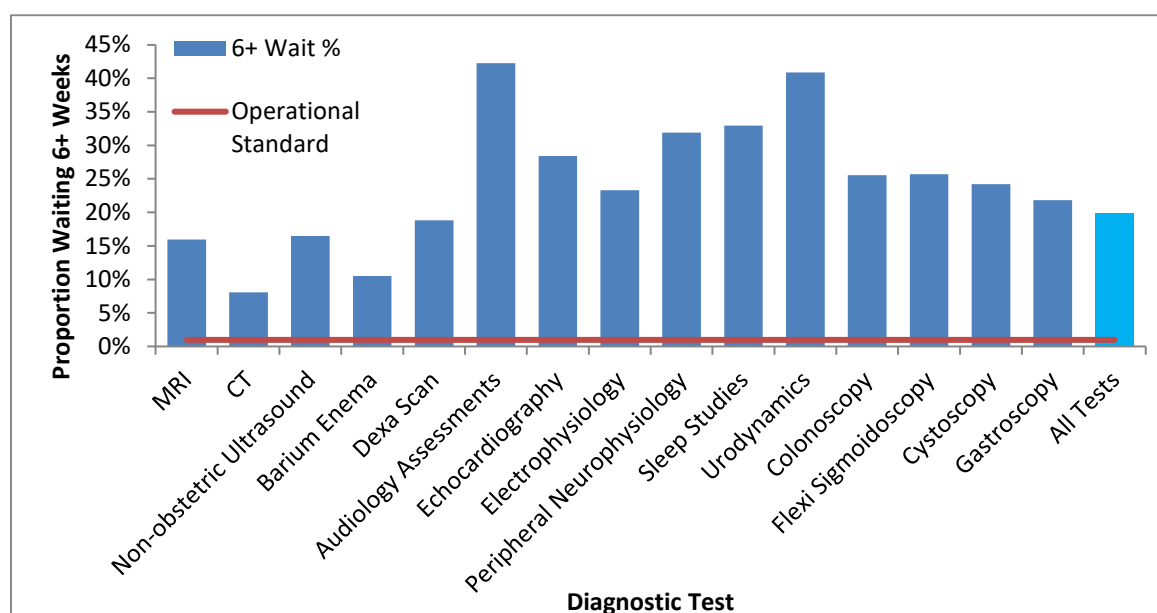
- 4.1.4. Compared with November 2023, the test type with the smallest change in the proportion of patients waiting six weeks or more was Physiological Measurement with a decrease of 0.3 percentage points. Imaging decreased by 3.5 percentage points, while Endoscopy decreased by 8.4 percentage points (Table 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 – November 2023 and November 2024

	Nov-23	Nov-24	Difference (%age points)
Imaging	18.6%	15.1%	-3.5
Physiological Measurement	34.4%	34.2%	-0.3
Endoscopy	32.4%	24.0%	-8.4
Total	23.3%	19.9%	-3.4

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 (8.1%), whilst the test with the highest proportion was Audiology Assessments (42.3%) (Chart 6).

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

- 4.1.6. 126 of the 134 acute trusts that submitted data for November 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 15.1% (Northwest region) and 29.5% (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: November 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	52,604	17.8%	294,972	409,473	2.6
South West	29,372	19.6%	150,064	234,236	2.6
South East	43,757	19.0%	229,956	371,552	2.5
Midlands	70,683	22.4%	315,814	456,494	2.8
East of England	60,862	29.5%	206,525	277,021	3.2
North West	28,683	15.1%	190,571	320,936	2.3
North East and Yorkshire	35,158	15.7%	223,527	362,901	2.4
England	321,773	19.9%	1,614,920	2,432,613	2.6

*Includes all independent sector providers and excludes centrally commissioned.

4.2 Total Waiting List

4.2.1. At the end of November 2024 there were a total of 1,614,900 patients still waiting for a diagnostic test. This is an increase of 4,500 (0.3%) from November 2023.

4.2.2. The test with the largest waiting list was Non-obstetric Ultrasound, which accounted for 34.9% of the total waiting list, or 562,900 patients. The test with the smallest waiting list was Electrophysiology, which accounted for 0.02% of the total waiting list, or 400 patients (Table 5).

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

	Nov-23	Nov-24	Growth (%age)
MRI	314,833	320,626	1.8%
CT	186,156	173,536	-6.8%
Non-obstetric Ultrasound	544,729	562,906	3.3%
Barium Enema	2,553	3,056	19.7%
Dexa Scan	60,688	56,316	-7.2%
Audiology Assessments	92,346	109,667	18.8%
Echocardiography	155,519	145,118	-6.7%
Electrophysiology	690	352	-49.0%
Peripheral Neurophysiology	32,315	34,668	7.3%
Sleep Studies	27,657	29,620	7.1%
Urodynamics	8,497	9,323	9.7%
Colonoscopy	71,207	62,906	-11.7%
Flexi Sigmoidoscopy	25,564	21,334	-16.5%
Cystoscopy	25,886	22,986	-11.2%
Gastroscopy	61,755	62,506	1.2%
All Tests	1,610,395	1,614,920	0.3%

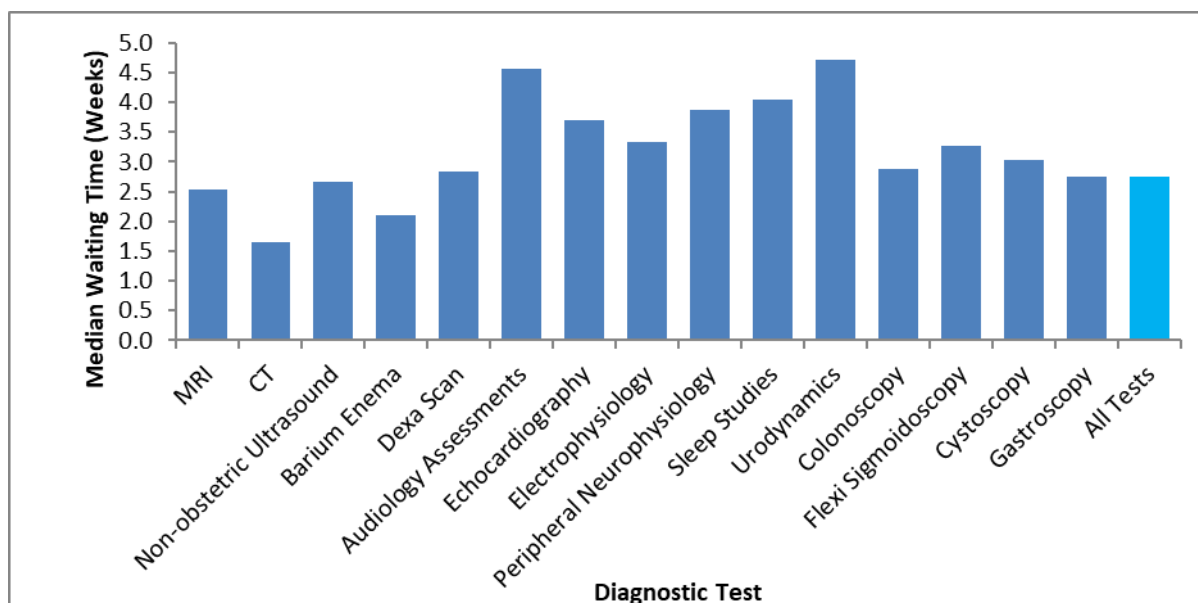
Note: Barium Enema is a test that should be replaced by Colonoscopy or CT Colonography, so the number of tests undertaken should be reducing.

- 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 18.8% compared with November 2023.

4.3 Median Waiting Times

- 4.3.1. At the end of November 2024, the estimated median waiting time for all 15 diagnostic tests was 2.6 weeks from the time of referral, down from 2.7 in 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 Audiology Assessments at 4.7 weeks (Chart 7).

Chart 7: Median waiting time by test – November 2024



4.4 Total Activity

- 4.4.1. In total 2,442,100 of the 15 key diagnostic tests were performed during November 2024. This is an increase of 69,500 (2.9%) from November 2023, 7.8% when adjusted for working days (Table 6).
- 4.4.2. The test with the highest activity was Non Obstetric Ultrasound with 742,500 tests taking place. This accounted for 30.4% of all activity in November 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 7.6% from the same period last year, and remains 7.6% when adjusted for working days.

Accredited Official Statistics

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

	Nov-24	Nov-23	YTD 24/25	YTD 23/24	Growth Nov 24 vs Nov 23	Growth YTD 24/25 vs YTD 23/24	Adjusted Growth Nov 24 vs Nov 23	Adjusted Growth YTD 24/25 vs YTD 23/24
MRI	400,862	374,927	3,164,204	2,886,501	6.9%	9.6%	12.0%	7.7%
CT	731,325	702,841	5,819,557	5,425,271	4.1%	7.3%	9.0%	5.4%
Non-obstetric Ultrasound	742,517	748,593	5,870,093	5,531,638	-0.8%	6.1%	3.9%	4.3%
Barium Enema	3,973	3,812	35,827	26,115	4.2%	37.2%	9.2%	34.8%
Dexa Scan	47,801	47,630	392,685	361,693	0.4%	8.6%	5.1%	6.7%
Audiology Assessments	118,227	109,193	908,613	755,793	8.3%	20.2%	13.4%	18.1%
Echocardiography	174,227	165,348	1,331,668	1,211,356	5.4%	9.9%	10.4%	8.0%
Electrophysiology	727	603	5,978	4,776	20.6%	25.2%	26.3%	23.0%
Peripheral Neurophysiology	23,009	22,158	172,912	160,845	3.8%	7.5%	8.8%	5.6%
Sleep Studies	19,901	16,209	151,918	116,486	22.8%	30.4%	28.6%	28.1%
Urodynamics	6,205	6,168	50,649	44,253	0.6%	14.5%	5.4%	12.4%
Colonoscopy	58,511	60,226	451,287	445,460	-2.8%	1.3%	1.8%	-0.5%
Flexi Sigmoidoscopy	17,299	18,141	133,213	137,218	-4.6%	-2.9%	-0.1%	-4.6%
Cystoscopy	31,275	32,044	248,007	226,208	-2.4%	9.6%	2.2%	7.7%
Gastroscopy	66,239	64,681	522,305	489,290	2.4%	6.7%	7.3%	4.9%
All Tests	2,442,098	2,372,574	19,258,916	17,822,903	2.9%	8.1%	7.8%	6.2%

5 Community Diagnostic Centre November 2024 Data

This section analyses the November 2024 activity data for Community Diagnostic Centres (CDCs) and includes comparisons with the main November 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 November 2024, CDCs performed 272,200 diagnostic tests, 11.1% of the total. The most common were imaging tests and the highest percentage of imaging tests by CDCs was for Magnetic Resonance Imaging (16.7%), see Table 7.

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

Test	All providers	CDCs	% by CDC
Magnetic Resonance Imaging	400,862	67,041	16.7%
Computed Tomography	731,325	84,177	11.5%
Non-obstetric Ultrasound	742,517	84,944	11.4%
Barium Enema	3,973	13	0.3%
DEXA Scan	47,801	6,426	13.4%
Audiology - Audiology Assessments	118,227	2,087	1.8%
Cardiology - Echocardiography	174,227	15,445	8.9%
Cardiology - Electrophysiology	727	776	106.7%
Neurophysiology - Peripheral Neurophysiology	23,009	244	1.1%
Respiratory physiology - Sleep Studies	19,901	2,864	14.4%
Urodynamics - Pressures & Flows	6,205	293	4.7%
Colonoscopy	58,511	3,485	6.0%
Flexi Sigmoidoscopy	17,299	819	4.7%
Cystoscopy	31,275	556	1.8%
Gastroscopy	66,239	3,072	4.6%
All tests	2,442,098	272,242	11.1%

CDC Electrophysiology activity erroneously includes other physiology test types

5.1.2. In November 2024, the region with the highest diagnostic activity in CDCs was the Midlands , with 56,200 tests (12.3% of their total). The region with the highest percentage of tests by CDCs, was the South West, with 32,700 tests (14.0% of their total), see Table 8.

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

Test	All providers	CDCs	% by CDC
London	409,473	41,241	10.1%
South West	234,236	32,723	14.0%
South East	371,552	41,093	11.1%
Midlands	456,494	56,182	12.3%
East of England	277,021	27,686	10.0%
North West	320,936	39,175	12.2%
North East and Yorkshire	362,901	33,380	9.2%
England	2,442,098	272,242	11.1%

5.2 CDC data completeness

5.2.1. In November 2024, 164 CDC sites were invited to submit activity data and 159 are included in the activity counts (97% 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 November 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.diagnosticsdata@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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