

# NHS Diagnostic Waiting Times and Activity Data

# **NHS Diagnostic Waiting Times and Activity Data**

## **May 2025 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 May 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 May 2025 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 May 2025 was 376,700. This was 22.0% 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 May 2024 the total number of patients waiting six weeks or more increased by 10,600 while the proportion of patients waiting six weeks or more stayed the same at 22.0%.
- In the last 12 months, the proportion of patients waiting six weeks or more at the end of a month has varied between 17.5% (February 2025) and 24.0% (August 2024).
- At the end of May 2025, the test with the smallest proportion of patients waiting six weeks or more was CT with 11.2%. The test with the highest proportion was Audiology Assessments, with 42.6% 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 2.8 weeks at the end of May 2025.
- There were 1,709,100 patients waiting for a key diagnostic test at the end of May 2025. This is an increase of 48,700 from May 2024.
- A total of 2,465,200 diagnostic tests were undertaken in May 2025. This is an increase of 21,100 from May 2024.

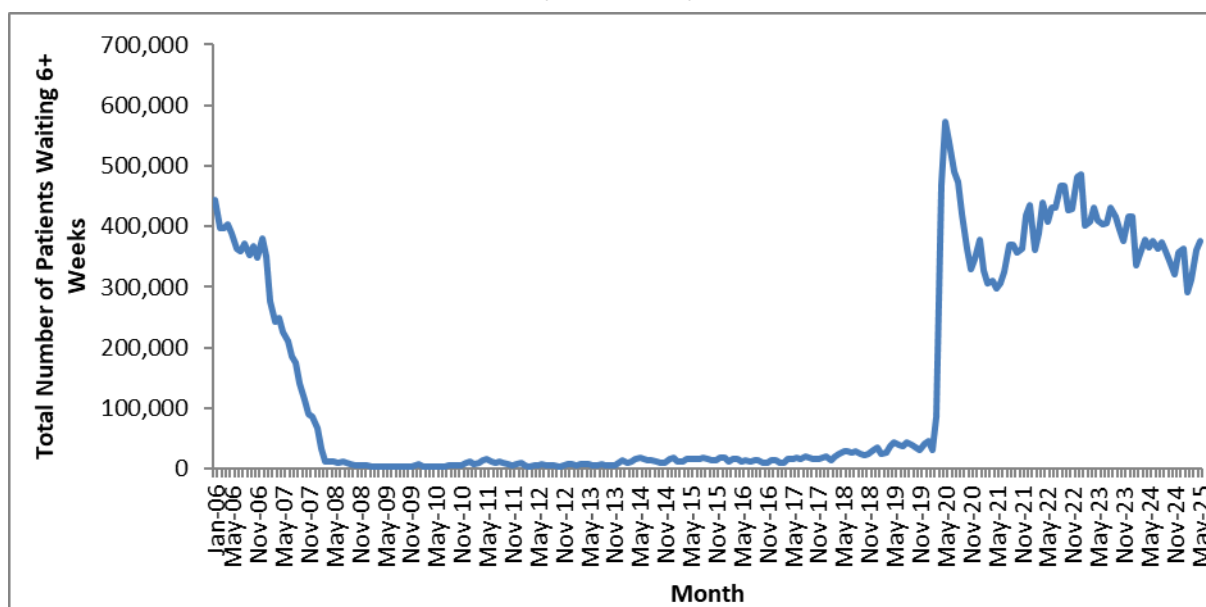
### 3 National Trends

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

#### 3.1 6+ Week Waits

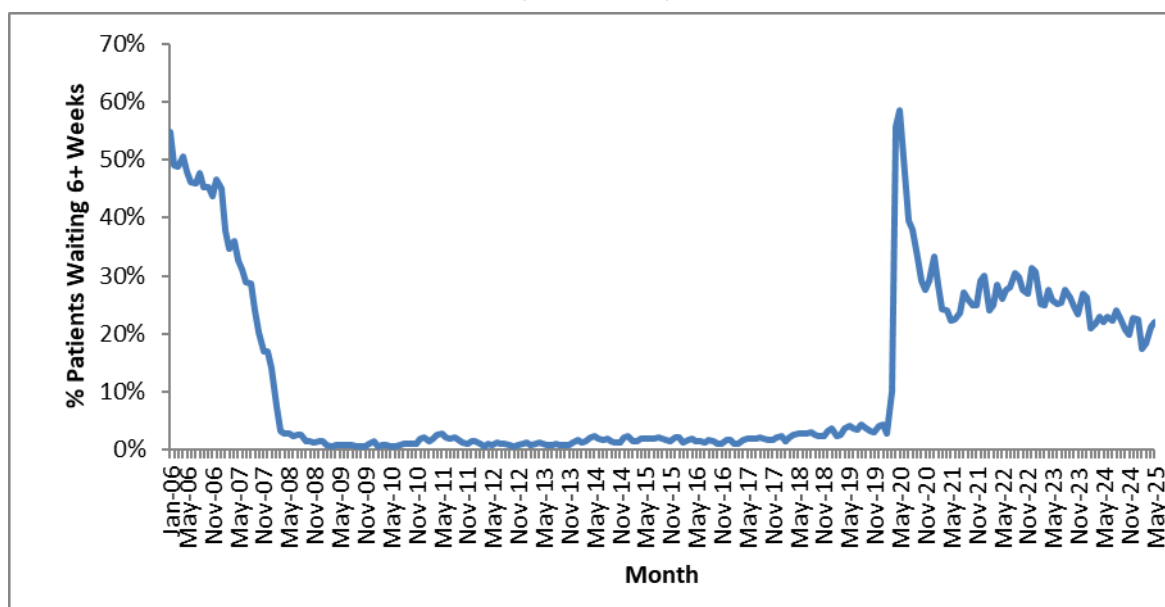
- 3.1.1. The total number of patients waiting six weeks or more dropped sharply between January 2007 and March 2008 (Chart 1), as Trusts worked towards the NHS Improvement Plan (June 2004) milestone that no one should wait six weeks or more for a diagnostic test by March 2008. Since March 2008 there 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 May 2025 there was an increase of 16,300 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 May 2025**



- 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 17.5% (February 2025) and 24.0% (August 2024). The 1% operational standard was last met in November 2013.

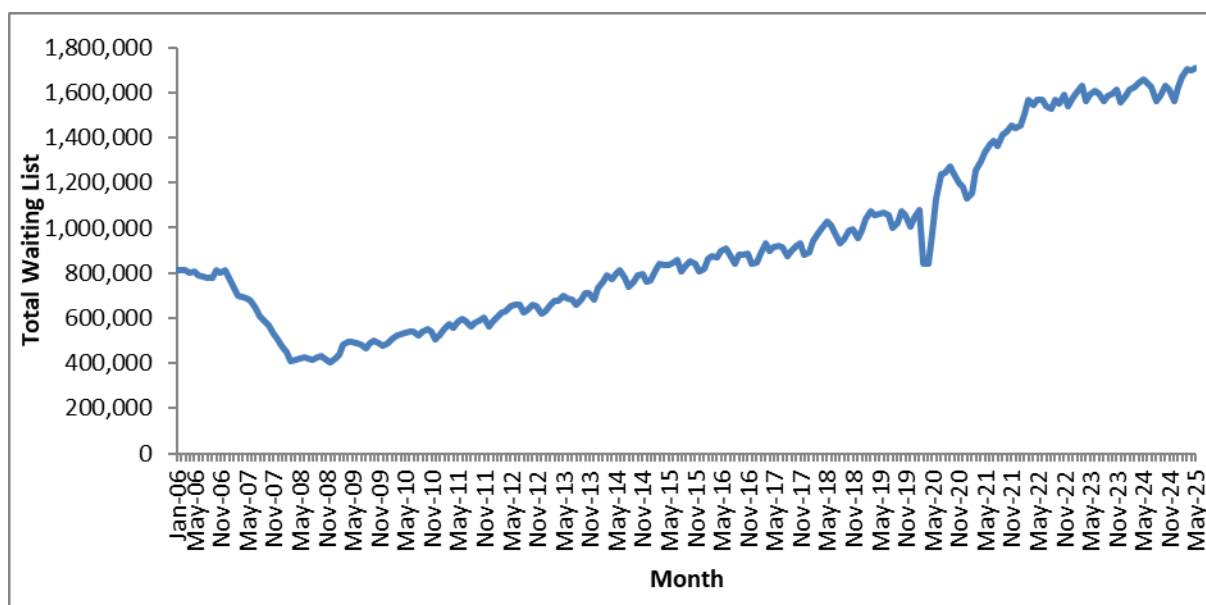
**Chart 2: Percentage of patients waiting 6+ weeks at month end for all tests  
January 2006 to May 2025**



## 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 May 2025**

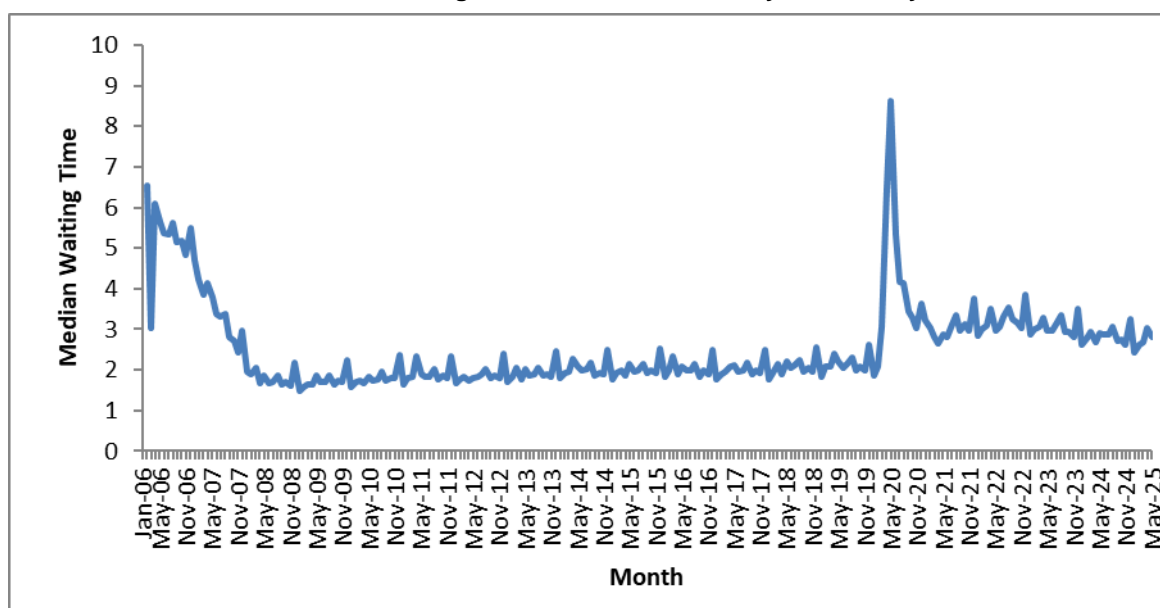




### 3.3 Median Waiting Time

- 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 3.2 weeks (December 2024) and a low of 2.4 weeks (January 2025). The median waiting time in May 2025 was 2.8 weeks.

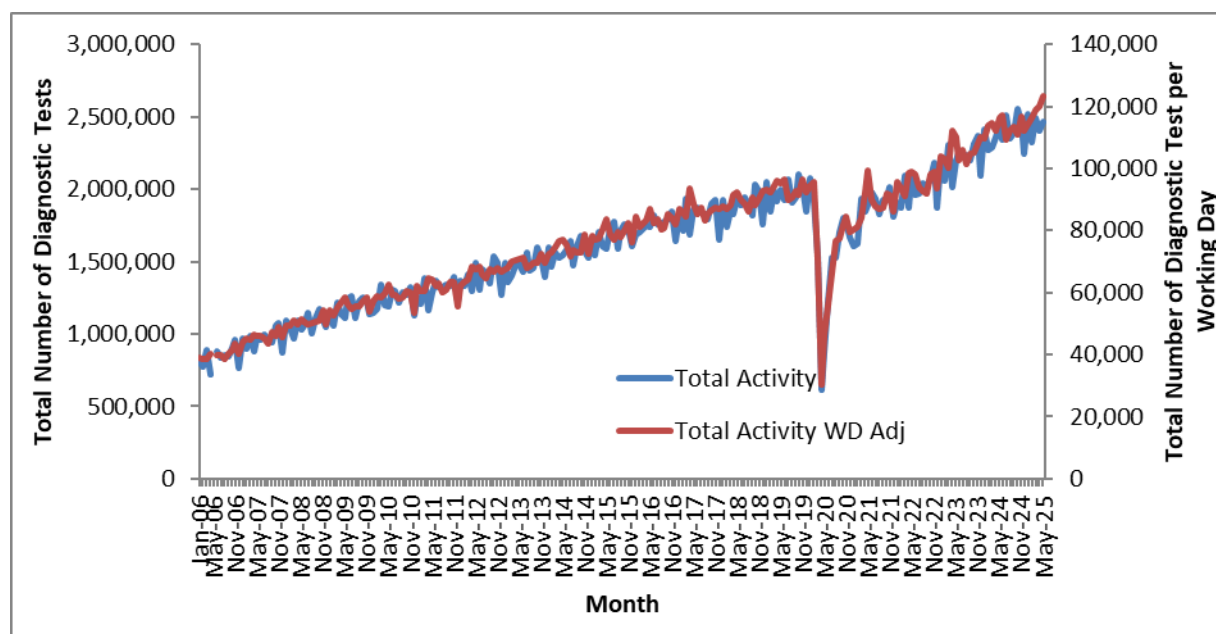
Chart 4: Median waiting time for all tests – January 2006 to May 2025



### 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 May 2025**



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 tests with the largest proportional increase in activity were MRI and Sleep studies, where May 2025 activity was 0.4% higher per month than May 2024 (Table 1).

**Table 1: Total activity, by test – May 2024 and May 2025**

	May-24	May-25	Average monthly growth
MRI	397,889	418,948	0.4%
CT	745,585	763,613	0.2%
Non-obstetric Ultrasound	743,705	742,442	0.0%
Barium Enema	4,157	4,258	0.2%
Dexa Scan	49,304	49,837	0.1%
Audiology Assessments	112,956	115,836	0.2%
Echocardiography	166,254	163,115	-0.2%
Electrophysiology	628	103	-14.0%
Peripheral Neurophysiology	21,360	20,193	-0.5%
Sleep Studies	18,945	19,852	0.4%
Urodynamics	6,383	5,700	-0.9%
Colonoscopy	59,108	53,646	-0.8%
Flexi Sigmoidoscopy	17,396	15,222	-1.1%
Cystoscopy	32,281	30,246	-0.5%
Gastroscopy	68,142	62,173	-0.8%
<b>All Tests</b>	<b>2,444,093</b>	<b>2,465,184</b>	<b>0.1%</b>

## 4 May 2025 Data

This section analyses the May 2025 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 May 2025, there were a total of 376,700 patients waiting six weeks or more from referral for one of the 15 key diagnostic tests. This was 22.0% of the total number of patients waiting at the end of the month.
- 4.1.2. Compared with May 2024, the number of patients waiting six weeks or more increased by 10,600, while the proportion of patients waiting six weeks or more stayed the same at 22.0%.
- 4.1.3. Compared with May 2024, the test with the largest increase in the proportion of patients waiting six weeks or more was Barium Enema, which increased by 13.4 percentage points. The test with the largest decrease was Dexa Scan, which decreased by 9.2 percentage points (Table 2).

**Table 2: Proportion of patients waiting 6+ weeks, by test – May 2024 and May 2025**

	May-24	May-25	Difference (%age points)
MRI	19.4%	15.8%	-3.6
CT	11.5%	11.2%	-0.3
Non-obstetric Ultrasound	18.2%	20.4%	2.1
Barium Enema	6.7%	20.2%	13.4
Dexa Scan	23.6%	14.4%	-9.2
Audiology Assessments	40.1%	42.6%	2.5
Echocardiography	30.0%	30.0%	0.0
Electrophysiology	39.0%	33.9%	-5.2
Peripheral Neurophysiology	30.5%	36.5%	6.0
Sleep Studies	34.6%	32.9%	-1.7
Urodynamics	41.1%	40.6%	-0.5
Colonoscopy	24.9%	26.8%	1.9
Flexi Sigmoidoscopy	32.8%	28.6%	-4.2
Cystoscopy	27.5%	27.2%	-0.3
Gastroscopy	25.4%	25.1%	-0.3
<b>All Tests</b>	<b>22.0%</b>	<b>22.0%</b>	<b>0.0</b>

Note: Figures may differ due to rounding.

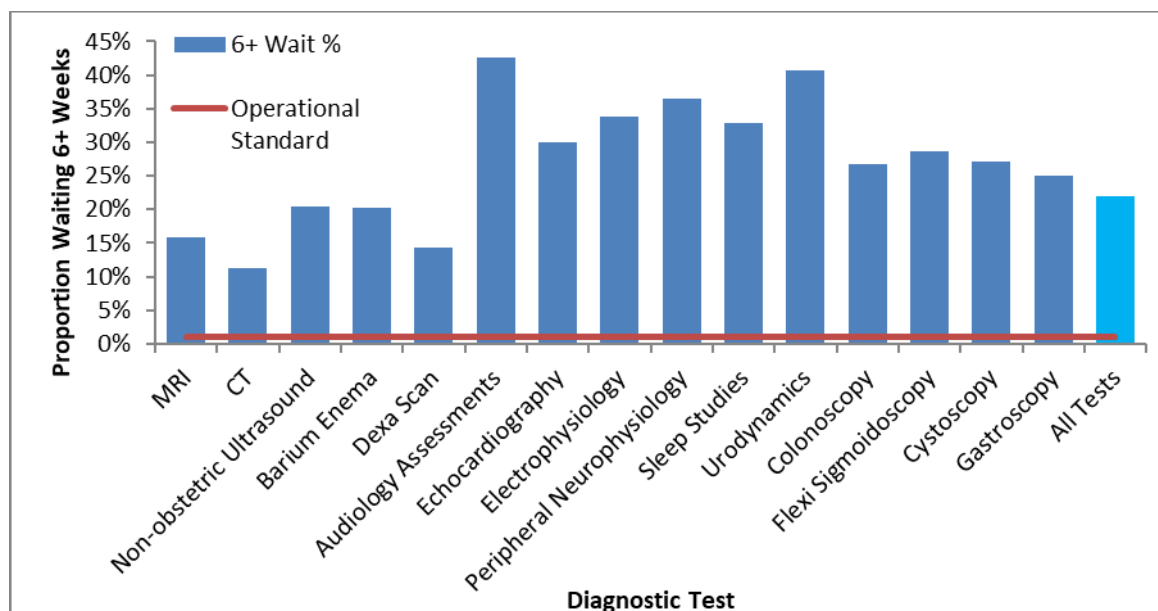
- 4.1.4. Compared with May 2024, the test type with the smallest change in the proportion of patients waiting six weeks or more was Endoscopy with a decrease of 0.1 percentage points. Physiological Measurement increased by 1.3 percentage points and Imaging decreased by 0.3 percentage points (Table 3). 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 – May 2024 and May 2025**

	May-24	May-25	Difference (%age points)
Imaging	17.8%	17.4%	-0.3
Physiological Measurement	34.0%	35.3%	1.3
Endoscopy	26.5%	26.4%	-0.1
<b>Total</b>	<b>22.0%</b>	<b>22.0%</b>	<b>0.0</b>

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 (11.2%), whilst the test with the highest proportion was Audiology Assessments (42.6%) (Chart 6).

**Chart 6: Percentage of patients waiting 6+ weeks, by test – May 2025**

- 4.1.6. 125 of the 133 acute trusts that submitted data for May 2025 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 15.3% (Northwest region) and 30.0% (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: May 2025 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	64,873	21.0%	308,732	404,428	2.7
South West	33,715	21.7%	155,509	237,361	2.8
South East	50,237	20.6%	244,332	373,982	2.7
Midlands	84,253	25.5%	329,897	464,444	3.0
East of England	64,019	30.0%	213,505	279,684	3.4
North West	31,445	15.3%	205,529	329,704	2.5
North East and Yorkshire	47,357	19.2%	247,215	364,334	2.6
<b>England</b>	<b>376,669</b>	<b>22.0%</b>	<b>1,709,088</b>	<b>2,465,184</b>	<b>2.8</b>

\*Includes all independent sector providers and excludes centrally commissioned.

## 4.2 Total Waiting List

4.2.1. At the end of May 2025 there were a total of 1,709,100 patients still waiting for a diagnostic test. This is an increase of 48,700 (2.9%) from May 2024.

4.2.2. The test with the largest waiting list was Non-obstetric Ultrasound, which accounted for 36.0% of the total waiting list, or 615,900 patients. The test with the smallest waiting list was Electrophysiology, which accounted for 0.03% of the total waiting list, or 500 patients (Table 5).

Table 5: Total number of patients waiting at month end, by test – May 2024 and May 2025

	May-24	May-25	Growth (%age)
MRI	318,266	323,178	1.5%
CT	179,333	179,892	0.3%
Non-obstetric Ultrasound	580,255	615,871	6.1%
Barium Enema	2,836	3,661	29.1%
Dexa Scan	61,433	55,014	-10.4%
Audiology Assessments	110,237	112,339	1.9%
Echocardiography	162,082	159,558	-1.6%
Electrophysiology	853	484	-43.3%
Peripheral Neuropsychology	35,728	36,934	3.4%
Sleep Studies	30,935	30,200	-2.4%
Urodynamics	8,708	9,344	7.3%
Colonoscopy	61,707	67,485	9.4%
Flexi Sigmoidoscopy	22,438	22,386	-0.2%
Cystoscopy	23,048	24,459	6.1%
Gastroscopy	62,555	68,283	9.2%
<b>All Tests</b>	<b>1,660,414</b>	<b>1,709,088</b>	<b>2.9%</b>

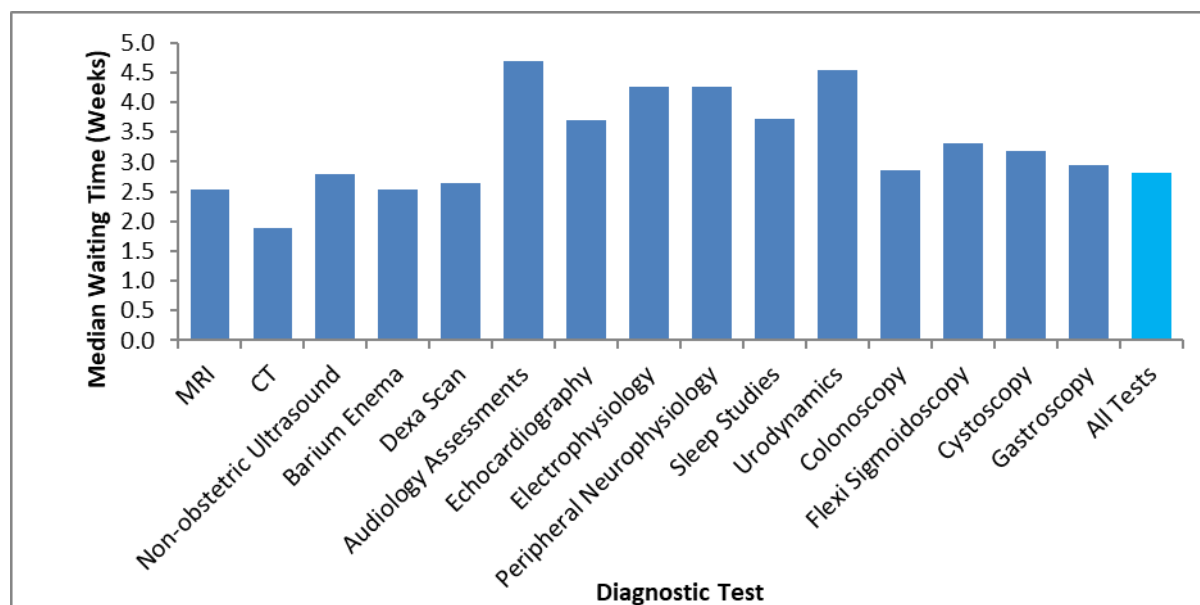
Note: Barium Enema is a test that should be replaced by Colonoscopy or CT Colonography, so the number of tests undertaken should be reducing.

- 4.2.3. The largest proportional increase in the number of patients waiting by test has been for Barium Enema where the reported waiting list grew by 29.1% compared with May 2024.

### 4.3 Median Waiting Times

- 4.3.1. At the end of May 2025, the estimated median waiting time for all 15 diagnostic tests was 2.8 weeks from the time of referral, down from 3.0 in the previous month. The test with the shortest median waiting time was CT at 1.9 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 – May 2025



### 4.4 Total Activity

- 4.4.1. In total 2,465,200 of the 15 key diagnostic tests were performed during May 2025. This is an increase of 21,100 (0.9%) from May 2024, which is 5.9% when adjusted for working days (Table 6).
- 4.4.2. The test with the highest activity was CT with 763,600 tests taking place. This accounted for 31.0% of all activity in May 2025. The test with the lowest activity was Electrophysiology with 100 tests taking place. This accounted for 0.00% of all activity this month.
- 4.4.3. The number of tests conducted over the last 12 months has increased by 5.8% from the same period last year, 6.2% when adjusted for working days.

## Accredited Official Statistics

**Table 6: Total activity and growth, by test – May 2024 and May 2025**

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

	May-25	May-24	YTD 25/26	YTD 24/25	Growth May 25 vs May 24	Growth YTD 25/26 vs YTD 24/25	Adjusted Growth May 25 vs May 24	Adjusted Growth YTD 25/26 vs YTD 24/25
MRI	418,948	397,889	827,485	779,554	5.3%	6.1%	10.6%	11.5%
CT	763,613	745,585	1,510,348	1,459,167	2.4%	3.5%	7.5%	8.7%
Non-obstetric Ultrasound	742,442	743,705	1,454,408	1,460,117	-0.2%	-0.4%	4.8%	4.6%
Barium Enema	4,258	4,157	8,221	8,271	2.4%	-0.6%	7.6%	4.4%
Dexa Scan	49,837	49,304	98,633	97,330	1.1%	1.3%	6.1%	6.4%
Audiology Assessments	115,836	112,956	228,976	224,039	2.5%	2.2%	7.7%	7.3%
Echocardiography	163,115	166,254	326,013	329,996	-1.9%	-1.2%	3.0%	3.7%
Electrophysiology	103	628	413	1,316	-83.6%	-68.6%	-82.8%	-67.0%
Peripheral Neurophysiology	20,193	21,360	41,323	42,539	-5.5%	-2.9%	-0.7%	2.0%
Sleep Studies	19,852	18,945	39,668	37,493	4.8%	5.8%	10.0%	11.1%
Urodynamics	5,700	6,383	11,880	12,944	-10.7%	-8.2%	-6.2%	-3.6%
Colonoscopy	53,646	59,108	105,157	115,825	-9.2%	-9.2%	-4.7%	-4.7%
Flexi Sigmoidoscopy	15,222	17,396	29,765	34,496	-12.5%	-13.7%	-8.1%	-9.4%
Cystoscopy	30,246	32,281	59,504	64,418	-6.3%	-7.6%	-1.6%	-3.0%
Gastroscopy	62,173	68,142	123,001	133,347	-8.8%	-7.8%	-4.2%	-3.1%
<b>All Tests</b>	<b>2,465,184</b>	<b>2,444,093</b>	<b>4,864,795</b>	<b>4,800,852</b>	<b>0.9%</b>	<b>1.3%</b>	<b>5.9%</b>	<b>6.4%</b>

## 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 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](#).

### 5.2 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 May 2024 for the months January 2022 through to April 2023.

### 5.3 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.](#)

### 5.4 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.

## **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.diagnosticsdata@nhs.net](mailto:england.diagnosticsdata@nhs.net)

## **5.6 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>

## **5.7 Additional Information**

[Full details of diagnostics data for individual organisations are available here.](#)

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