



**NHS Referral to Treatment (RTT)  
Waiting Times Statistics for England  
2010 Annual Report**

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## Summary

### *Admitted Patients*

- The average (median) time waited for patients completing a Referral to Treatment (RTT) pathway in December 2010 was 7.9 weeks for admitted patients, compared to 7.7 weeks in December 2009. The median time waited has been relatively stable around 8 weeks since March 2008, but is subject to seasonality with previous years showing increases in average waiting times in the early part of the calendar year.
- The 95th percentile time waited for patients completing an RTT pathway in December 2010 was 20.9 weeks for admitted patients, compared to 19.8 weeks in December 2009. The 95th percentile time waited for admitted patients has been stable around 20 weeks since January 2009.
- In total, 254,739 admitted patients, for whom English commissioners are responsible, completed their RTT pathway during December 2010. Of these, 92.2% were treated within 18 weeks, compared to 93.3% in December 2009.

### *Non-admitted Patients*

- The average (median) time waited for patients completing a Referral to Treatment (RTT) pathway in December 2010 was 4.1 weeks for non-admitted patients, compared to 4.2 weeks in December 2009. The median time waited has been relatively stable around 4 weeks since March 2008, but is subject to seasonality with previous years showing increases in average waiting times in the early part of the calendar year.
- The 95th percentile time waited for patients completing an RTT pathway in December 2010 was 15.3 weeks for non-admitted patients, compared to 14.9 weeks in December 2009. The 95th percentile time waited for non-admitted patients has been stable around 15 weeks since January 2009.
- In total, 742,747 non-admitted patients, for whom English commissioners are responsible, completed their RTT pathway during December 2010. Of these, 97.6% were treated within 18 weeks, compared to 97.9% in December 2009.

### *Incomplete Pathways*

- For patients still waiting for treatment (incomplete pathways) at the end of December 2010, the average (median) waiting time was 6.9 weeks, compared to a median waiting time of 6.5 weeks at the end of December 2009. The median waiting time has been relatively stable around 6 weeks since March 2009, but is subject to seasonality with previous years showing increases in average waiting times around December and

January.

- For patients still waiting for treatment (incomplete pathways) at the end of December 2010, the 95th percentile was 26.3 weeks, compared to a 95th percentile of 24.7 weeks at the end of December 2009. The 95th percentile waiting time for patients still waiting for treatment at the end of the month (incomplete pathways) has been stable around 24 weeks since May 2009.
- At the end of December 2010, there were 2,410,000 patients on incomplete RTT pathways. Of these, 88.6% had been waiting less than 18 weeks. At the end of December 2009, there were 2,370,000 patients on incomplete RTT pathways. Of these, 90.0% had been waiting less than 18 weeks.

## 1. Introduction

- 1.1. This report presents a summary of English NHS consultant-led referral to treatment waiting times statistics up to December 2010.
- 1.2. Patients continue to have a legal right under the NHS Constitution to access services within maximum referral to treatment waiting times, or for the NHS to take all reasonable steps to offer them a range of alternative providers if this is not possible. The continued publication of waiting times information will ensure that the NHS is accountable to the patients and public it serves. This information, combined with the quality of patients' experiences and outcomes, will drive patients' choices of where they want to be treated and drive further improvement in quality and waiting times.
- 1.3. 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 Official Statistics.
- 1.4. The Government Statistical Service (GSS) statistician responsible for producing the data in this report is:  
Mark Svenson  
Knowledge and Intelligence, the Department of Health  
Room 4E63, Quarry House, Quarry Hill, Leeds LS2 7UE  
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## 2. Methodology

- 2.1. The Department of Health (DH) compiles monthly Referral To Treatment (RTT) data on the length of time from GP referral through to treatment. There are two main central returns:
- **Unadjusted.** This return has been collected since January 2007 and was first published for March 2007. The return covers admitted patients (since January 2007), non-admitted patients (since August 2007) and patients on incomplete pathways (since August 2007).
  - **Adjusted.** This return has been collected and published since March 2008. The return covers admitted patients on an adjusted basis (i.e. including legitimate pauses of patients' waiting time clocks).
- 2.2. Data is submitted monthly to DH by all providers of NHS-funded, consultant-led services, via Unify2<sup>1</sup>. NHS commissioners (Primary Care Trusts) review and sign off the data before DH performs central validation checks to ensure good data quality. Final figures are published to a pre-announced timetable, roughly 7 weeks after the end of the reference month<sup>2</sup>.
- 2.3. Further papers describing the methodology for the monitoring of consultant-led RTT waiting times can be found on the DH website<sup>3</sup>.
- 2.4. Revisions to published figures are released on a six-monthly basis and in accordance with the DH Knowledge and Intelligence team's revision policy<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Unify2 is DH's standard online tool for the collection and sharing of NHS performance data.

<sup>2</sup> Figures are published according to an agreed formula: publication occurs on or after the 31st working day after the reporting month end.

<sup>3</sup> [http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publicationsandstatistics/Statistics/Perfomancedataandstatistics/ReferraltoTreatmentstatistics/DH\\_089757](http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publicationsandstatistics/Statistics/Perfomancedataandstatistics/ReferraltoTreatmentstatistics/DH_089757)

<sup>4</sup> [http://www.dh.gov.uk/dr\\_consum\\_dh/digitalassets/@dh/@en/@ps/@sta/@perf/documents/digitalasset/dh\\_105088.pdf](http://www.dh.gov.uk/dr_consum_dh/digitalassets/@dh/@en/@ps/@sta/@perf/documents/digitalasset/dh_105088.pdf)

### 3. Analysis – Current Performance

3.1. Table 1 shows average (median) time waited and 95th percentile time waited for admitted pathways, across the ten English Strategic Health Authorities (SHAs) in December 2010.

**Table 1: Admitted (adjusted) RTT waiting times by Strategic Health Authority, December 2010**

<b>Strategic Health Authority</b>	<b>Admitted (adjusted) RTT periods</b>			
	Median wait (weeks)	95th percentile (weeks)	% within 18 weeks	Total number
North East	7.0	18.0	95.2%	14,664
North West	8.0	22.1	91.3%	34,411
Yorkshire and the Humber	7.1	21.8	91.5%	27,147
East Midlands	8.1	20.0	93.3%	21,231
West Midlands	7.6	20.4	92.8%	28,421
East of England	8.6	20.1	92.5%	29,377
London	7.8	20.9	92.7%	30,583
South East Coast	9.5	22.5	90.6%	20,098
South Central	8.2	22.9	89.5%	18,455
South West	7.4	20.1	92.6%	30,339
<b>England<sup>5</sup></b>	<b>7.9</b>	<b>20.9</b>	<b>92.2%</b>	<b>254,739</b>

3.2. Table 1 shows that average waiting times are broadly similar across England, ranging from 7.0 to 9.5 weeks for admitted patients.

<sup>5</sup> The total number of RTT periods in each SHA does not add up to the England total due to a small number of RTT periods that are commissioned by the National Commissioning Group.

3.3. Table 2 shows average (median) time waited and 95th percentile time waited for non-admitted pathways, across the ten English Strategic Health Authorities (SHAs) in December 2010.

**Table 2: Non-admitted RTT waiting times by Strategic Health Authority, December 2010**

<b>Strategic Health Authority</b>	<b>Non-admitted RTT periods</b>			
	Median wait (weeks)	95th percentile (weeks)	% within 18 weeks	Total number
North East	3.8	14.7	97.9%	41,112
North West	4.3	16.0	97.2%	108,498
Yorkshire and the Humber	3.9	14.9	97.4%	76,839
East Midlands	4.7	15.5	97.7%	48,916
West Midlands	3.9	15.2	97.5%	73,676
East of England	4.3	15.5	97.8%	78,336
London	3.7	15.0	97.9%	126,546
South East Coast	5.0	15.6	97.2%	61,102
South Central	4.0	15.5	97.3%	48,260
South West	4.0	14.7	98.0%	61,651
<b>England<sup>6</sup></b>	<b>4.1</b>	<b>15.3</b>	<b>97.6%</b>	<b>742,747</b>

3.4. Table 2 shows that average waiting times are broadly similar across England, ranging from 3.7 to 5.0 weeks for non-admitted patients.

<sup>6</sup> The total number of RTT periods in each SHA does not add up to the England total due to a small number of RTT periods that are commissioned by the National Commissioning Group.



3.5. Table 3 shows average (median) waiting time and 95th percentile waiting time across the ten English Strategic Health Authorities (SHAs) for patients waiting for treatment at the end of December 2010.

**Table 3: Incomplete RTT waiting times by Strategic Health Authority, December 2010**

<b>Strategic Health Authority</b>	<b>Incomplete RTT periods</b>			
	Median wait (weeks)	95th percentile (weeks)	% within 18 weeks	Total number
North East	7.1	26.9	88.1%	115,368
North West	6.8	27.1	88.4%	311,174
Yorkshire and the Humber	6.6	25.0	89.3%	215,196
East Midlands	7.0	24.5	89.4%	142,451
West Midlands	6.4	26.9	89.5%	223,132
East of England	6.2	19.8	93.7%	239,676
London	7.7	30.8	84.6%	332,565
South East Coast	7.3	23.6	90.2%	194,859
South Central	7.7	30.0	85.0%	151,720
South West	6.8	24.8	89.1%	204,733
<b>England</b>	<b>6.9</b>	<b>26.3</b>	<b>88.6%</b>	<b>2,405,743</b>

3.6. Table 4 shows average (median) time waited and 95th percentile time waited for admitted pathways by treatment function<sup>7</sup> in December 2010.

**Table 4: Admitted (adjusted) RTT waiting times by Treatment Function, December 2010**

<b>Treatment Function</b>	<b>Admitted (adjusted) RTT periods</b>			
	Median wait (weeks)	95th percentile (weeks)	% within 18 weeks	Total number
General Surgery	7.5	20.9	92.4%	37,207
Urology	6.4	19.6	93.7%	17,749
Trauma & Orthopaedics	11.6	24.8	86.5%	46,758
ENT	9.0	21.1	92.1%	13,908
Ophthalmology	9.5	20.2	92.2%	34,178
Oral Surgery	11.0	21.5	90.7%	13,454
Neurosurgery	7.8	25.1	88.4%	1,850
Plastic Surgery	7.7	23.2	89.8%	9,864
Cardiothoracic Surgery	4.8	17.0	96.9%	1,444
General Medicine	3.3	13.5	99.0%	5,250
Gastroenterology	4.3	14.9	99.0%	7,858
Cardiology	5.7	17.1	96.6%	7,520
Dermatology	7.2	18.5	94.6%	6,166
Thoracic Medicine	3.5	15.1	98.5%	1,200
Neurology	2.8	14.3	99.3%	721
Rheumatology	2.7	13.2	99.1%	1,457
Geriatric Medicine	1.2	12.7	100.0%	147
Gynaecology	6.0	18.0	95.1%	23,625
Other	5.5	19.6	93.8%	24,383
<b>Total</b>	<b>7.9</b>	<b>20.9</b>	<b>92.2%</b>	<b>254,739</b>

3.7. In December 2010, the shortest average waiting times were in Geriatric Medicine and the longest average waiting times were in Trauma & Orthopaedics for admitted patients.

<sup>7</sup> Treatment functions are based on specialities. There are 19 treatment functions in total, which have been chosen to capture the main treatment areas.

3.8. Table 5 shows average (median) time waited and 95th percentile time waited for non-admitted pathways by treatment function<sup>8</sup> in December 2010.

**Table 5: Non-admitted RTT waiting times by Treatment Function, December 2010**

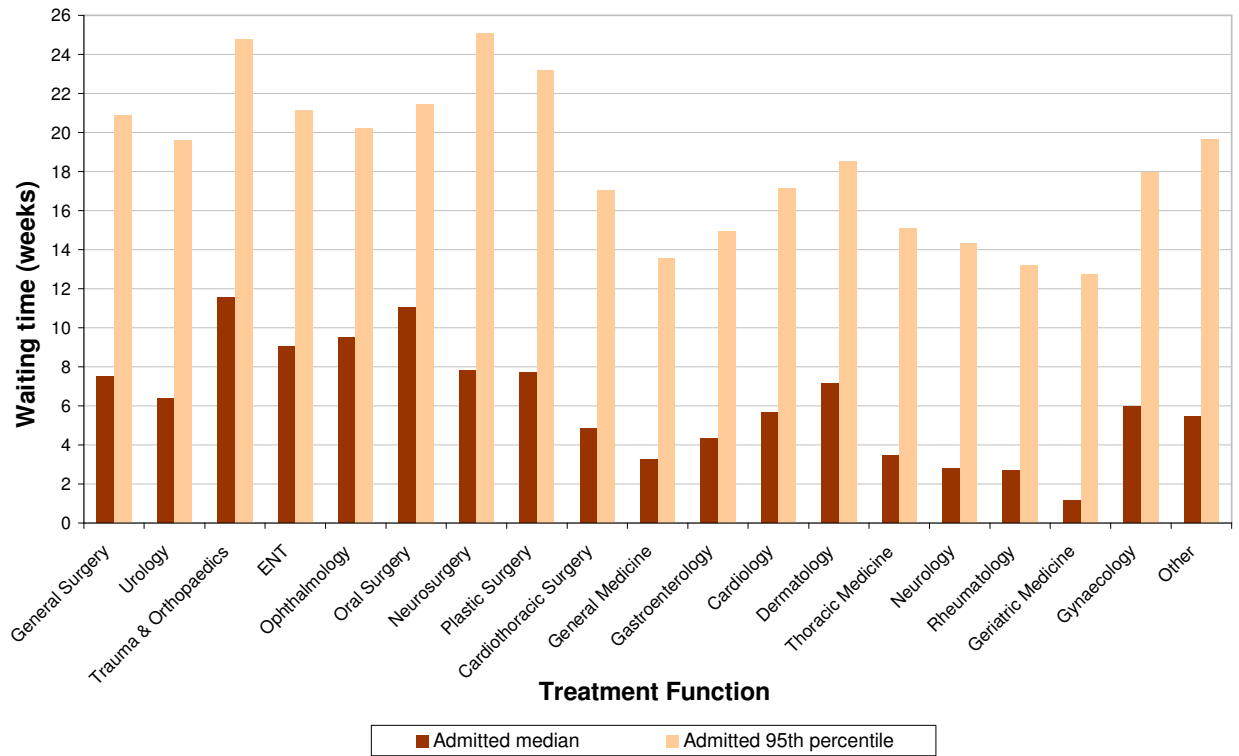
<b>Treatment Function</b>	<b>Non-admitted RTT periods</b>			
	Median wait (weeks)	95th percentile (weeks)	% within 18 weeks	Total number
General Surgery	3.4	16.3	96.9%	51,289
Urology	4.8	16.6	96.6%	23,425
Trauma & Orthopaedics	5.1	17.4	95.8%	73,884
ENT	4.9	15.4	97.4%	54,047
Ophthalmology	4.9	14.9	97.7%	73,277
Oral Surgery	5.9	17.6	96.0%	27,568
Neurosurgery	7.7	19.4	94.0%	3,414
Plastic Surgery	3.9	16.7	96.4%	7,613
Cardiothoracic Surgery	3.8	16.3	97.6%	975
General Medicine	3.6	14.6	98.1%	22,123
Gastroenterology	5.7	16.8	96.8%	18,764
Cardiology	4.7	14.8	98.3%	31,088
Dermatology	6.0	15.1	97.8%	50,268
Thoracic Medicine	4.7	14.7	98.6%	12,935
Neurology	7.1	16.8	96.3%	19,720
Rheumatology	6.1	14.9	98.1%	16,904
Geriatric Medicine	3.3	12.9	99.2%	8,872
Gynaecology	3.5	13.8	98.4%	51,438
Other	1.9	12.9	98.5%	195,143
<b>Total</b>	<b>4.1</b>	<b>15.3</b>	<b>97.6%</b>	<b>742,747</b>

3.9. In December 2010, the shortest average waiting times were in Other and the longest average waiting times were in Neurosurgery for non-admitted patients.

<sup>8</sup> Treatment functions are based on specialities. There are 19 treatment functions in total, which have been chosen to capture the main treatment areas.

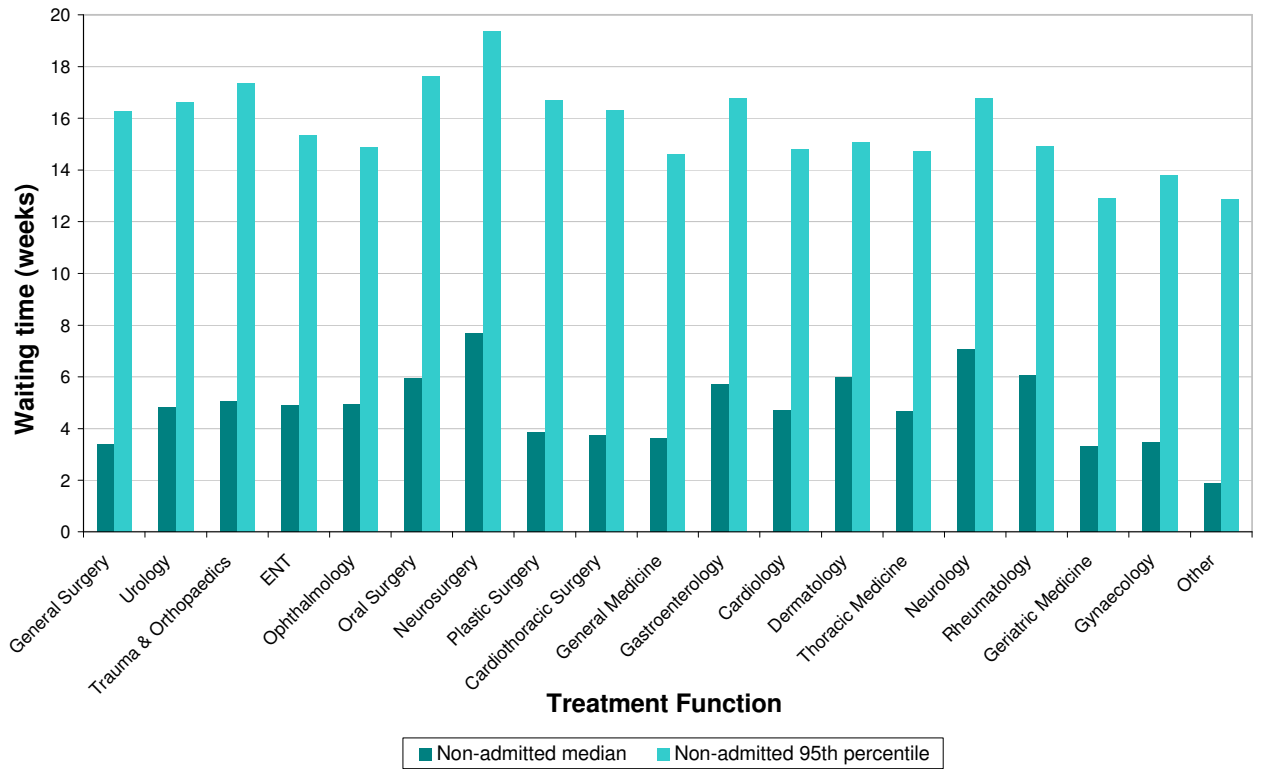
3.10. Chart 1 shows average (median) time waited and 95th percentile time waited for admitted pathways by treatment function in December 2010.

**Chart 1: Admitted (adjusted) RTT waiting times by Treatment Function, December 2010**



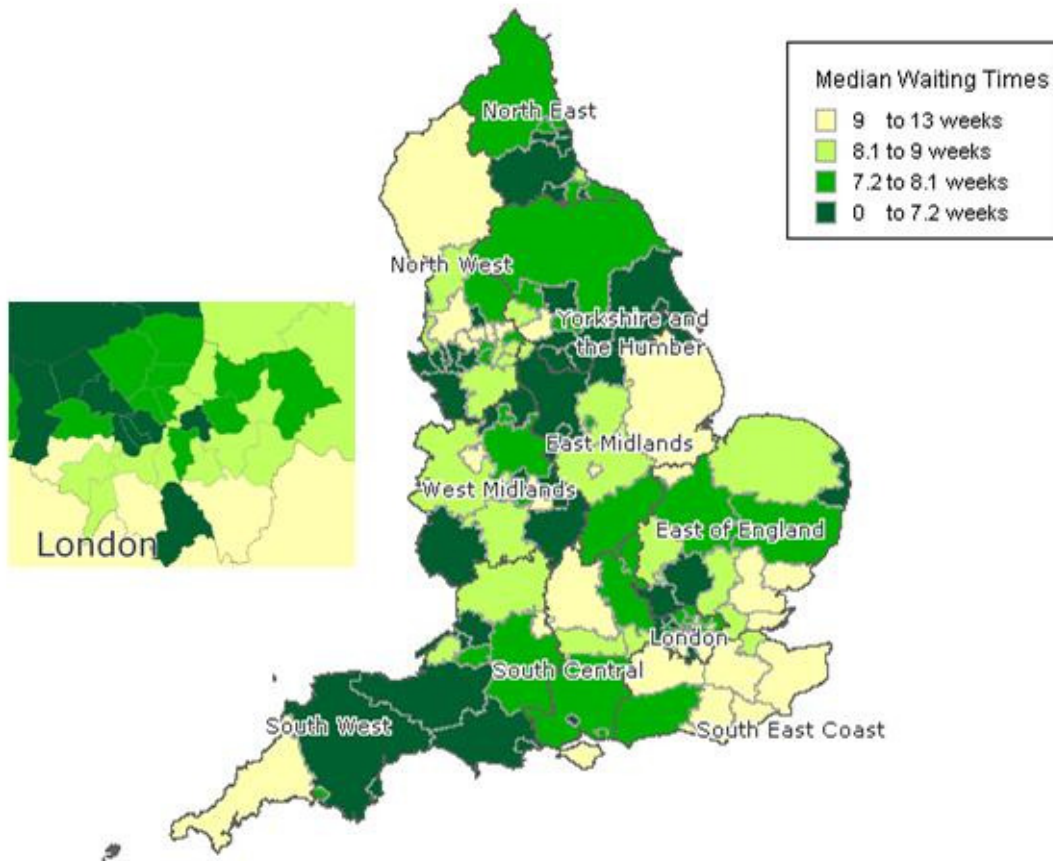
3.11. Chart 2 shows average (median) time waited and 95th percentile time waited for non-admitted pathways by treatment function in December 2010.

**Chart 2: Non-admitted RTT waiting times by Treatment Function, December 2010**



3.12. Chart 3 shows average (median) time waited for admitted patients across England by Primary Care Trust (PCT)<sup>9</sup> in December 2010.

**Chart 3: Admitted (adjusted) RTT waiting times by PCT, December 2010**



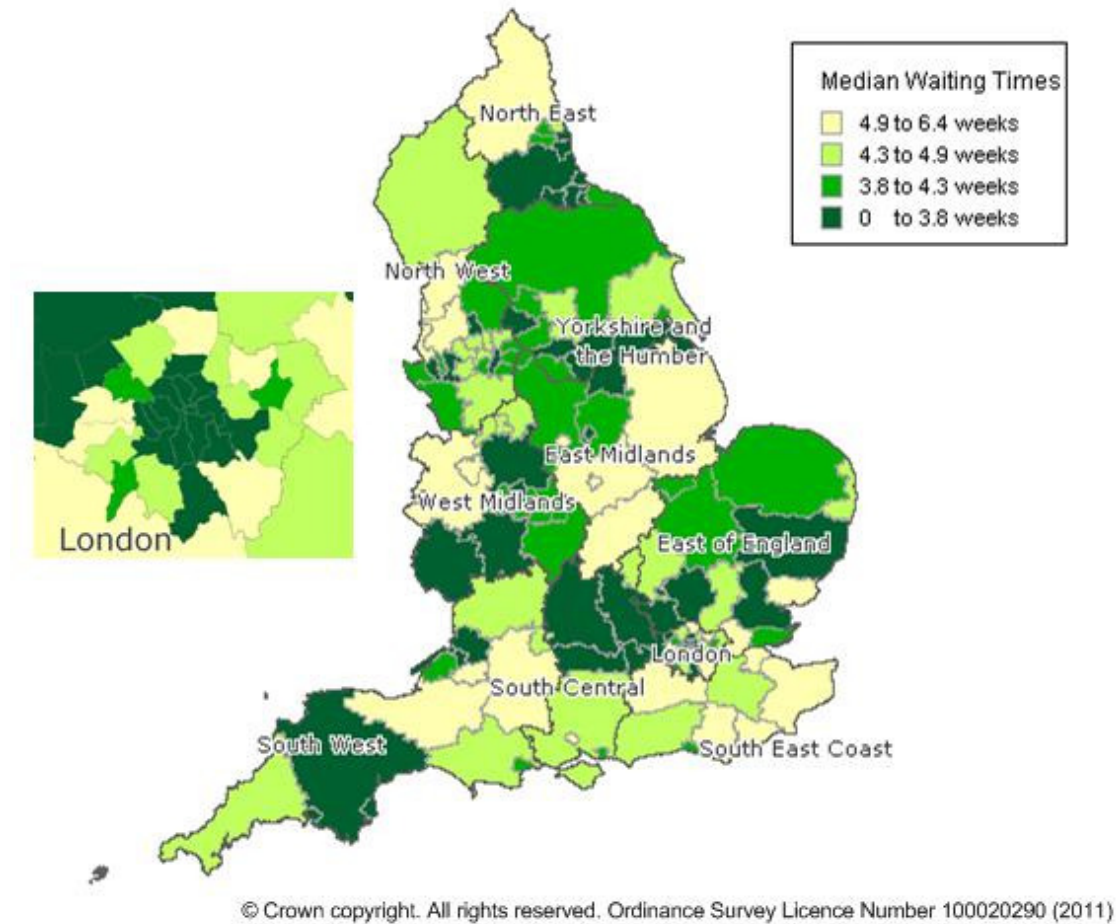
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Note: The median waiting times are grouped into quartiles

<sup>9</sup> Primary Care Trusts (PCTs) are responsible for commissioning NHS services on behalf of patients who are registered with a GP practice in England. In 2010, from January to March there were 152 PCTs and from April to December there were 151 PCTs.

3.13. Chart 4 shows average (median) time waited for non-admitted patients across England by Primary Care Trust (PCT)<sup>10</sup> in December 2010.

**Chart 4: Non-admitted RTT waiting times by PCT, December 2010**



Note: The median waiting times are grouped into quartiles

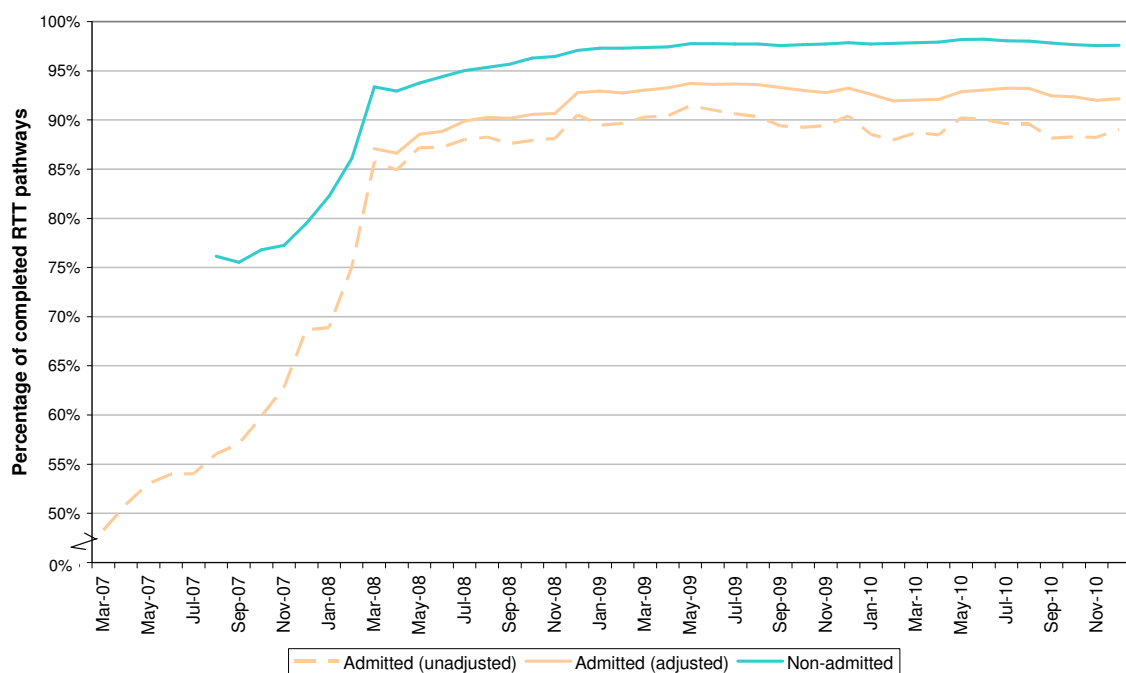
<sup>10</sup> Primary Care Trusts (PCTs) are responsible for commissioning NHS services on behalf of patients who are registered with a GP practice in England. In 2010, from January to March there were 152 PCTs and from April to December there were 151 PCTs.

## 4. Analysis – Time Series

4.1. This section analyses consultant-led referral to treatment waiting time data over time. RTT waiting times data on admitted patients have been published on an unadjusted basis since March 2007, and on an adjusted basis since March 2008. Data on non-admitted patients have been published since August 2007.

4.2. Chart 5 shows the percentage of consultant-led RTT periods that were completed within 18 weeks.

**Chart 5: Percentage of RTT periods completed within 18 weeks, England, from March 2007 until December 2010**

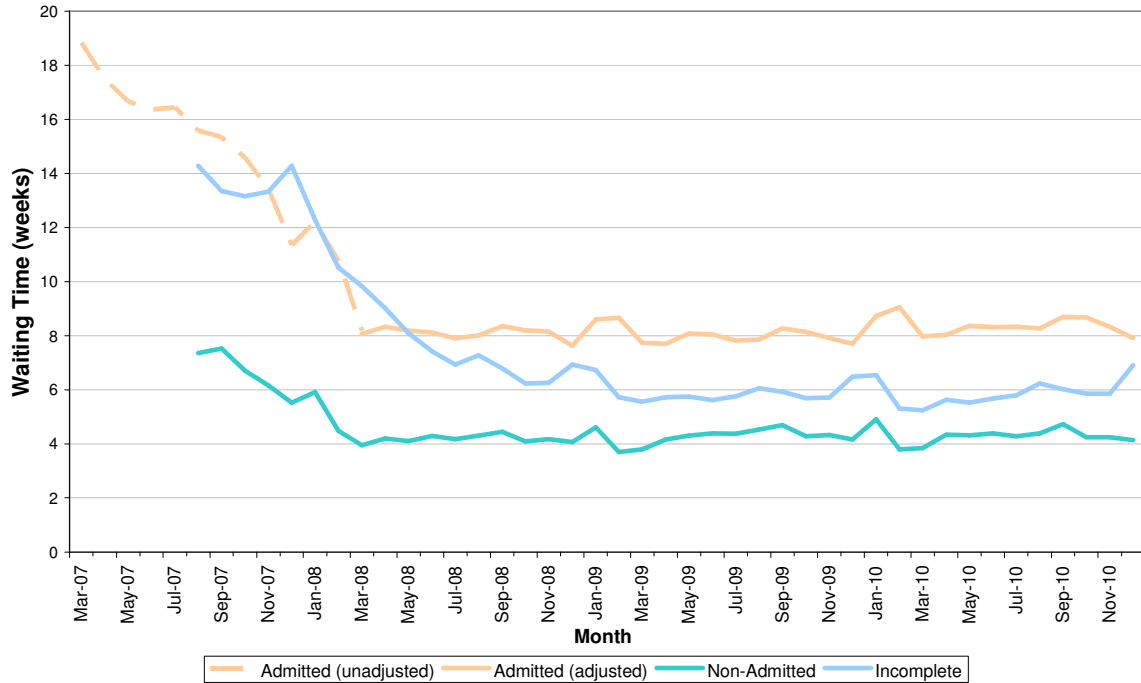


4.3. The percentage of RTT periods completed within 18 weeks at a national level has been relatively stable since January 2009.



4.4. Chart 6 shows how average (median<sup>11</sup>) RTT waiting times have changed over time.

**Chart 6: Average (Median) RTT Waiting Times, England, from March 2007 until December 2010**

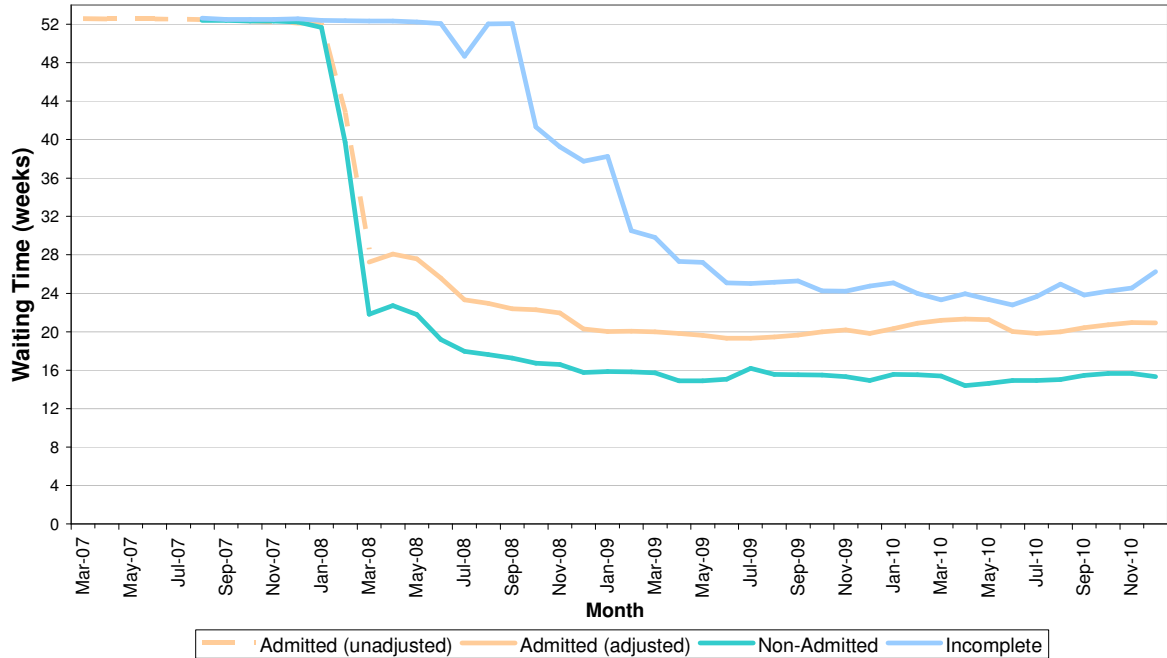


4.5. The average waiting time for completed Admitted and Non-admitted RTT periods levelled off from March 2008, but appears to be subject to seasonality with increased average waiting times for completed RTT periods around January.

<sup>11</sup> The median waiting time is the middle value when all patients are ordered by length of wait. This is the preferred measure of the average waiting time, as it is less susceptible to extreme values than the mean.

4.6. Chart 7 shows how the 95th percentile RTT waiting times have changed over time.

**Chart 8: 95th Percentile RTT Waiting Times, England, from March 2007 until December 2010**

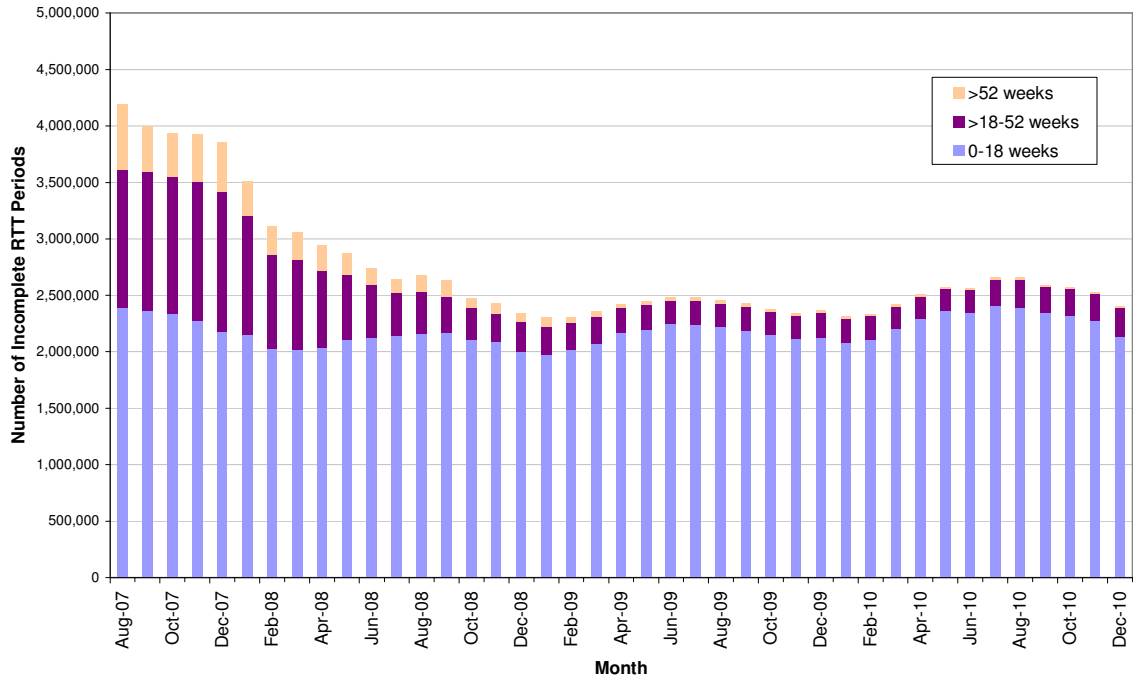


Note: The 95th percentile cannot be calculated if it falls above 52 weeks due to the aggregate nature of the data.

4.7. The 95th percentile waiting time for completed Admitted and Non-admitted RTT periods has been relatively stable since January 2009.

4.8. Chart 8 shows the total number of incomplete RTT periods at the end of each month over time. This is the number of patients who were still awaiting treatment at the end of the month.

**Chart 8: Incomplete RTT periods, England, from August 2007 until December 2010**



4.9. The total number of incomplete RTT periods fell from just over 4 million at the end of August 2007 to around 2.3 million at the end of January 2009. Since then, total levels of incomplete RTT periods have been broadly stable, but subject to seasonality.