

NHS Diagnostic Waiting Times and Activity Data

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March 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 March 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 March 2026 was 406,900. This was 21.2% 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 March 2025 the total number of patients waiting six weeks or more increased by 94,000 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 20.2% (February 2026) and 24.8% (December 2025).
- At the end of March 2026, the test with the smallest proportion of patients waiting six weeks or more was CT with 10.0%. The test with the highest proportion was Urodynamics, 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 2.9 weeks at the end of March 2026.
- There were 1,918,200 patients waiting for a key diagnostic test at the end of March 2026. This is an increase of 214,700 from March 2025.
- A total of 2,618,500 diagnostic tests were undertaken in March 2026. This is an increase of 104,000 from March 2025.

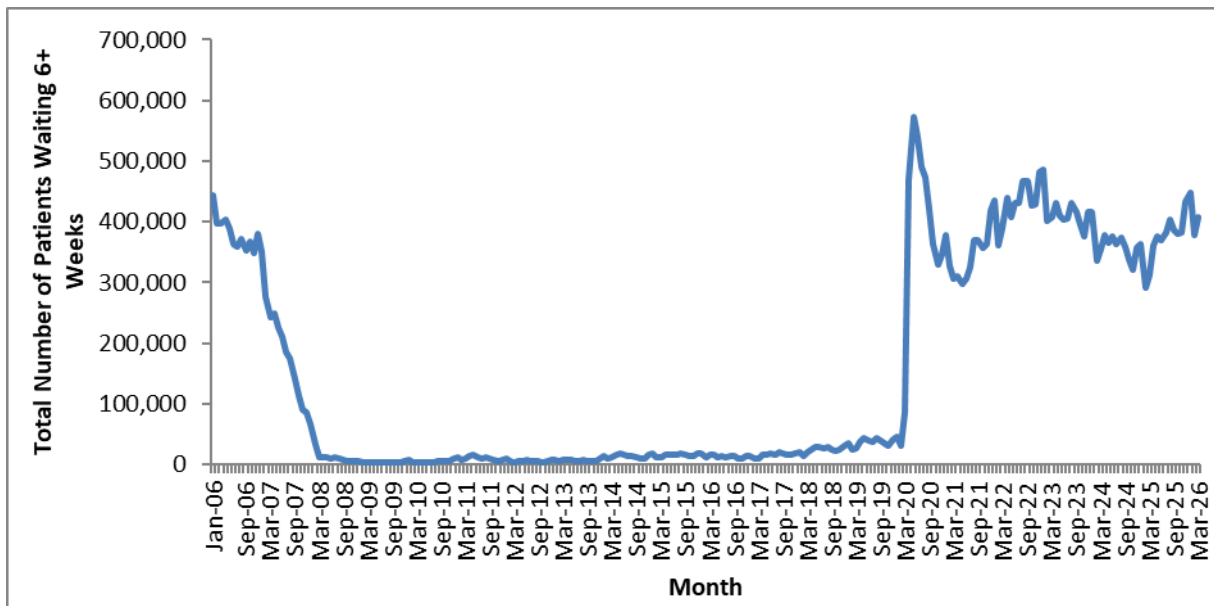
3 National Trends

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

3.1 6+ Week Waits

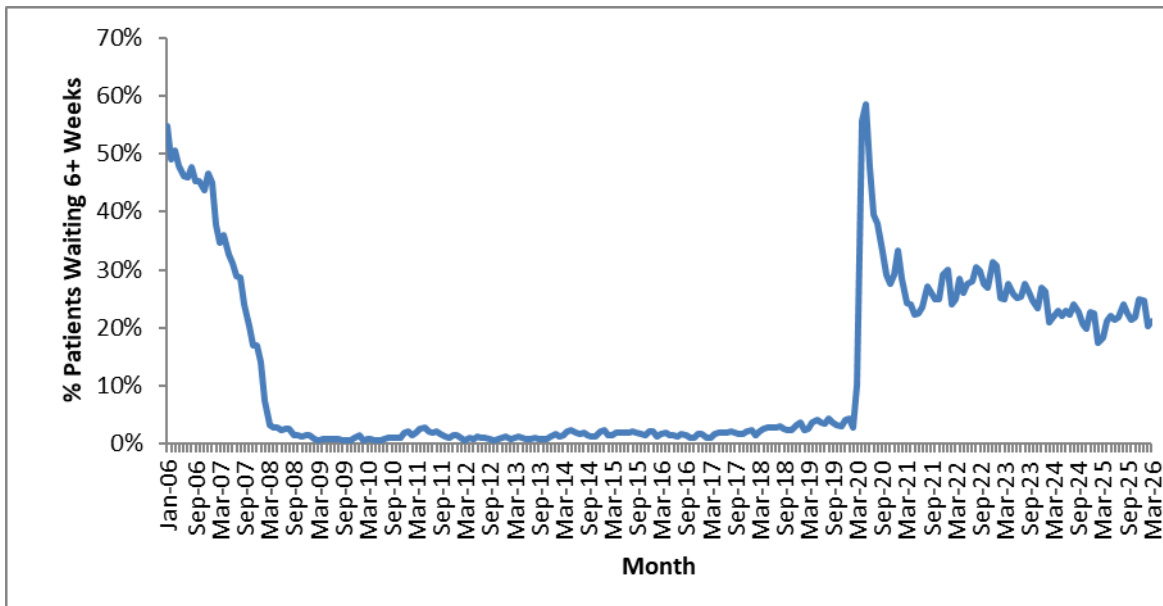
- 3.1.1. The total number of patients waiting six weeks or more dropped sharply between January 2007 and March 2008 (Chart 1), as Trusts worked towards the NHS Improvement Plan (June 2004) milestone that no one should wait six weeks or more for a diagnostic test by March 2008. Subsequent fluctuations 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 March 2026 there was an increase of 29,800 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 March 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 20.2% (February 2026) and 24.8% (December 2025). The 1% operational standard was last met in November 2013.

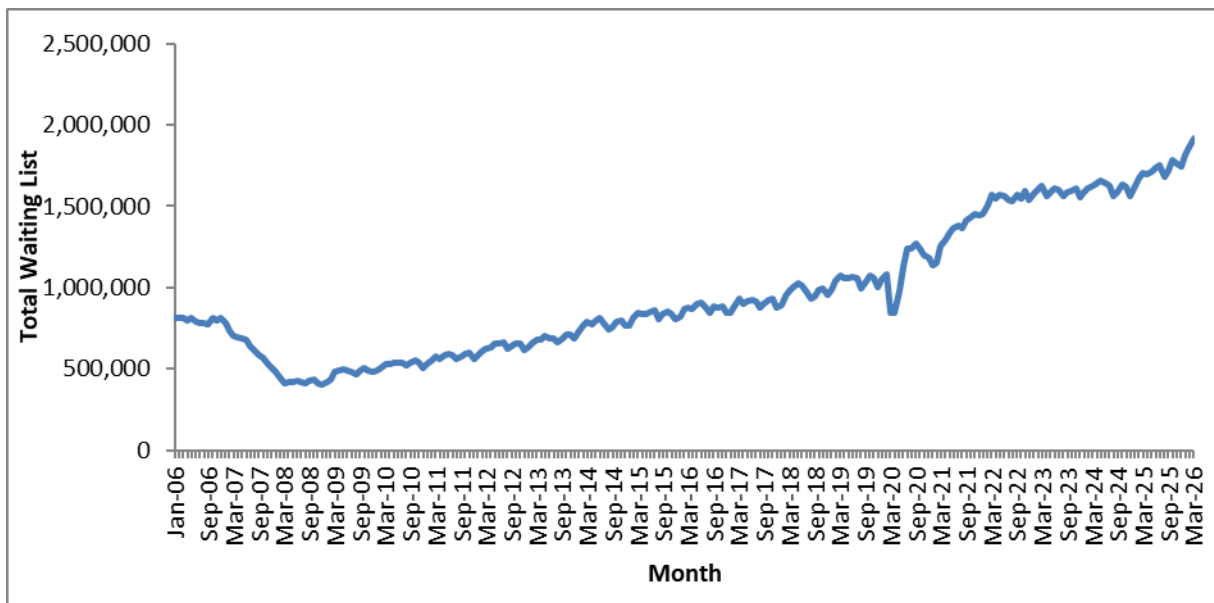
**Chart 2: Percentage of patients waiting 6+ weeks at month end for all tests
January 2006 to March 2026**



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.

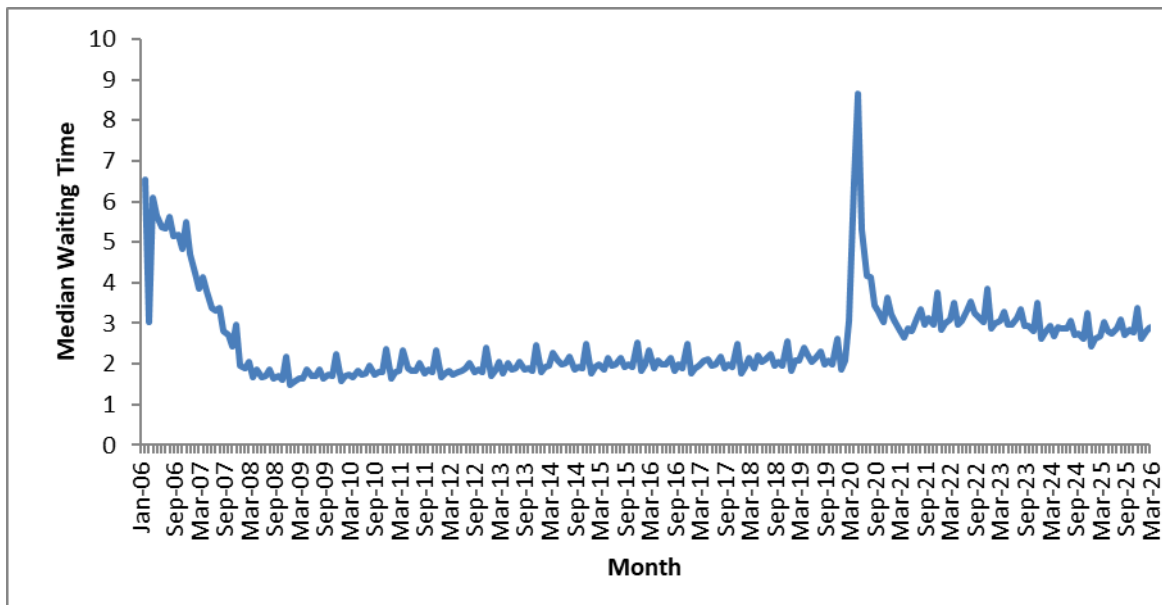
**Chart 3: Total number of patients waiting at month end for all tests
January 2006 to March 2026**



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 March 2026 was 2.9 weeks.

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

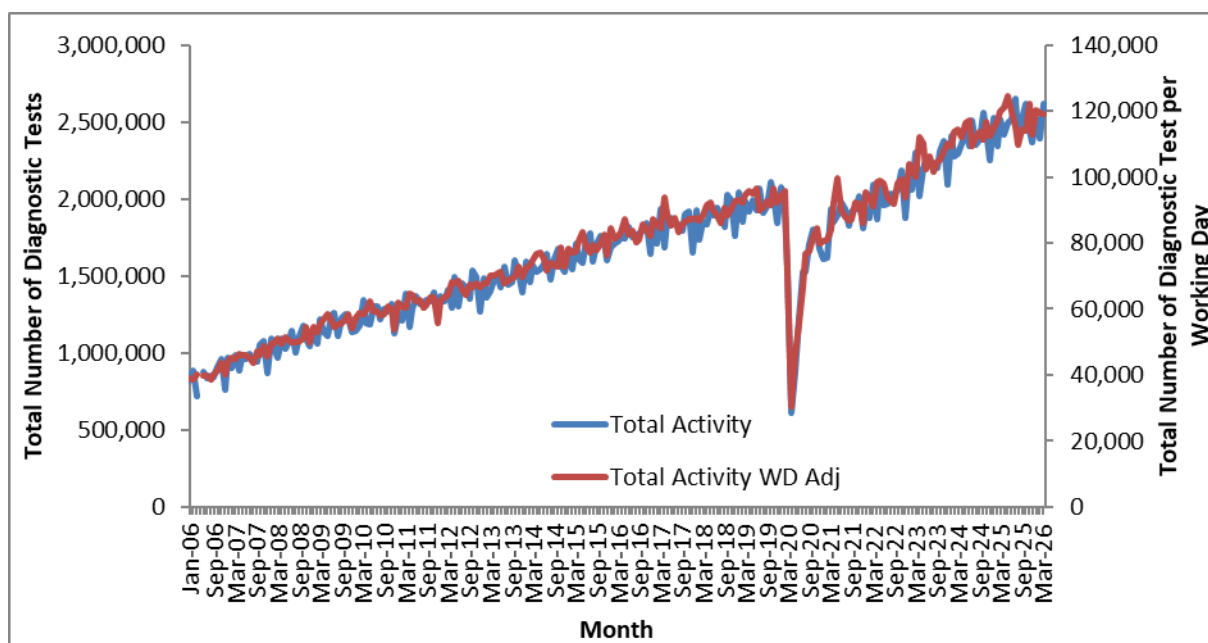


3.4 Total Activity

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 March 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 tests with the largest proportional increase in activity were Barium Enema and Sleep studies, where March 2026 activity was 1.3% higher per month than March 2025 (Table 1).

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

	Mar-25	Mar-26	Average monthly growth
MRI	432,151	439,201	0.1%
CT	764,141	803,076	0.4%
Non-obstetric Ultrasound	744,210	775,891	0.3%
Barium Enema	3,995	4,683	1.3%
Dexa Scan	49,663	53,660	0.6%
Audiology Assessments	115,742	134,213	1.2%
Echocardiography	171,445	181,425	0.5%
Electrophysiology	124	121	-0.2%
Peripheral Neurophysiology	21,520	22,124	0.2%
Sleep Studies	20,649	24,002	1.3%
Urodynamics	6,651	7,240	0.7%
Colonoscopy	63,093	57,627	-0.8%
Flexi Sigmoidoscopy	17,763	15,547	-1.1%
Cystoscopy	32,383	34,836	0.6%
Gastroscopy	70,937	64,839	-0.7%
All Tests	2,514,467	2,618,485	0.3%

4 March 2026 Data

This section analyses the March 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 March 2026, there were a total of 406,900 patients waiting six weeks or more from referral for one of the 15 key diagnostic tests. This was 21.2% of the total number of patients waiting at the end of the month.
- 4.1.2. Compared with March 2025, the number of patients waiting six weeks or more increased by 94,000, while the proportion of patients waiting six weeks or more increased by 2.8%.
- 4.1.3. Compared with March 2025, the test with the largest increase in the proportion of patients waiting six weeks or more was Electrophysiology, which increased by 16.3 percentage points. The test with the largest decrease was Sleep studies, which decreased by 3.7 percentage points (Table 2).

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

	Mar-25	Mar-26	Difference (%age points)
MRI	13.7%	21.6%	7.8
CT	9.6%	10.0%	0.4
Non-obstetric Ultrasound	15.7%	17.7%	2.0
Barium Enema	13.4%	18.1%	4.8
Dexa Scan	15.4%	13.0%	-2.4
Audiology Assessments	38.2%	37.5%	-0.7
Echocardiography	24.5%	25.0%	0.6
Electrophysiology	17.3%	33.6%	16.3
Peripheral Neurophysiology	32.0%	39.3%	7.4
Sleep Studies	29.5%	25.8%	-3.7
Urodynamics	40.0%	42.6%	2.6
Colonoscopy	23.8%	28.8%	5.0
Flexi Sigmoidoscopy	24.9%	28.9%	3.9
Cystoscopy	26.0%	24.6%	-1.4
Gastroscopy	21.6%	27.6%	6.0
All Tests	18.4%	21.2%	2.8

Note: Figures may differ due to rounding.

- 4.1.4. Compared with March 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 0.7 percentage points. Imaging increased by 3.3 percentage points and Endoscopy increased by 4.4 percentage points (Table 3). See section 5.4 for which tests are included under the different test types.

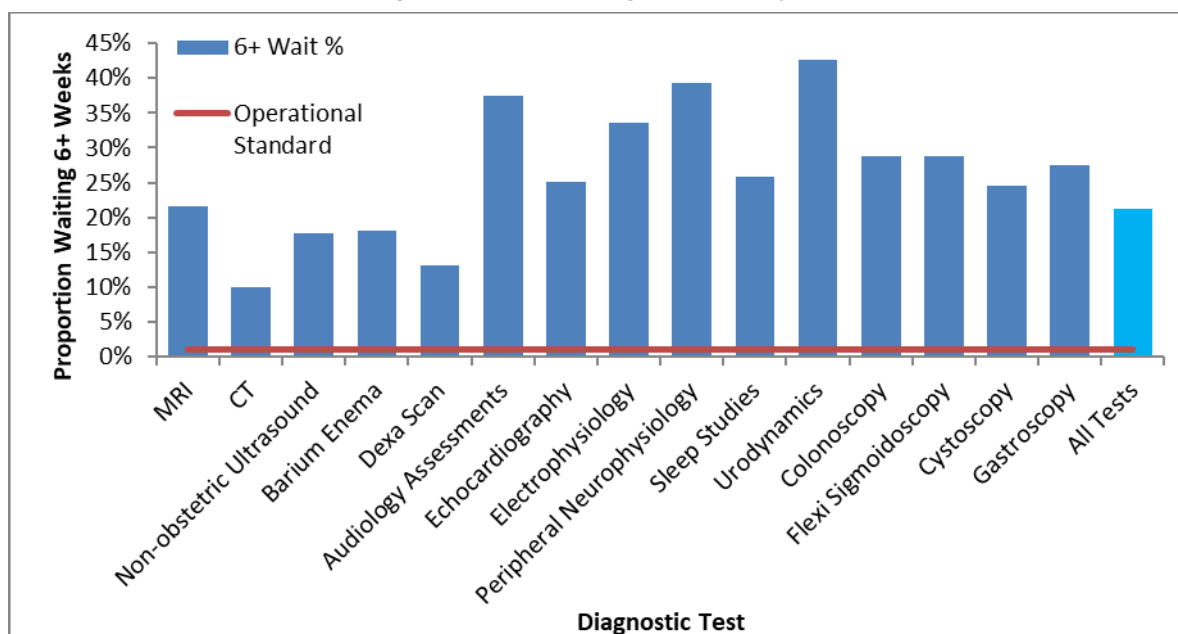
Table 3: Proportion of patients waiting 6+ weeks, by test type – March 2025 and March 2026

	Mar-25	Mar-26	Difference (%age points)
Imaging	14.2%	17.4%	3.3
Physiological Science	30.6%	31.3%	0.7
Endoscopy	23.4%	27.8%	4.4
Total	18.4%	21.2%	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 (10.0%), whilst the test with the highest proportion was Urodynamics (42.6%) (Chart 6).

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



- 4.1.6. 126 of the 133 acute trusts that submitted data for March 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 12.7% (Northwest region) and 29.8% (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: March 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	58,065	18.9%	306,912	415,383	2.6
South West	25,847	16.0%	161,525	257,084	2.6
South East	55,781	19.6%	284,960	394,981	2.8
Midlands	105,882	26.5%	398,960	490,939	3.3
East of England	75,834	29.8%	254,075	295,799	3.6
North West	28,850	12.7%	226,671	359,553	2.5
North East and Yorkshire	55,808	19.9%	280,960	395,098	2.8
England	406,925	21.2%	1,918,239	2,618,485	2.9

*Includes all independent sector providers and excludes centrally commissioned.

4.2 Total Waiting List

- 4.2.1. At the end of March 2026 there was a total of 1,918,200 patients still waiting for a diagnostic test. This is an increase of 214,700 (12.6%) from March 2025.
- 4.2.2. The test with the largest waiting list was Non-obstetric Ultrasound, which accounted for 35.1% of the total waiting list, or 674,100 patients. The test with the smallest waiting list was Electrophysiology, which accounted for 0.01% of the total waiting list, or 100 patients (Table 5).

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

	Mar-25	Mar-26	Growth (%age)
MRI	331,280	393,913	18.9%
CT	192,232	207,524	8.0%
Non-obstetric Ultrasound	603,202	674,100	11.8%
Barium Enema	3,487	4,642	33.1%
Dexa Scan	59,977	61,205	2.0%
Audiology Assessments	109,997	122,621	11.5%
Echocardiography	151,960	158,108	4.0%
Electrophysiology	312	131	-58.0%
Peripheral Neurophysiology	35,227	39,722	12.8%
Sleep Studies	30,257	37,660	24.5%
Urodynamics	9,644	10,789	11.9%
Colonoscopy	64,458	78,427	21.7%
Flexi Sigmoidoscopy	21,488	24,616	14.6%
Cystoscopy	23,995	26,363	9.9%
Gastroscopy	66,057	78,418	18.7%
All Tests	1,703,573	1,918,239	12.6%

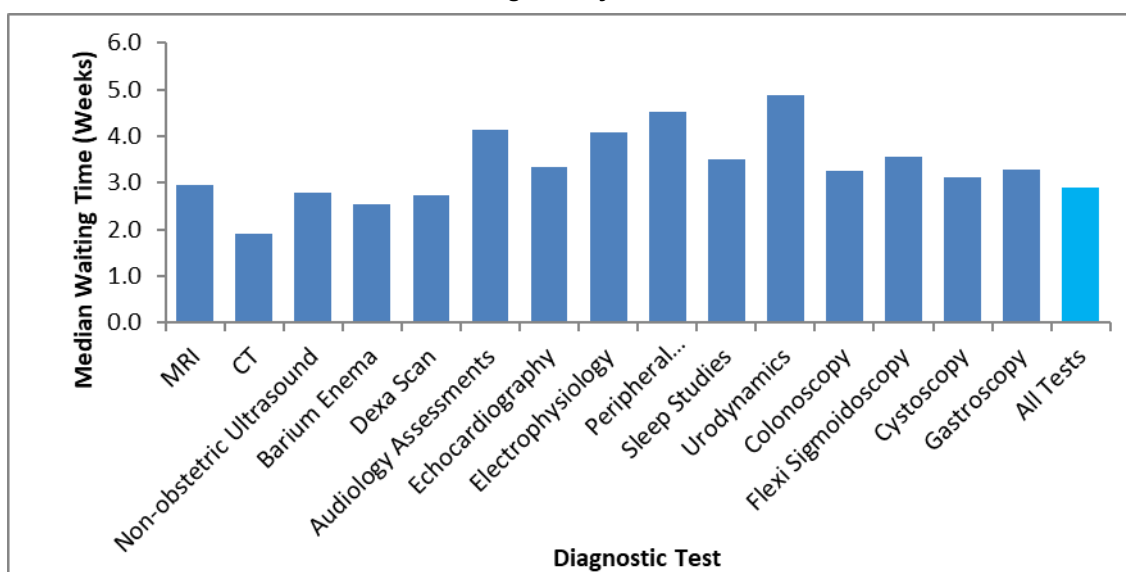
Note: Barium Enema is a test that should be replaced by Colonoscopy or CT Colonography, so the number of tests undertaken should be reducing.

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 33.1% compared with March 2025.

4.3 Median Waiting Times

4.3.1. At the end of March 2026, the estimated median waiting time for all 15 diagnostic tests was 2.9 weeks from the time of referral, up 0.1 from 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 Urodynamics at 4.9 weeks (Chart 7).

Chart 7: Median waiting time by test – March 2026



4.4 Total Activity

4.4.1. In total 2,618,500 of the 15 key diagnostic tests were performed during March 2026. This is an increase of 104,000 from March 2025, which is an increase of 4.1%. This becomes a decrease of 0.6% when adjusted for working days (Table 6).

4.4.2. The test with the highest activity was CT with 803,100 tests taking place. This accounted for 30.7% of all activity in March 2026. The test with the lowest activity was Electrophysiology with 100 tests taking place. This accounted for 0.005% of all activity this month.

4.4.3. The number of tests conducted over the last 12 months has increased by 3.2% from the same period last year, which becomes 2.8% when adjusted for working days.

Accredited Official Statistics

Table 6: Total activity and growth, by test – March 2025 and March 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.

	Mar-26	Mar-25	YTD 25/26	YTD 24/25	Growth Mar 26 vs Mar 25	Growth YTD 25/26 vs YTD 24/25	Adjusted Growth Mar 26 vs Mar 25	Adjusted Growth YTD 25/26 vs YTD 24/25
MRI	439,201	432,151	5,005,810	4,791,985	1.6%	4.5%	-3.0%	4.1%
CT	803,076	764,141	9,212,823	8,813,406	5.1%	4.5%	0.3%	4.1%
Non-obstetric Ultrasound	775,891	744,210	8,938,676	8,779,572	4.3%	1.8%	-0.5%	1.4%
Barium Enema	4,683	3,995	53,508	48,360	17.2%	10.6%	11.9%	10.2%
Dexa Scan	53,660	49,663	601,689	580,906	8.0%	3.6%	3.1%	3.2%
Audiology Assessments	134,213	115,742	1,499,541	1,355,176	16.0%	10.7%	10.7%	10.2%
Echocardiography	181,425	171,445	2,045,798	1,998,659	5.8%	2.4%	1.0%	2.0%
Electrophysiology	121	124	1,792	7,001	-2.4%	-74.4%	-6.9%	-74.5%
Peripheral Neurophysiology	22,124	21,520	252,807	257,093	2.8%	-1.7%	-1.9%	-2.1%
Sleep Studies	24,002	20,649	256,427	232,293	16.2%	10.4%	11.0%	10.0%
Urodynamics	7,240	6,651	77,003	76,279	8.9%	0.9%	3.9%	0.6%
Colonoscopy	57,627	63,093	672,250	701,844	-8.7%	-4.2%	-12.8%	-4.6%
Flexi Sigmoidoscopy	15,547	17,763	186,960	205,365	-12.5%	-9.0%	-16.5%	-9.3%
Cystoscopy	34,836	32,383	389,101	377,282	7.6%	3.1%	2.7%	2.7%
Gastroscopy	64,839	70,937	773,542	807,051	-8.6%	-4.2%	-12.8%	-4.5%
All Tests	2,618,485	2,514,467	29,967,727	29,032,272	4.1%	3.2%	-0.6%	2.8%

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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