

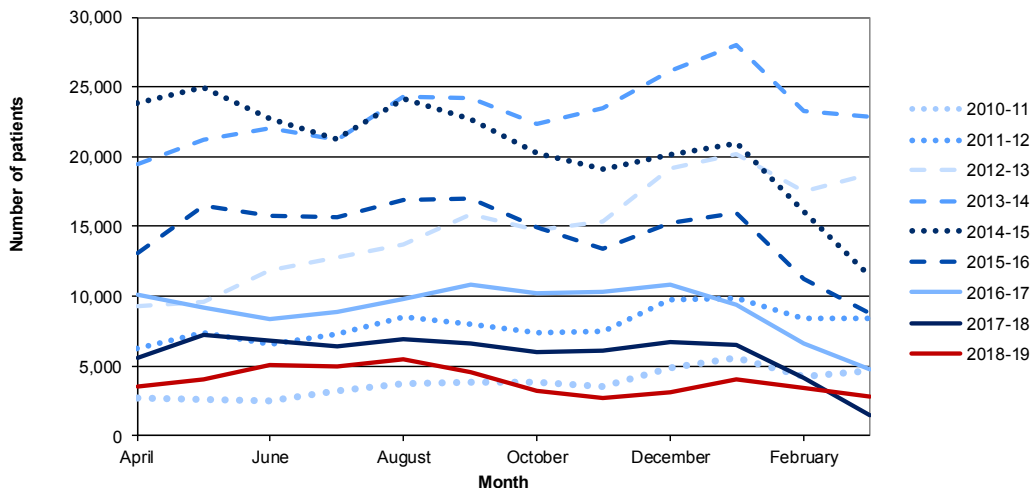


NHS Wales diagnostic and therapy services waiting times: 2018-19

29 August 2019
SB 35/2019

Key points

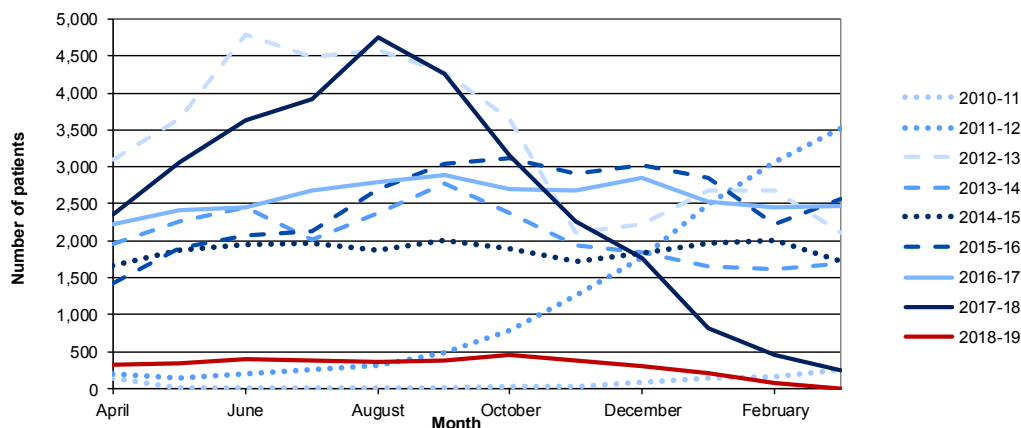
Chart 1: Number of patients waiting over 8 weeks for diagnostic services by financial year, 2010-11 onwards



Source: Diagnostic and therapy services waiting times, NHS Wales Informatics Service (NWIS)

For every month, the number of waits over 8 weeks was lower this year than almost every year since 2011-12 (except 2017-18 where it was higher in March). See the [summary](#) for more information.

Chart 2: Number of patients waiting over 14 weeks for therapy services by financial year, 2010-11 onwards



Source: Diagnostic and therapy services waiting times, NHS Wales Informatics Service (NWIS)

For every month, the number of waits over 14 weeks was lower this year than every year since 2012-13. See the [summary](#) for more information.

About this bulletin

This Statistical Bulletin presents summary information on the reported numbers of patients waiting for NHS diagnostic and therapy services in Wales.

New this year: an [interactive dashboard](#) where you can explore the trends and data in more detail.

The operational standards for maximum waiting times for access to diagnostic and therapy services are 8 weeks for specified diagnostic tests and 14 weeks for specified therapy services.

This information is published monthly along with other key indicators as part of the [NHS Activity and Performance Summary](#).

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Introduction

[The NHS Delivery Framework 2018-19](#) was used to measure delivery throughout 2018-19.

The diagnostic and therapy service statistics show monthly data on the number of people waiting and number of weeks waited at the end of each month for specific diagnostic and therapy services. They are reported by NHS local health boards (LHBs) and collected by the NHS Wales Informatics Service (NWIS). Waiting lists include all those patients, irrespective of their area of residence, who are waiting for NHS-funded diagnostic and therapy services within Wales.

The following table shows which diagnostic and therapy services are included in the waiting times statistics:

Diagnostic services	Therapy services
Cardiology	Arts Therapies
Diagnostic Endoscopy	Adult Hearing Aids
Imaging	Dietetics
Neurophysiology	Occupational Therapy
Physiological measurement	Physiotherapy
Radiology (consultant referral)	Podiatry
Radiology (GP referral)	Speech & Language Therapy

The waiting time is calculated from the date the referral request was received until the date on which:

- a) the diagnostic test for which the patient has been referred is carried out; or
- b) the hearing aid is fitted; or
- c) the patient commences the first treatment following an assessment or examination.

Note that the diagnostic and therapy service statistics are based on a snapshot at the end of each month; therefore monthly numbers should not be summed.

Figures for diagnostic and therapy services include known estimates. See the 'Estimates' section of the accompanying Bulletin for further details.

Targets

The targets relating to Diagnostic and Therapies are that no one should wait longer than 8 weeks for a diagnostic test, or more than 14 weeks for therapy services.

The main target about waiting time to treatment for the NHS in Wales is covered by the referral to treatment time. Monitoring information related to this target is published in a separate annual bulletin, [Referral to Treatment Times](#).

The analysis focuses on performance in the 2018-19 financial year but looks back over a longer time series to show long-term trends. Whilst data for diagnostic and therapy waiting times are available back to 2005 on [StatsWales](#), the bulletin and interactive dashboard focuses on October

2009 onwards (or 2010-11 onwards for analysis by financial year) as that is when the current health boards came into existence.

Context sections are provided to add value to some of the analysis.

New this year

An [interactive dashboard](#) has been published alongside this bulletin. This bulletin provides a summary of the last year of data, along with longer-term trends. The dashboard provides an interactive analysis with more detail. It includes breakdowns by local health board and service. It shows the median wait times.

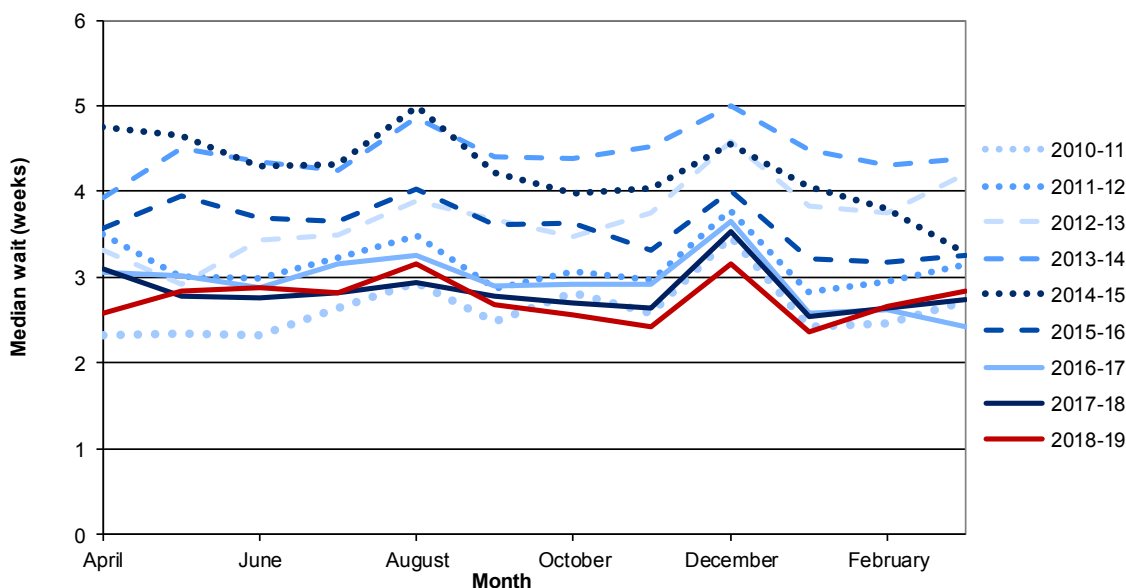
Summary

Diagnostics

Performance

- For every month, the number of waits over 8 weeks was lower this year than almost every year since 2011-12 (except 2017-18 where it was higher in March): see [Chart 1](#).
- Hywel Dda and Powys Teaching had the lowest number of patients waiting over the target time for most months of 2018-19. Betsi Cadwaladr had the most patients waiting over the target time for most months, and the only health board that had an increase over the year (of 1,460 or 178.7 per cent); it reached a peak in August 2018 (2,462), the highest since January 2015.
- Of all services, diagnostic endoscopy had the highest number waiting over the target time for every month of 2018-19, and the only service that had an increase over the year. Imaging and neurophysiology had the lowest or joint lowest for every month.

Chart 3: Median waiting times for diagnostic services by financial year, 2010-11 onwards



Context

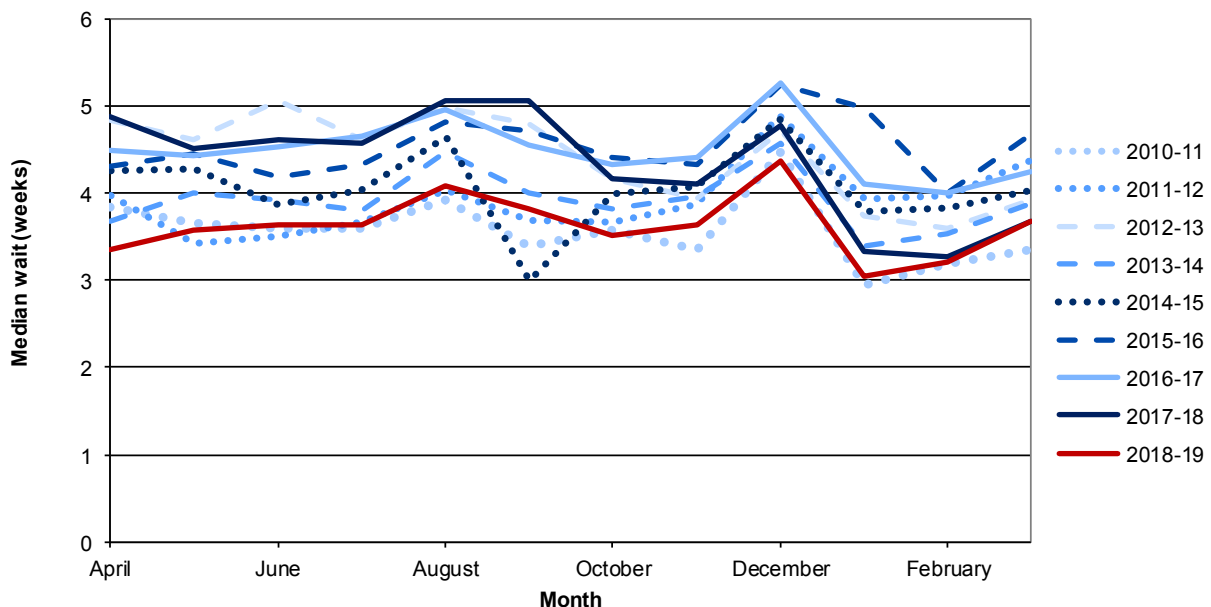
- The median waiting times were generally shorter this year than every year since 2011-12, but mostly longer than in 2010-11: see [Chart 3](#).
- In 2018-19, median waiting times by diagnostic service ranged from a low of 1.8 weeks for imaging in October 2018 to a high of 4.1 weeks for physiological measurement in December 2018.
- Hywel Dda had the shortest median waits of all health boards for most months of the year.

Therapies

Performance

- For every month, the number of waits over 14 weeks was lower this year than every year since 2012-13: see [Chart 2](#).
- In 2018-19, Betsi Cadwaladr, Abertawe Bro Morgannwg and Cwm Taf had no patients waiting over 14 weeks in 11 months of the year. By March 2019, all health boards except Powys had no patients waiting over 14 weeks. Hywel Dda and Cardiff and Vale had the most waits over target of all health boards in each month, although by March 2019 they had no patients waiting over the target time.
- In 2018-19, arts therapies followed by speech language had the lowest number of patients waiting over target for most months of the year. With the exception of physiotherapy, the other services had no patients waiting over target time in one month of the year, although podiatry had two months with no patients over target.

Chart 4: Median waiting times for therapy services by financial year, 2010-11 onwards



Context

- The median waiting times were shorter this year than almost every year since 2012-13 (except 2014-15 where it was longer in September): see [Chart 4](#).
- Excluding median waiting times for arts therapies, the median wait by therapy service in 2018-19 ranged from a low of 2.5 weeks for podiatry in January 2019 (the lowest median wait for therapies by service in the last nine years) to a high of 5.7 weeks for audiology (adult hearing aids) in December 2018. Medians by health board ranged from a low of 1.9 weeks at Cwm Taf in January 2019 (the lowest median wait for therapies by health board in the last nine years) to a high of 5.6 weeks at Cardiff and Vale in December 2018.

Key quality information

We publish a detailed [quality report](#) on NHS Wales Diagnostic and Therapy waiting times statistics. This includes information on definitions and coverage, as well as other aspects of quality such as timeliness, relevance and comparability and also details of users and uses of our statistics.

Relevance

The statistics cover specific aspects of diagnostic and therapy waiting times and are used as the measure of performance against the NHS Wales standards – see the introduction of the bulletin for information on the standards. Other interests and uses of this data are outlined below.

We encourage users of the statistics to contact us to let us know how they use the data. It would not be possible to provide tables to meet all user needs, but the tables published in the bulletin and StatsWales aim to answer common questions.

We consult with key users prior to making changes and, where possible, publicise changes on the internet, at committees and other networks to consult with users more widely. We aim to respond quickly to policy changes to ensure our statistics remain relevant.

We regularly review all our outputs and welcome feedback.

Users and uses

An understanding of trends in waiting times is crucial for those involved in planning and decision making at the national and local level.

We believe the key users of these statistics are:

- ministers and their advisors;
- Assembly members and Members Research Service in the National Assembly for Wales;
- officials within the Department for Health and Social Services at Welsh Government;
- NHS Wales;
- students, academics and universities;
- other areas of the Welsh Government;
- other government departments;
- media; and
- individual citizens.

The statistics are used in a variety of ways. Some examples of these include:

- advice to Ministers and briefings on the latest performance across Wales against the targets;
- to assess, manage and monitor NHS Wales performance against targets;
- by NHS local health boards, to benchmark themselves against other local health boards;

- to contribute to news articles on waiting times in Wales;
- to help determine the service the public may receive from NHS Wales.
- to contribute to news articles on waiting times in Wales;
- to help determine the service the public may receive from NHS Wales.

If you are a user and do not feel the above list adequately covers you please let us know by contacting via stats.healthinfo@gov.wales.

Definitions

Definitions of terms used are in the [NHS Wales Data Dictionary](#).

Although this release refers to patients, it is possible that a person could be on a number of different lists waiting for different conditions – i.e. there would be one patient but more than one pathway. Due to it being an aggregate data collection we're not able to measure the number of unique patients.

Changes to the statistical release

From April 2017 Welsh Government has been publishing monthly NHS activity and performance statistics on the same day, with annual rather than quarterly analytical releases. This is the first in the new series of annual releases relating to diagnostic and therapy services waiting times. Please see the [Chief Statistician's update](#) for more information. We welcome feedback on the new look release as well as any further analysis that would be of interest.

Median

The median time is the middle time when all waiting times are ordered from shortest wait to longest, so a half of all patient pathways wait this time or less. It is commonly used in preference to the mean as it is not affected by extreme values in the same way as the mean.

It should be noted that median times are calculated from aggregate data, rather than patient level data, and therefore are only estimates. Also because we do not have patient level data we have not presented the mean in these statistics.

Accuracy

Percentage point changes are calculated using unrounded figures.

Revisions

Any revisions to the data will be noted in the information accompanying the [StatsWales](#) cubes each month, and any large revisions will be noted on the summary headline page.

Estimates

Occasionally local health boards do not submit complete information in time for the release. When this occurs an estimate is included within the data presented. Estimates were made as follows:

September 2010 – May 2011

Diagnostic Endoscopy, Dietetics, Occupational Therapy, Physiological Measurement, Physiotherapy and Speech Language for Worthybush General Hospital (Hywel Dda Health Board) have been estimated for September 2010 - May 2011 using data from August 2010 as they were unable to submit data due to migration from PAS to Myrddin (Administrative systems).

October 2012

Physiotherapy data for October 2012 for Cardiff and Vale University Health Board are estimated using their data for September 2012, as they were unable to provide full data on physiotherapy for October 2012.

February 2013

Physiotherapy data for February 2013 for Cardiff and Vale University LHB are estimated using their data for January 2013. This is due to Cardiff and Vale University being unable to provide full data on physiotherapy for February 2013, because staff sickness resulted in patients not being entered into the system in time for the submission.

June 2013

Radiology & imaging data for June 2013 for Cardiff and Vale University LHB are estimated using their data for May 2013. This is due to Cardiff and Vale University experiencing technical difficulties with the base data.

April 2014

Neurophysiology data for April 2014 for Betsi Cadwaladr University LHB are estimated using their data for March 2014, this is due to the implementation of the service to a new hospital site which resulted in the April 2014 data being unreliable and hence not submitted by the LHB.

April 2017

Data for April 2017 for Cwm Taf University Health Board are estimated using their data for March 2017, as they were unable to provide any data for April 2017.

From the April 2018 data onwards, additional diagnostic tests for Cardiology have been included in the Diagnostic and Therapy waiting times data. These new records have been included in the waiting time totals and as a result there has been an increase in the number of people waiting for a diagnostic test compared to the previous month.

Due to a data issue, figures for nuclear medicine for Aneurin Bevan were under reported between February 2015 and July 2015 inclusive. During these months data for Myocardial Perfusion Scans

were not reported under nuclear medicine, whereas outside of these months this test was included under nuclear medicine. Therefore, the decrease in patients seen in February 2015 and the increase seen in August 2015 were due to the way the data were reported, rather than changes in actual numbers of patients. This has caused a difference of approximately 350-400 patients each month, and approximately 150 to 190 of these each month were waiting 8 weeks or longer for their scan. Therefore the exclusion of these patients slightly improves the Welsh performance against the standard.

Public sector strike

The public sector strike on 30 November 2011 and 10 May 2012 will have had an effect on performance in the November and May figures, respectively, as many diagnostic and therapy tests were cancelled for that date.

Doctors' strikes – 21 June 2012

Diagnostic and Therapy service waiting times may have been affected by the doctors' strikes on 21 June 2012 and this might have had a slight impact on performance.

Timeliness and punctuality

All outputs adhere to the Code of Practice by pre-announcing the date of publication through the [Upcoming calendar](#) web pages. Furthermore, should the need arise to postpone an output this would follow the Welsh Government's [Revisions, errors and postponements](#) arrangements.

We publish releases as soon as practicable after the relevant time period. Data for the end of month position is published within six weeks of the reference date. This allows for the significant validation by LHBs, NWIS and the Health Statistics and Analysis Unit.

This release was postponed. It was originally pre-announced to be published on the 27th June but has now been published on the 29th August 2019.

Accessibility and clarity

The statistics are published in an accessible, orderly, pre-announced manner on the Welsh Government website at 9:30am on the day of publication. An RSS feed alerts registered users to this publication. Simultaneously the quarterly releases are also published on the National Statistics Publication Hub. All releases are available to download for free.

More detailed data is available at the same time on the StatsWales website and this can be manipulated online or downloaded into spreadsheets for use offline.

Comparability and coherence

Every month the data are all collected from the same sources and adhere to the national standard - they will also be coherent within and across organisations. Where there are changes in definitions or scope we clearly note this in the release and add appropriate caveats to the data.

Where there are changes to the data provided, this is shown clearly in the outputs. Where advance warning is known of future changes, these will be pre-announced in accordance with Welsh Government arrangements.

There is similar information available from other parts of the UK for diagnostic services but the data is not comparable due to local definitions and standards in each area – see Coherence below.

There are no therapy waits reported in other UK countries.

Agreed standards and definitions within Wales provide assurance that the data is consistent across local health boards.

Statisticians in all four home nations have collaborated as part of the 'UK Comparative Waiting Times Group'. The aim of the group was to look across published health statistics, in particular waiting times, and compile a comparison of (i) what is measured in each country, (ii) how the statistics are similar and (iii) where they have key differences. That information is available on the [Government Statistical Service website](#).

Data on NHS Wales diagnostic and therapy waiting times is available on [StatsWales](#).

Data on NHS England diagnostic waiting times is available on the [NHS England website](#).

Data on NHS Scotland diagnostic waiting times is available on the [Information Services Division Scotland website](#).

NHS Northern Ireland hospital waiting times statistics can be found on the [Department of Health website](#).

National Statistics status

The [United Kingdom Statistics Authority](#) has designated these statistics as National Statistics, in accordance with the Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007 and signifying compliance with the [Code of Practice for Statistics](#).

National Statistics status means that official statistics meet the highest standards of trustworthiness, quality and public value.

All official statistics should comply with all aspects of the Code of Practice for Statistics. They are awarded National Statistics status following an assessment by the UK Statistics Authority's regulatory arm. The Authority considers whether the statistics meet the highest standards of Code compliance, including the value they add to public decisions and debate.

It is Welsh Government's responsibility to maintain compliance with the standards expected of National Statistics. If we become concerned about whether these statistics are still meeting the appropriate standards, we will discuss any concerns with the Authority promptly. National Statistics status can be removed at any point when the highest standards are not maintained, and reinstated when standards are restored.

The continued designation of these statistics as National Statistics was confirmed in 2011 following a [compliance check by the Office for Statistics Regulation](#). These statistics last underwent a [full assessment against the Code of Practice](#) in 2011.

Since the latest review by the Office for Statistics Regulation, we have continued to comply with the Code of Practice for Statistics, and have made the following improvements:

- E.g. added more value by providing more detailed breakdowns and interactive analysis in the [diagnostic and therapy services waiting times dashboard](#).

Well-being of Future Generations Act (WFG)

The Well-being of Future Generations Act 2015 is about improving the social, economic, environmental and cultural well-being of Wales. The Act puts in place seven well-being goals for Wales. These are for a more equal, prosperous, resilient, healthier and globally responsible Wales, with cohesive communities and a vibrant culture and thriving Welsh language. Under section (10)(1) of the Act, the Welsh Ministers must (a) publish indicators (“national indicators”) that must be applied for the purpose of measuring progress towards the achievement of the Well-being goals, and (b) lay a copy of the national indicators before the National Assembly. The 46 national indicators were laid in March 2016.

Information on the indicators, along with narratives for each of the well-being goals and associated technical information is available in the [Well-being of Wales report](#).

Further information on the [Well-being of Future Generations \(Wales\) Act 2015](#).

The statistics included in this release could also provide supporting narrative to the national indicators and be used by public services boards in relation to their local well-being assessments and local well-being plans.

Further details

The document is available at:

<https://gov.wales/nhs-diagnostic-and-therapy-service-waiting-times>

Next update

June 2020 (Provisional)

We want your feedback

We welcome any feedback on any aspect of these statistics which can be provided by email to stats.healthinfo@gov.wales.

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