

Data Quality and Methods

Completeness

Cancer Waiting Times (CWT) is a mandatory collection which all NHS Services¹ must submit to NHS England monthly via the Strategic Data Collection Service (SDCS). On the rare occasion that a provider submits either a partial return (less than 100% of data) or no return, this is highlighted in the provisional monthly release. For those who have missed or made a partial submission the stats team contact providers immediately to help them. Every six months, providers are able to submit revised data to cover any partial or missing returns or rectify any issue which could impact the final data. We publish the revised data covering the relevant half of the previous financial year as soon as is possible within our publication schedule².

Each month, we publish a statistical release³ containing the headline figures for each of the three standards. Additionally, it contains details of those providers who have either: been identified as missing; making a partial submission or have notified us of an issue relating to the number of records submitted. We also provide an estimate of the impact of these data quality issues on the number of records included in the statistics for the operational standards⁴ were providers to choose to submit a revised return. We also include an estimate of the resulting average impact on performance across the 3 standards.

We have analysed the summaries from publications in 2024/25 and, on average each month, we highlighted less than 5 providers whose submission may contain an issue relating to the activity for one of the three standards. We estimated the resulting overall impact on performance to be minimal – up to 0.2%.

¹ All NHS Providers delivering cancer outpatient, cancer screening or cancer treatment services and Contracted independent sector providers.

² [Statistics » 12 months statistics calendar](#)

³ [Cancer-Waiting-Times-Statistical-Release-July-2025-Provider-based-Provisional.pdf](#)

⁴ We also include the estimated impact on Urgent Suspected Cancer Referrals Seen at a First Outpatient Attendance and Urgent Breast Symptomatic Referrals Seen at a First



Coverage

It has been long recognised by producers of Cancer Statistics that around 80% of patients are included in both the National Disease Registration Service (NDRS)' Cancer DRS registration⁵ and NHS England's Cancer waiting time datasets. This has also been the subject of published journal articles by academics.

The cancer registration data captures a patient's complete journey from referral, diagnosis, treatment, outcomes, experience and survival. It does this through the collation, curation and combination of many differing data sources into a unified information resource.

In contrast, the Cancer Waiting Times (CWT) dataset focuses on the waiting times and pathway undertaken by patients referred with suspected cancer and subsequently told the outcome of their diagnosis, and treated for cancer. The dataset is used to monitor the performance of the NHS, and individual providers, against the 3 operational performance standards. The dataset only includes those whose pathway is, at least in part, NHS funded.

The CWT guidance⁶ provides detailed guidance on those who should be included and excluded from the collection. Given the complexity and wide range of tumours, inclusions and exclusions are detailed on a site-by-site basis and run to a chapter of around 20 pages. The guidance also includes detail on valid exclusions to the Faster Diagnosis Standard.

Mitigation of misreporting


There are several mitigations in place to minimise the likelihood of misreporting including:

- Provider organisations having primary responsibility for ensuring the data they submit is accurate.
- The submitted data being drawn from a CWT record level dataset, which is based on data held in IT systems with their own standards and validations (such as Somerset Cancer Registry), collected as part of routine clinical practice, and are thus difficult to misreport on, and would likely involve breaking of ethical standards and clinical codes of practise.
- Commissioners being responsible for ensuring data submitted against them is accurate and would raise concerns with providers as needed.
- Applying a number of validation rules to the CWT collection⁷.

⁵ [Cancer registration statistics - NDRS](#)

⁶ [NHS England » National cancer waiting times monitoring dataset guidance](#)

⁷ [cancer-waiting-times/cancer-waiting-timesvalidations-v2.1.2.pdf](#)

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- Validating Inter-Provider Transfer (IPT) records between trusts. These are the cases where patients are transferred between trusts for specific diagnostic and treatment requirements.
 - Analysts undertaking a 'pre-QA process', which involves comparing data submissions to data submitted over the past 6 months. Where data are outside their normal range, we will contact those responsible for submitting that data, using the details of who made the submissions, to confirm if the data is correct or there is a known error (e.g. missing submission, activity much lower/higher than average). Providers are then given a short window to confirm if they want a data quality note to be included in the statistical release and provider workbook that alerts users' to issues with their data.
 - Following submission of provisional data, giving providers an opportunity to submit corrected figures where necessary to correct any data quality issues in data previously provided.

⁵ [Cancer registration statistics - NDRS](#)

⁶ [NHS England » National cancer waiting times monitoring dataset guidance](#)

⁷ [cancer-waiting-times/cancer-waiting-timesvalidations-v2.1.2.pdf](#)