

NHS Diagnostic Waiting Times and Activity Data

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February 2026 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.

There is a standard threshold of 1% for this pledge. The NHS Standard Contract 2025/26 seeks progress towards an interim threshold of at most 5%.

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 Science

- 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 February 2026 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 February 2026 was 377,100. This was 20.2% 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 February 2025 the total number of patients waiting six weeks or more increased by 85,700 while the proportion of patients waiting six weeks or more increased by 2.8%.
- In the last 12 months, the proportion of patients waiting six weeks or more at the end of a month has varied between 18.4% (March 2025) and 24.8% (December 2025).
- At the end of February 2026, the test with the smallest proportion of patients waiting six weeks or more was CT with 9.3%. The test with the highest proportion was Urodynamics, with 41.0% 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 February 2026.
- There were 1,862,800 patients waiting for a key diagnostic test at the end of February 2026. This is an increase of 193,700 from February 2025.
- A total of 2,389,700 diagnostic tests were undertaken in February 2026. This is an increase of 46,100 from February 2025.

3 National Trends

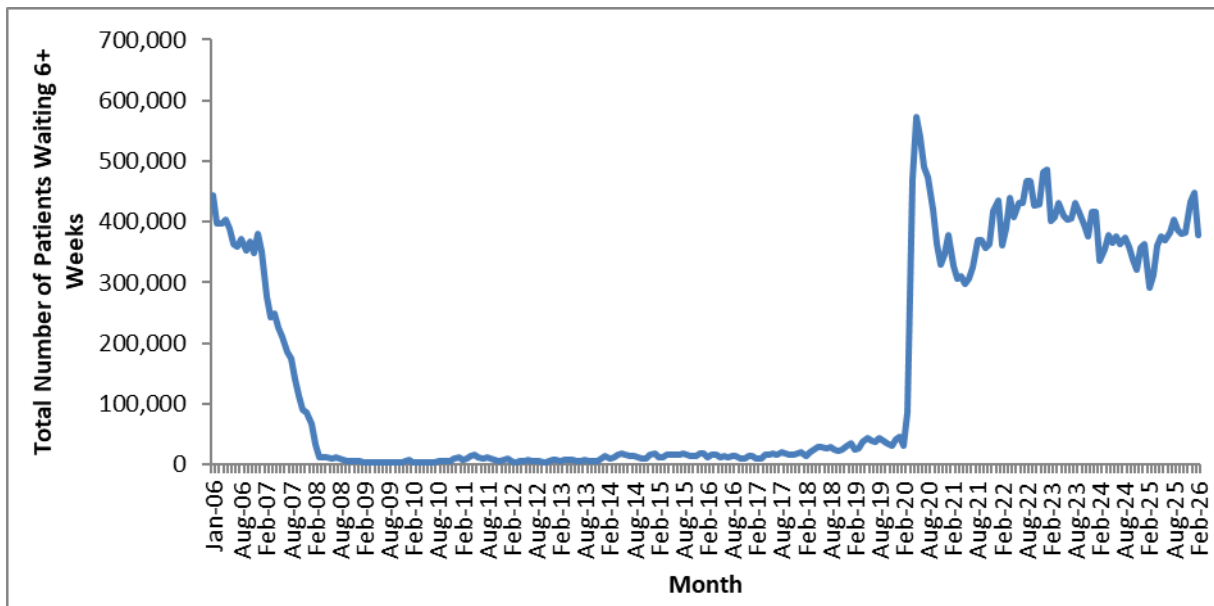
This section analyses trends in monthly diagnostic waiting times and activity data that has been collected since January 2006.

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. Subsequent fluctuations in the total number of patients waiting six weeks or more led to a gradual increase until it rose sharply in April 2020 due to the impact of COVID-19.

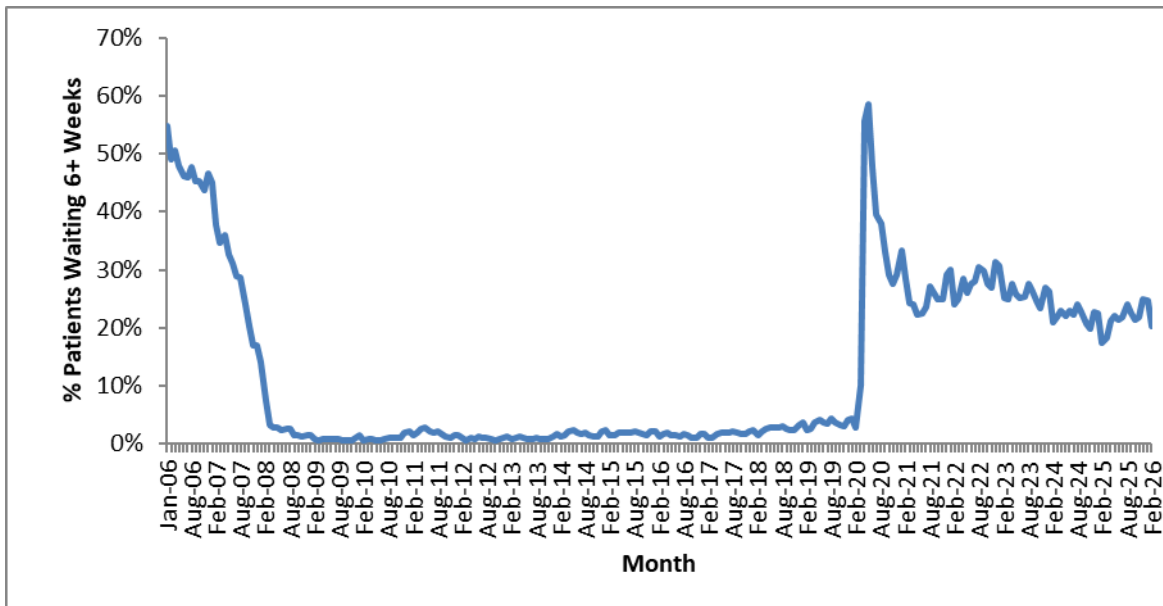
3.1.2. In February 2026 there was a decrease of 70,000 in the number of patients waiting six weeks or more from the previous month.

Chart 1: Total number of patients waiting 6+ weeks at month end for all tests January 2006 to February 2026



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 18.4% (March 2025) and 24.8% (December 2025). The 1% operational standard was last met in November 2013.

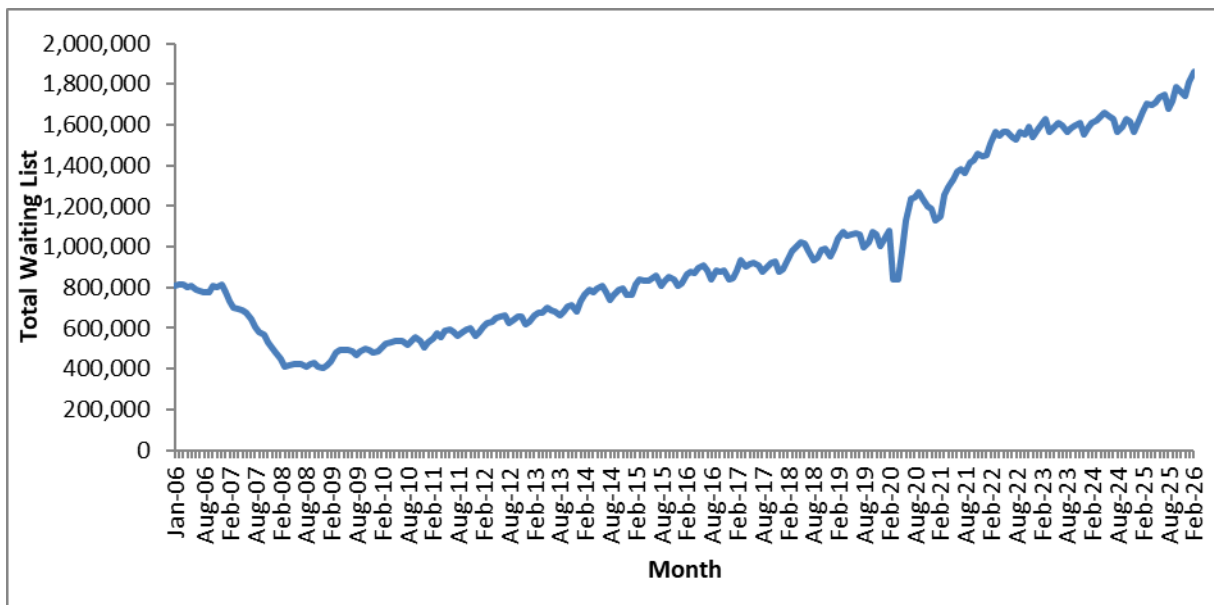
**Chart 2: Percentage of patients waiting 6+ weeks at month end for all tests
January 2006 to February 2026**



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), remaining static for some months. The underlying trend then showed a steady increase before dropping sharply in March 2020 due to the impact of COVID-19 and subsequently rising again.

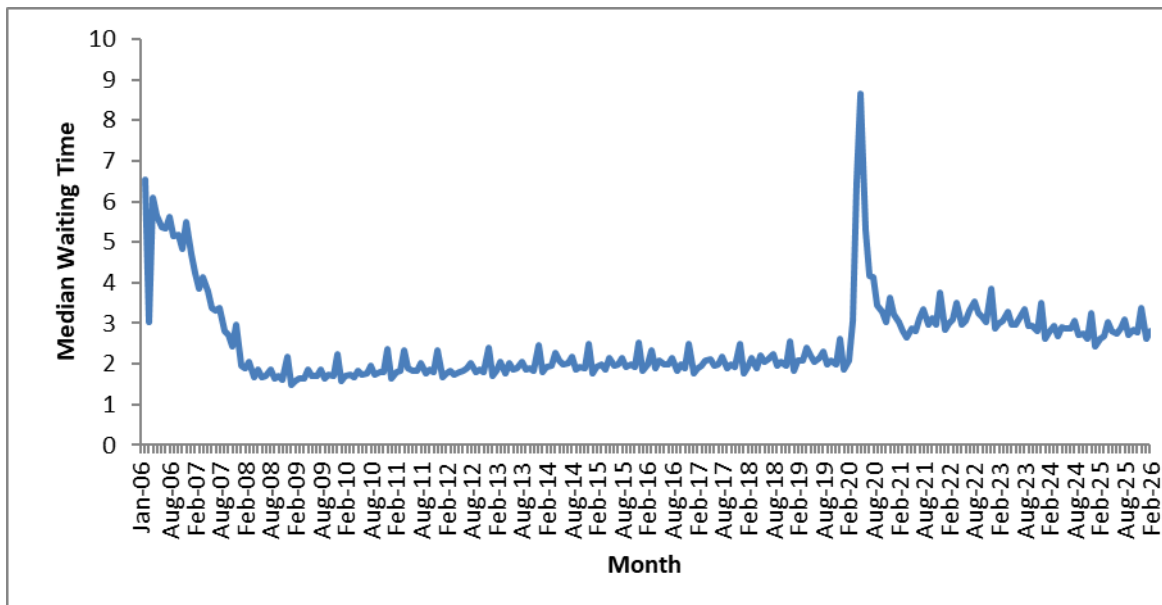
**Chart 3: Total number of patients waiting at month end for all tests
January 2006 to February 2026**



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 rose minimally 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 3.4 weeks (December 2025) and a low of 2.6 weeks (January 2026). The median waiting time in February 2026 was 2.8 weeks.

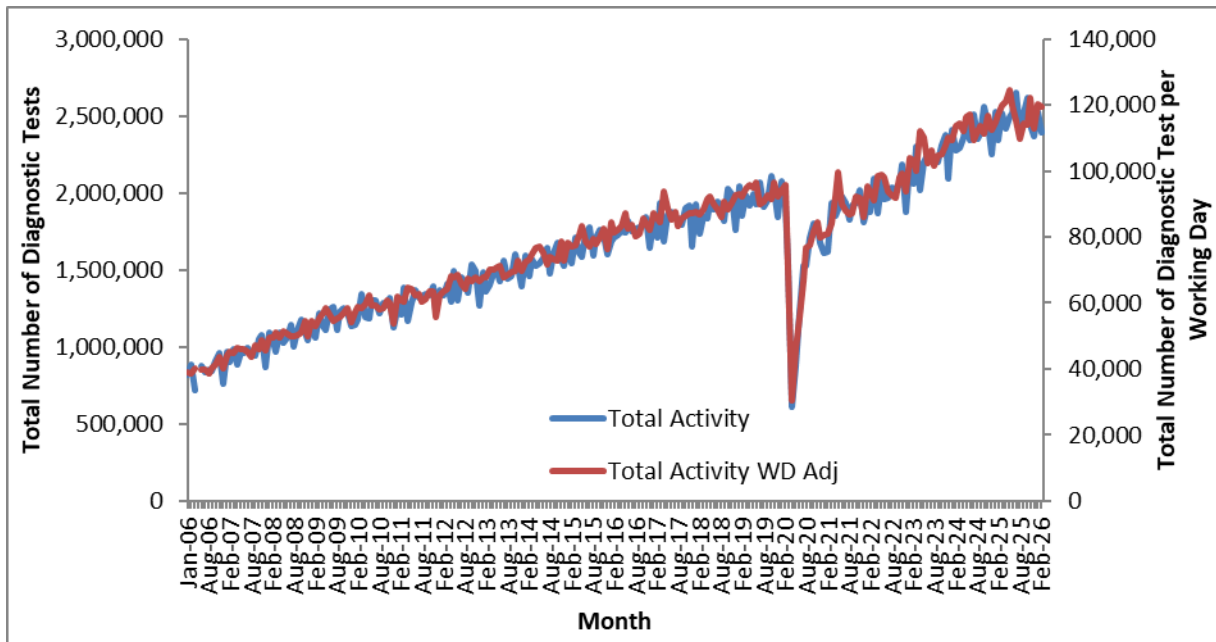
Chart 4: Median waiting time for all tests – January 2006 to February 2026



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 February 2026



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 Audiology Assessments), where February 2026 activity was 0.9% higher per month than February 2025 (Table 1).

Table 1: Total activity, by test – February 2025 and February 2026

	Feb-25	Feb-26	Average monthly growth
MRI	388,777	395,077	0.1%
CT	702,505	727,406	0.3%
Non-obstetric Ultrasound	711,146	717,309	0.1%
Barium Enema	3,809	4,248	0.9%
Dexa Scan	46,162	48,304	0.4%
Audiology Assessments	109,720	122,283	0.9%
Echocardiography	163,183	166,753	0.2%
Electrophysiology	192	131	-3.1%
Peripheral Neurophysiology	20,785	20,417	-0.1%
Sleep Studies	19,472	21,028	0.6%
Urodynamics	6,109	6,417	0.4%
Colonoscopy	58,007	53,346	-0.7%
Flexi Sigmoidoscopy	16,996	14,590	-1.3%
Cystoscopy	30,322	31,839	0.4%
Gastroscopy	66,349	60,529	-0.8%
All Tests	2,343,534	2,389,677	0.2%

4 February 2026 Data

This section analyses the February 2026 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 February 2026, there were a total of 377,100 patients waiting six weeks or more from referral for one of the 15 key diagnostic tests. This was 20.2% of the total number of patients waiting at the end of the month.
- 4.1.2. Compared with February 2025, the number of patients waiting six weeks or more increased by 85,700, while the proportion of patients waiting six weeks or more increased by 2.8%.
- 4.1.3. Compared with February 2025, the test with the largest increase in the proportion of patients waiting six weeks or more was Electrophysiology, which increased by 14.7 percentage points. The test with the largest decrease was Dexa Scan, which decreased by 4.9 percentage points (Table 2).

Table 2: Proportion of patients waiting 6+ weeks, by test – February 2025 and February 2026

	Feb-25	Feb-26	Difference (%age points)
MRI	13.8%	19.9%	6.1
CT	8.6%	9.3%	0.7
Non-obstetric Ultrasound	14.4%	16.3%	1.9
Barium Enema	10.9%	17.8%	6.8
Dexa Scan	16.4%	11.5%	-4.9
Audiology Assessments	36.4%	38.0%	1.6
Echocardiography	24.2%	23.7%	-0.4
Electrophysiology	19.2%	34.0%	14.7
Peripheral Neurophysiology	31.9%	40.4%	8.5
Sleep Studies	28.7%	25.1%	-3.5
Urodynamics	37.5%	41.0%	3.5
Colonoscopy	22.7%	29.6%	7.0
Flexi Sigmoidoscopy	23.8%	29.8%	6.0
Cystoscopy	24.8%	23.8%	-0.9
Gastroscopy	20.3%	26.9%	6.6
All Tests	17.5%	20.2%	2.8

Note: Figures may differ due to rounding.

- 4.1.4. Compared with February 2025, the test type with the smallest change in the proportion of patients waiting six weeks or more was Physiological Science with an increase of 1.2 percentage points. Imaging increased by 2.7 percentage points and Endoscopy increased by 5.6 percentage points (Table 3). See section 5.4 for which tests are included under the different test types.

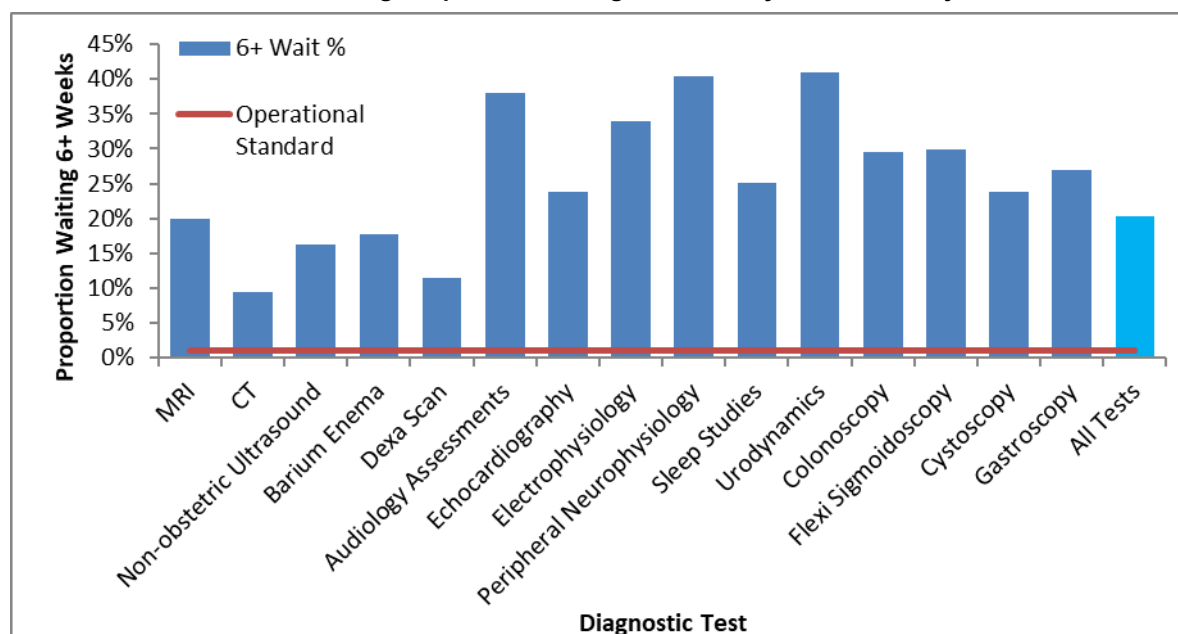
Table 3: Proportion of patients waiting 6+ weeks, by test type – February 2025 and February 2026

	Feb-25	Feb-26	Difference (%age points)
Imaging	13.4%	16.1%	2.7
Physiological Science	29.6%	30.9%	1.2
Endoscopy	22.2%	27.9%	5.6
Total	17.5%	20.2%	2.8

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 (9.3%), whilst the test with the highest proportion was Urodynamics (41.0%) (Chart 6).

Chart 6: Percentage of patients waiting 6+ weeks, by test – February 2026



- 4.1.6. 126 of the 133 acute trusts that submitted data for February 2026 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 11.2% (Northwest region) and 28.7% (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.

Table 4: February 2026 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	58,125	19.0%	305,362	375,938	2.6
South West	23,907	15.3%	156,298	235,719	2.5
South East	49,562	18.0%	276,046	362,203	2.7
Midlands	94,202	24.6%	382,479	451,003	3.1
East of England	70,610	28.7%	246,220	264,406	3.5
North West	24,465	11.2%	219,171	329,836	2.3
North East and Yorkshire	55,397	20.3%	272,391	361,887	2.8
England	377,078	20.2%	1,862,814	2,389,677	2.8

*Includes all independent sector providers and excludes centrally commissioned.

4.2 Total Waiting List

- 4.2.1. At the end of February 2026 there was a total of 1,862,800 patients still waiting for a diagnostic test. This is an increase of 193,700 (11.6%) from February 2025.
- 4.2.2. The test with the largest waiting list was Non-obstetric Ultrasound, which accounted for 34.7% of the total waiting list, or 645,500 patients. The test with the smallest waiting list was Electrophysiology, which accounted for 0.01% of the total waiting list, or 200 patients (Table 5).

Table 5: Total number of patients waiting at month end, by test – February 2025 and February 2026

	Feb-25	Feb-26	Growth (%age)
MRI	332,575	385,738	16.0%
CT	192,176	203,873	6.1%
Non-obstetric Ultrasound	580,477	645,515	11.2%
Barium Enema	3,218	4,295	33.5%
Dexa Scan	59,433	58,118	-2.2%
Audiology Assessments	100,814	117,032	16.1%
Echocardiography	147,650	157,010	6.3%
Electrophysiology	260	162	-37.7%
Peripheral Neurophysiology	34,174	39,907	16.8%
Sleep Studies	30,220	36,081	19.4%
Urodynamics	9,903	10,784	8.9%
Colonoscopy	66,671	76,232	14.3%
Flexi Sigmoidoscopy	22,065	24,246	9.9%
Cystoscopy	24,397	26,975	10.6%
Gastroscopy	65,068	76,846	18.1%
All Tests	1,669,101	1,862,814	11.6%

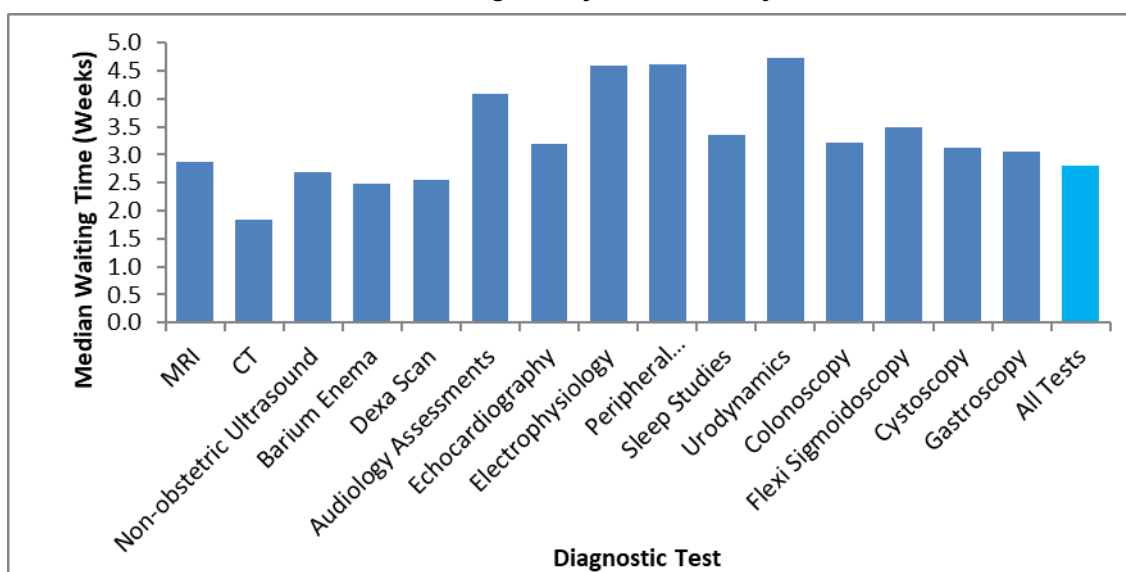
Note: Barium Enema is a test that should be replaced by Colonoscopy or CT Colonography, so the number of tests undertaken should be reducing.

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 33.5% compared with February 2025.

4.3 Median Waiting Times

4.3.1. At the end of February 2026, the estimated median waiting time for all 15 diagnostic tests was 2.8 weeks from the time of referral, up 0.2 from the previous month. The test with the shortest median waiting time was CT at 1.8 weeks. The test with the longest median waiting time was Urodynamics at 4.7 weeks (Chart 7).

Chart 7: Median waiting time by test – February 2026



4.4 Total Activity

4.4.1. In total 2,389,700 of the 15 key diagnostic tests were performed during February 2026. This is an increase of 46,100 (2.0%) from February 2025, which remains at 2.0% when adjusted for working days (Table 6).

4.4.2. The test with the highest activity was CT with 727,400 tests taking place. This accounted for 30.4% of all activity in February 2026. The test with the lowest activity was Electrophysiology with 100 tests taking place. This accounted for 0.01% of all activity this month.

4.4.3. The number of tests conducted over the last 12 months has increased by 3.7% from the same period last year, which becomes 3.3% when adjusted for working days.

Accredited Official Statistics

Table 6: Total activity and growth, by test – February 2025 and February 2026

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

	Feb-26	Feb-25	YTD 25/26	YTD 24/25	Growth Feb 26 vs Feb 25	Growth YTD 25/26 vs YTD 24/25	Adjusted Growth Feb 26 vs Feb 25	Adjusted Growth YTD 25/26 vs YTD 24/25
MRI	395,077	388,777	4,566,609	4,359,834	1.6%	4.7%	1.6%	4.7%
CT	727,406	702,505	8,409,747	8,049,265	3.5%	4.5%	3.5%	4.5%
Non-obstetric Ultrasound	717,309	711,146	8,162,785	8,035,362	0.9%	1.6%	0.9%	1.6%
Barium Enema	4,248	3,809	48,825	44,365	11.5%	10.1%	11.5%	10.1%
Dexa Scan	48,304	46,162	548,029	531,243	4.6%	3.2%	4.6%	3.2%
Audiology Assessments	122,283	109,720	1,365,328	1,239,434	11.5%	10.2%	11.5%	10.2%
Echocardiography	166,753	163,183	1,864,373	1,827,214	2.2%	2.0%	2.2%	2.0%
Electrophysiology	131	192	1,671	6,877	-31.8%	-75.7%	-31.8%	-75.7%
Peripheral Neurophysiology	20,417	20,785	230,683	235,573	-1.8%	-2.1%	-1.8%	-2.1%
Sleep Studies	21,028	19,472	232,425	211,644	8.0%	9.8%	8.0%	9.8%
Urodynamics	6,417	6,109	69,763	69,628	5.0%	0.2%	5.0%	0.2%
Colonoscopy	53,346	58,007	614,623	638,751	-8.0%	-3.8%	-8.0%	-3.8%
Flexi Sigmoidoscopy	14,590	16,996	171,413	187,602	-14.2%	-8.6%	-14.2%	-8.6%
Cystoscopy	31,839	30,322	354,265	344,899	5.0%	2.7%	5.0%	2.7%
Gastroscopy	60,529	66,349	708,703	736,114	-8.8%	-3.7%	-8.8%	-3.7%
All Tests	2,389,677	2,343,534	27,349,242	26,517,805	2.0%	3.1%	2.0%	3.1%

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 currently released on an annual 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 April 2026 for the months January through to August 2025.

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. CDC activity is no longer collected separately in DM01, since the programme's management information is now published instead, but waits and activity for their patients is included in DM01 returns for the responsible or host Trust.

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 Science

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 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

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.](#)

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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