Diagnostic Waiting Times

Quarter Ending: 31 March 2020

Publication date: 26 May 2020
This is a National Statistics publication

National Statistics status means that the official statistics meet the highest standards of trustworthiness, quality and public value. They are identified by the quality mark shown above.

The UK Statistics Authority has designated these statistics as National Statistics signifying compliance with the Code of Practice for Statistics.

Once statistics have been designated as National Statistics, it is a statutory requirement that the Code of Practice shall continue to be observed.

The statistics last underwent a full assessment by the Office for Statistics Regulation (OSR) against the Code of Practice in July 2010. The OSR is the regulatory arm of the UK Statistics Authority.

Find out more about the Code of Practice at: https://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/osr/code-of-practice/

Find out more about National Statistics at: https://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/national-statistician/types-of-official-statistics/
Contents

Introduction ...............................................................................................................................................3
Main Points ...............................................................................................................................................4
Results and Commentary.........................................................................................................................6
  Summary of the Position at 31 March ....................................................................................................6
  Trends .....................................................................................................................................................7
    Patients who had been waiting over six weeks ..................................................................................9
    Patients who had been waiting no more than six weeks .................................................................10
Glossary ..................................................................................................................................................13
Contact ...................................................................................................................................................14
Further Information ...............................................................................................................................14
Open data ...............................................................................................................................................14
NHS Performs ......................................................................................................................................14
Rate this publication ...............................................................................................................................14
Appendices ............................................................................................................................................15
  Appendix 1 – Publication Metadata ...................................................................................................15
  Appendix 2 – Early Access details ......................................................................................................17
  Appendix 3 – PHS and Official Statistics ..........................................................................................18
Introduction

Waiting times are important to patients and are a measure of how the NHS is responding to demands for services. Measuring and regular reporting of waiting times highlight where there are delays in the system and enables monitoring of the effectiveness of NHS Scotland’s performance. Public Health Scotland (PHS) continues to be committed to improving the information on waiting times along with our key stakeholders, the NHS Boards and Scottish Government.

Diagnostic Waiting Times are an important component in the delivery of the 18 Weeks Referral to Treatment standard (a maximum whole journey waiting time of 18 weeks from referral to treatment).

On 31 March 2009, the Scottish Government introduced the waiting time standard that patients waiting for one of the eight key diagnostic tests and investigations would be waiting no longer than six weeks. This supersedes nine weeks, which was initially introduced on 31 December 2007.

Waiting Times information on the following eight key diagnostic tests and investigations has been collected nationally since 2006:

**Endoscopy**
- Upper Endoscopy
- Lower Endoscopy (excluding Colonoscopy)
- Colonoscopy
- Cystoscopy

**Radiology**
- CT Scan
- MRI Scan
- Barium Studies
- Non-obstetric ultrasound

NHS Boards submit to PHS the number of NHS patients who are waiting for any of the eight diagnostic tests and investigations at the end of the month. The standard end point that the wait is measured to, i.e. when the clock stops, is when the verified results are available for reporting. However, due to IT system constraints, in some cases for both Endoscopic and Radiology tests, the clock stops on the day the test is carried out.

Further background and data quality information can be found on the website.
Main Points

The Scottish Government waiting time standard states that patients waiting for one of the eight key diagnostic tests and investigations should be waiting no longer than six weeks. The period of waits covers the time between the date the request for the test or procedure is received within the department and the date when the verified report has been received by or made available to the requester. PHS is working towards being able to measure this wait in its entirety. In the meantime, the statistics presented here relate to number of patients waiting at the end of a month and the length time they had been waiting so far.

It should be highlighted that the statistics presented for this period are affected in part by the Covid-19 (Coronavirus) outbreak. In particular, on the 17 March, NHS Scotland was placed under emergency measures and Boards were asked to suspend all non-urgent elective treatment. Later on the 23 March the nation entered a period of ‘lockdown’. These measures affected normal referral and treatment patterns. In particular, there is likely to have been less referrals to services as well as less patients seen in the latter weeks of March. Where possible we have highlighted aspects of these statistics that are influenced by this.

- During March the number of patients waiting for one of the eight key diagnostics tests and investigations reduced from 88,301 to 79,402 patients - a 10% decrease.
  - This decrease is largely driven by a decrease in the number of patients waiting for the key radiology tests (from 65,869 to 56,074 patients). This is due to in part to a reduction in referrals in the latter weeks of March as well as some services managing to continue to test some patients in this period.
  - In contrast the number of patients waiting for endoscopy tests increased slightly from 22,432 to 23,328.

- Due to a reduction in referrals and reduced levels of testing in March, by the end of March the distribution of waiting patients, in respect of how long they had been waiting for key tests, had changed significantly. In particular

  - There were less patients who had been waiting within 2 weeks - 17,902 patients (22.5%) at the end of March compared to 37,384 (42.3%) at the end of February.
  - 60,179 patients (75.8%) had been waiting no more than six weeks compared to 74,801 (84.7%) at the end of February.
  - 19,223 patients (24.2%) had been waiting over 6 weeks compared to 13,500 (15.3%) at the end of February.

- At the 31 March, 23,328 patients were waiting for key diagnostic tests that involve endoscopies. Of these patients:
• 13,988 (60.0%) had been waiting within six weeks. This compares to 68.1% at 31 December 2019 and to 63.0% at 31 March 2019.

• 9,340 (40.0%) had been waiting over six weeks, with 3,885 (16.5%) waiting over 13 weeks.

• At 31 March, 56,074 patients were waiting for key diagnostics that involve radiology tests. Of these patients:

  • 46,191 (82.4%) had been waiting within six weeks. This compares to 83.4% at 31 December 2019 and to 92.4% at 31 March 2019.

  • 9,883 (17.6%) had been waiting over six weeks, with 1,389 (2.5%) waiting over 13 weeks.
Results and Commentary

Summary of the Position at 31 March

Table 1 shows the position at the 31 March in respect of the number of patients waiting for each of the eight key diagnostic tests and investigations. There were 79,402 patients waiting of which 60,179 (75.8%) had been waiting within 6 weeks. Of these patients, 23,328 were waiting for endoscopy investigations whereas 56,074 were waiting for key radiology tests shown.

The percentage of patients who had been waiting no more than six weeks was higher for those waiting for the radiology tests (82.4%) but lower for those waiting for endoscopies (60.0%).

Table 1: Patients waiting for all Key Diagnostic Tests, NHSScotland

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Diagnostic Test &amp; Investigations</th>
<th>Total waiting</th>
<th>6 Weeks or less</th>
<th>Over 6 Weeks</th>
<th>% within 6 Weeks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8 Key Diagnostic Tests</td>
<td>79,402</td>
<td>60,179</td>
<td>19,223</td>
<td>75.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upper Endoscopy</td>
<td>9,285</td>
<td>5,032</td>
<td>4,253</td>
<td>54.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lower Endoscopy</td>
<td>2,406</td>
<td>1,424</td>
<td>982</td>
<td>59.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colonoscopy</td>
<td>8,766</td>
<td>5,900</td>
<td>2,866</td>
<td>67.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cystoscopy</td>
<td>2,871</td>
<td>1,632</td>
<td>1,239</td>
<td>56.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All Endoscopy</td>
<td>23,328</td>
<td>13,988</td>
<td>9,340</td>
<td>60.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CT Scan</td>
<td>12,471</td>
<td>10,771</td>
<td>1,700</td>
<td>86.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MRI Scan</td>
<td>14,729</td>
<td>10,652</td>
<td>4,077</td>
<td>72.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barium Studies</td>
<td>225</td>
<td>184</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>81.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Obstetric Ultrasound</td>
<td>28,649</td>
<td>24,584</td>
<td>4,065</td>
<td>85.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All Radiology</td>
<td>56,074</td>
<td>46,191</td>
<td>9,883</td>
<td>82.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
For the latest quarter, Figure 1 shows the percentage of patients who had been waiting over six weeks in each Board (Board of treatment) for either an endoscopy or radiology test. There is significant variation in the rates shown. For instance, for the key radiology tests, six Boards achieved a percentage higher than 96% but the lowest rate was 60%. For endoscopies, the percentage for seven Boards was over 80% but for three Boards it was less than 50% for the percentage waiting within 6 weeks.

Figure 1: Percentage of patients who had been waiting six weeks or less by NHS Board as at 31 March 2020

Trends
Size of the Waiting Lists

Figure 2 shows a recent trend for the number of patients on the waiting lists for all tests or just an endoscopy or radiology test. The number of patients waiting for an endoscopy had been reducing – there were over 29,000 patients at the end of May 2018 but only 20,730 by the end of September 2019. Since then the number of patients waiting at end of each month has slowly increased – there were 22,432 patients (+12% from September 2019) waiting at the end of February 2020 and during the month of March this rose to 23,328 (+4% from February 2020). It is likely that this increase in part will be due to the Covid-19 outbreak with fewer investigations able to be performed in later March.

The number of patients waiting for a key radiology test had remained relatively stable between April 2019 and February 2020 with on average around 65,000 patient waiting. However, there was a dramatic reduction in those waiting for these tests by the end of March 2020. Again, this is change likely to be influenced by the Covid-19 outbreak. Although there is likely to have been a reduction both in the number of referrals for tests and those performed in March the net change in list size may in part be due to freed capacity to
complete an earlier clinical review of the tests completed before the outbreak. However, it should be noted that this reduction between February and March is not replicated in every Board. Please see the data tables for more details on the waiting list by NHS Board.

Figure 2: Number of patients on the waiting list by quarter and test category

Variation in Time Waited

For either the endoscopy or radiology tests, and using the time categories available, Figures 3 & 4 examine the variation in the time that patients had been waiting. To illustrate the change to way patients are distributed across these categories, after national measures relating to the Covid-19 outbreak were implemented, these charts compare those who were waiting at the end of February with those waiting at the end of March.

Most noticeably, for both categories of test, there were significantly less patients who had been waiting within 2 weeks. This is likely due largely to a major drop in the number of patients being referred for tests in the last few weeks of March. In most other time categories, the number of patients has increased, reflecting the longer waits being experienced by many of those who had already been referred before testing was reduced, due to a reduction in the volume of tests being performed.

More generally there is greater variability in the waits patients experience for endoscopies compared to those waiting for the radiology tests. For example, by the end of February there were 3,335 patients who had waited over 13 weeks and by the end of March this rose a further 520 patients.
Patients who had been waiting over six weeks

On 31 March 2009, the Scottish Government introduced the waiting time standard that patients waiting for one of these key diagnostic tests and investigations would be waiting no longer than six weeks Figure 2 shows the trend for the number of patients who had been waiting over 6 weeks at the end of each month distinguishing between category of test.
The number of patients who had been waiting over 6 weeks for endoscopies had been decreasing – there were only 6,129 patients waiting at the end of September 2019 compared to 13,314 patients at the end of July 2018. However, there were no further decreases on this figure after this and by the end of February there were 7,009 patients waiting. This rose to 9,340 patients by the end of March following the Covid-19 outbreak.

There is more variation in the trend for the number of patients who had been waiting over six weeks for a radiology test. However, by the end of March 2020 there were 9,883 patients who had waited more than six weeks - an increase of 3,392 patients on the previous month.

**Figure 5: Trend in the number of patients who had been waiting over six weeks**

Patients who had been waiting no more than six weeks

Figures 3 and 4 illustrated the change between February and March as to how patients were distributed across ‘time waited’ categories and the impact of the Covid-19 outbreak. Figure 6 shows how these changes impact on the end of the trend for the percentage of patients who had been waiting no more than six weeks at the end of each month. Before March there had been come variation in this percentage but on average 80% of patients had been waiting no more than six weeks. However, by the end of March this had dropped to 75.8%.

For the key radiology tests this percentage decreased from 90.1% to 82.4% between the end of February and the end of March, whereas for endoscopies it reduced from 68.8% to 60.0%.

Figures 7 and 8 drill down into the trends for this percentage for each of the 8 diagnostic tests.
Figure 6: Percentage of Patients who had been waiting no more than six weeks

Figure 7: Percentage of patients who had been waiting no more than six weeks for each Endoscopy Test

*Note: Y-axis does not start at zero.*
Figure 8: Percentage of patients who had been waiting no more than six weeks for each key Radiology Test
## Glossary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Diagnostic test</td>
<td>Test or procedure that is used to identify a person’s condition, disease or injury to enable a medical diagnosis to be made.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Key Diagnostic test         | There are eight key diagnostic tests, for which the current National Waiting Times Standard is a maximum wait of six weeks. These eight tests/investigations are:  
  - Upper Endoscopy,  
  - Lower Endoscopy (excluding Colonoscopy),  
  - Colonoscopy,  
  - Cystoscopy,  
  - Computer Tomography (CT Scan),  
  - Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI Scan),  
  - Barium Studies,  
  - Non-obstetric Ultrasound. |
| Patient’s completed wait    | The period of time between the date the request for the test or procedure is received within the department and the date when the verified report has been received by or made available to the requester. |
| Patients waiting            | Number of available patients waiting at the census date, including those who have an appointment date or who have been seen but whose verified report has not yet been received by or made available to the requester. The number of patients waiting at the census date in each time band corresponds to the time that has elapsed from the receipt of the referral. |
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Further Information

Further information and data for this publication are available from the publication page on our website.

The next release of this publication will be 25 August 2020.

Open data

Data from this publication is available to download from the Scottish Health and Social Care Open Data Portal.

NHS Performs

A selection of information from this publication is included in NHS Performs. NHS Performs is a website that brings together a range of information on how hospitals and NHS Boards within NHSScotland are performing.

Rate this publication

Let us know what you think about this publication via the link at the bottom of this publication page on the PHS website.
## Appendices

### Appendix 1 – Publication Metadata

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Metadata Indicator</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tr>
<td>Publication title</td>
<td>Diagnostic Waiting Times</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Description</td>
<td>Monthly summary of patients waiting times for eight key diagnostic tests and investigations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme</td>
<td>Health and Social Care</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Topic</td>
<td>Access and Waiting Times</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Format</td>
<td>Excel workbooks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data source(s)</td>
<td>Aggregate counts accredited and derived from individual NHSScotland Boards are submitted monthly to PHS using a defined Excel template. Associated with individual NHSScotland Boards Local Delivery Plans integrated to the 18Weeks RTT national standards.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date that data are acquired</td>
<td>Deadline for data submission is the 22nd of each month, though files can be resubmitted up to one week before publication where the quality assurance process identifies differences with local figures.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Release date</td>
<td>The last Tuesday of the month for each publication.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequency</td>
<td>Quarterly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Timeframe of data and timeliness</td>
<td>Data from December 2007 to date. There have been no delays in reporting.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Continuity of data</td>
<td>From January 2010 Golden Jubilee National Hospital data is included in the Scotland total.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Revisions statement</td>
<td>Historic data is not normally revised unless revision of data is required due to NHS Board resubmission of revised local data following publication.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concepts and definitions</td>
<td>A Data Submission Guidance document is available in printed and electronic form. These have been provided to all NHS Boards’ key DMMI contacts. This information is now published and available to view at <a href="http://www.isdscotland.org/Health-Topics/Waiting-Times/Diagnostics/">http://www.isdscotland.org/Health-Topics/Waiting-Times/Diagnostics/</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relevance and key uses of the statistics</td>
<td>Waiting times are important to patients and are a measure of how the NHS is responding to demands for services. Measuring and regular reporting of waiting times highlights where there are delays in the system and enables monitoring of the effectiveness of NHS performance throughout the country. The NHS in Scotland has been set a number of targets for maximum waiting times.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Other uses of the data include information requests for a variety of customers, e.g. research charities; public companies; freedom of Information requests; information support to Boards; health intelligence work; parliamentary questions and local delivery plan (LDP) targets.

| **Accuracy** | PHS only receives aggregate data from each NHS Board where the data for the previous quarter is confirmed by the submitting Board. Although aggregated data cannot be systematically validated by PHS, we does carry out quality assurance checks on the data submitted. Reported data are compared to previous figures and to expected trends. Derivation of the figures and data accuracy is a matter for individual NHS Boards. |
| **Completeness** | 100% of submitted data is used for analysis and publication. |
| **Comparability** | Comparative waiting times information is not possible at present using these data due to inconsistencies in definitions of waiting times for treatment across the four countries. |
| **Accessibility** | It is the policy of Public Health Scotland to make its web sites and products accessible according to [published guidelines](http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/assessment/assessment-—report-—55---nhs-waiting-times-in-scotland.pdf). |
| **Coherence and clarity** | Key statistics for the latest quarter are linked to on the main Waiting Times page of the publication. Statistics are presented within Excel spreadsheets. NHS Board and national figures are presented. Geographical hierarchies and national figures are presented using drop down menus. Further features to aid clarity: 1. Tables use drop down menus to display data by a single Board. 2. Tables are printer friendly. |
| **Value type and unit of measurement** | Count of number of patients waiting over four and six weeks for Scotland and NHSScotland Health Boards. |
| **Official Statistics designation** | National Statistics. |
| **Last published** | 25 February 2020 |
| **Next published** | 25 August 2020 |
| **Date of first publication** | May 2009 |
| **Help email** | phs.isdwaitingtimes@nhs.net |
| **Date form completed** | 29 April 2020 |
Appendix 2 – Early Access details

Pre-Release Access
Under terms of the "Pre-Release Access to Official Statistics (Scotland) Order 2008", PHS is obliged to publish information on those receiving Pre-Release Access ("Pre-Release Access" refers to statistics in their final form prior to publication). The standard maximum Pre-Release Access is five working days. Shown below are details of those receiving standard Pre-Release Access.

Standard Pre-Release Access:
Scottish Government Health Department
NHS Board Chief Executives
NHS Board Communication leads

Early Access for Management Information
These statistics will also have been made available to those who needed access to ‘management information’, i.e. as part of the delivery of health and care:

Early Access for Quality Assurance
These statistics will also have been made available to those who needed access to help quality assure the publication:
Appendix 3 – PHS and Official Statistics

About Public Health Scotland (PHS)

PHS is a knowledge-based and intelligence driven organisation with a critical reliance on data and information to enable it to be an independent voice for the public’s health, leading collaboratively and effectively across the Scottish public health system, accountable at local and national levels, and providing leadership and focus for achieving better health and wellbeing outcomes for the population. Our statistics comply with the Code of Practice for Statistics in terms of trustworthiness, high quality and public value. This also means that we keep data secure at all stages, through collection, processing, analysis and output production, and adhere to the ‘five safes’.