

Influenza Weekly Surveillance Bulletin

Northern Ireland, Week 17 (23rd April – 29th April 2018)

Summary

In week 17, the surveillance data indicates influenza activity continues to decrease. Rates remain below the baseline Moving Epidemic Method (MEM) threshold for Northern Ireland and are below normal seasonal activity¹. Both influenza A and B detections continue to decline.

Northern Ireland Primary Care Consultation Rates

- GP consultation rates for combined flu and flu-like illness (flu/FLI) decreased from 5.3 per 100,000 population in week 16, 2018 to 3.3 per 100,000 population in week 17.
- OOH GP consultation rates for flu/FLI decreased in week 17, 2018 from 2.6 per 100,000 population in week 16 to 2.2 per 100,000.

Microbiological Surveillance (Flu and RSV)

- The proportion of all positive influenza specimens decreased from 9% in week 16, 2018 to 4% in week 17.
- There was one positive detection of RSV reported.

Secondary Care (Hospital both non-ICU and ICU)

- The number of detections of influenza from hospital wards reported to PHA decreased from a total of 16 detections in week 16, 2018 to eight in week 17.
- There was one new admission to ICU with confirmed influenza reported in week 17, 2018, giving a total of 119 cases this season to date.
- There were no deaths reported in ICU during week 17. There were 21 deaths in ICU this season in which a diagnosis of influenza was confirmed.

Influenza Outbreaks across Northern Ireland

- There was no influenza outbreaks reported to the PHA in week 17, 2018.

Mortality

- The proportion of deaths related to respiratory keywords (bronchiolitis, bronchitis, influenza and pneumonia) decreased from 29% in week 16, 2018 to 27% in week 17.

¹ The baseline MEM threshold for Northern Ireland is 22.58 per 100,000 population this year (2017/18). Low activity is 22.6 to <26.6, moderate activity 26.6 to <85.1, high activity 85.1 to <142.4 and very high activity is >142.4.

Introduction

Influenza is an acute viral infection of the respiratory tract (nose, mouth, throat, bronchial tubes and lungs). There are three types of flu virus: A, B and C, with A and B responsible for most clinical illness. Influenza activity in Northern Ireland is monitored throughout the year to inform public health action and to prevent spread of the infection. The influenza season typically runs from week 40 to week 20. Week 40 for the 2017/18 season commenced on 2nd October 2017.

Surveillance systems used to monitor influenza activity include:

- Northern Ireland GP surveillance representing 98% of Northern Ireland population;
- Sentinel flu-swabber GP practices representing 11.2% of the NI population, contributing to the measurement of circulating influenza in the community
- GP Out-of-Hours surveillance system representing the entire population;
- Virological reports from the Regional Virus Laboratory (RVL);
- Individual virology reports from local laboratories (as outlined);
- Influenza outbreak report notification to PHA Duty Room;
- Critical Care Network for Northern Ireland reports on patients in ICU/HDU with confirmed influenza;
- Mortality data from Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA);
- Excess mortality estimations are calculated using the EuroMOMO (Mortality Monitoring in Europe) model based on raw death data supplied by NISRA

NB: Please note the change in the collection of Flu/FLI consultation data in 2017-18. Data will now be collected from 325 GP practices, representing 98% of the Northern Ireland (NI) population. This represents a change from previous seasons when data was collected from 37 sentinel GP practices (representing 11.7% of the NI population).

As a result, Flu/FLI consultation rates and the MEM threshold in 2017-18 will be generally lower than in previous years. Please take this into account when interpreting the figures in this season's bulletin.

Northern Ireland GP Consultation Data

Figure 1. Northern Ireland GP consultation rates for flu/FLI 2015/16 - 2017/18

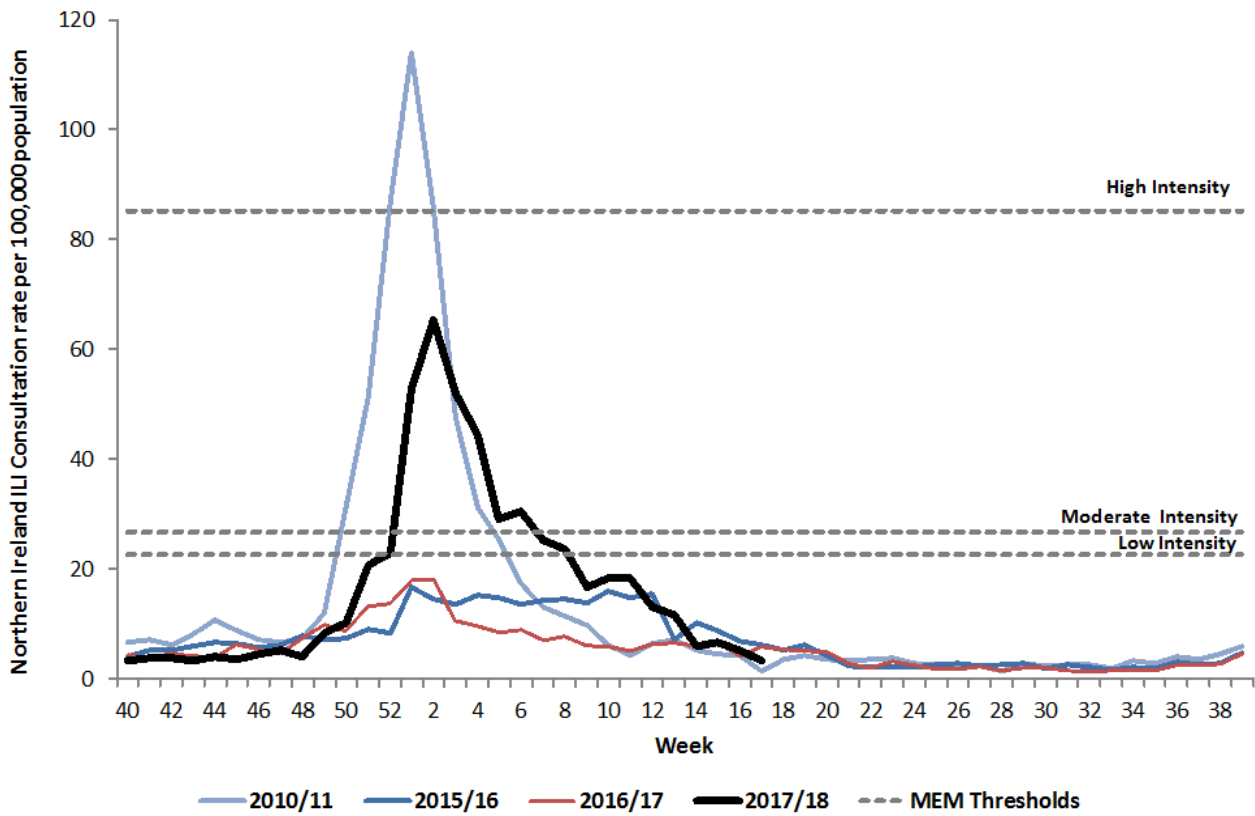


Figure 2. Northern Ireland GP consultation rates for flu/FLI and number of influenza positive detections 2012/13 – 2017/18

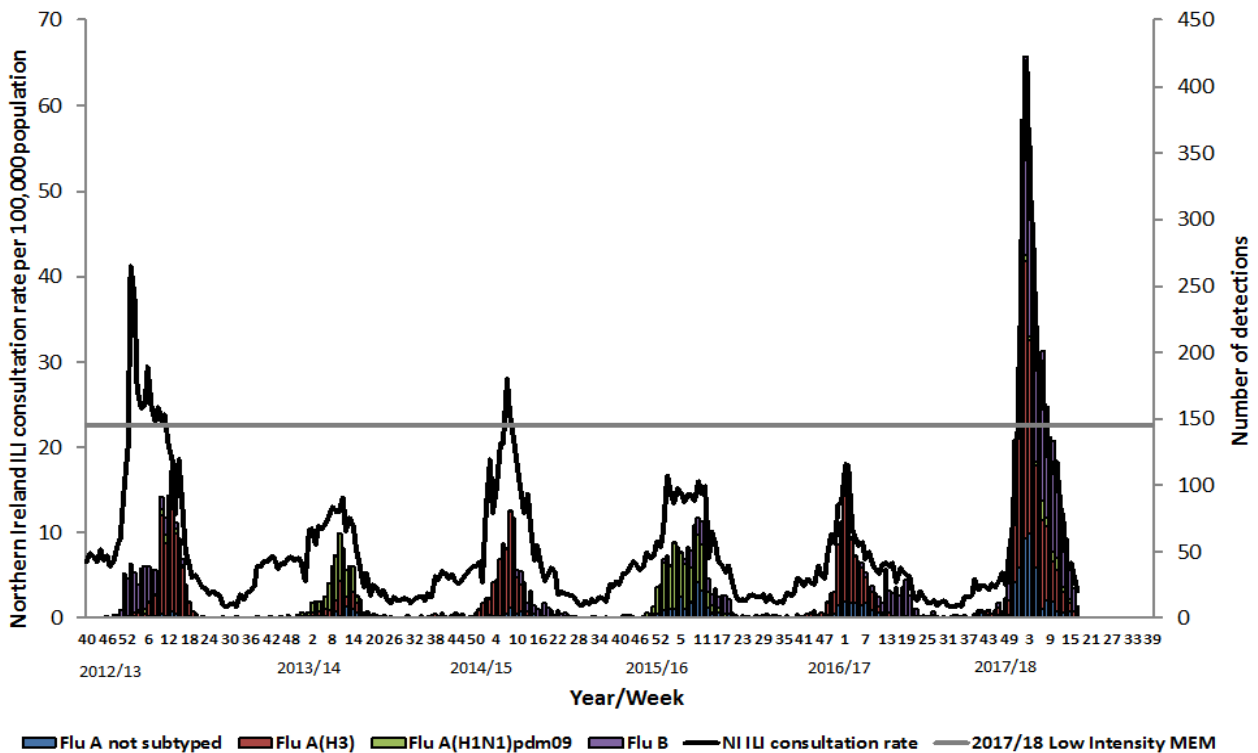
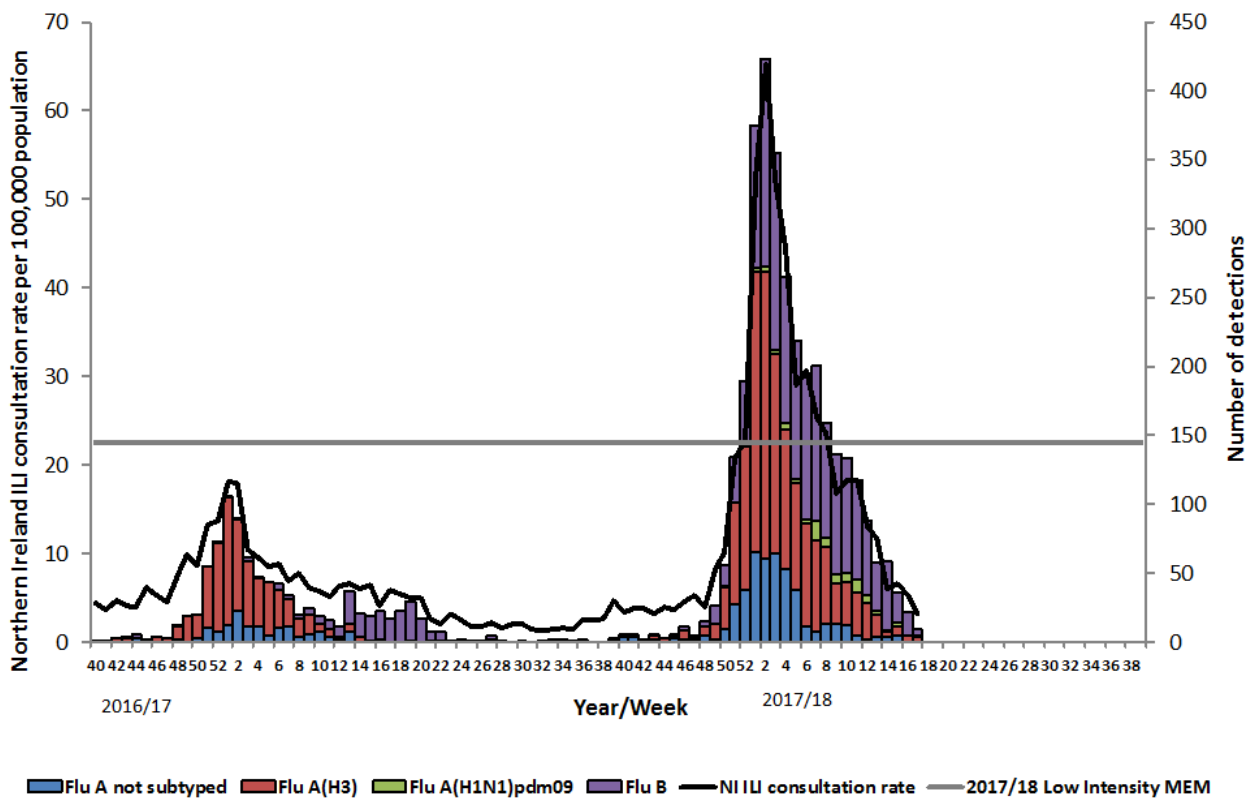


Figure 3. Northern Ireland GP consultation rates for flu/FLI and number of virology 'flu' detections from week 40, 2016



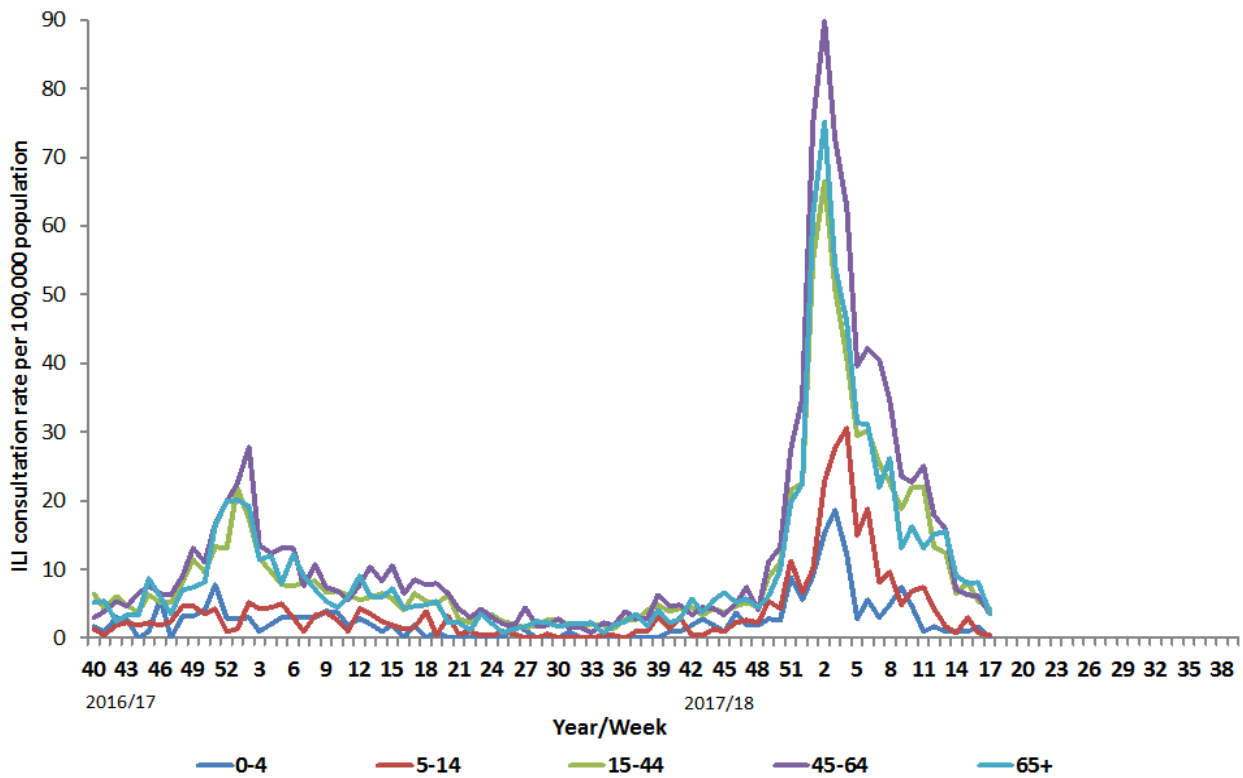
Comment

NI GP consultation rates decreased from 5.3 per 100,000 population in week 16, 2018 to 3.3 per 100,000 in week 17. These rates remain well below the baseline MEM threshold for Northern Ireland (22.6 per 100,000) and are below normal seasonal activity (Figure 1).

The number of positive influenza laboratory detections decreased significantly from 22 in week 16, 2018 to 9 in week 17. At this point in the season there have been a total of 1330 detections of influenza A(H3), 1448 of influenza B, 455 of influenza A (typing awaited), and 81 detections of influenza A(H1N1) 2009 (Figures 1, 2 and 3).

Further information about laboratory detections of influenza is detailed on page 8.

Figure 4. Northern Ireland GP age-specific consultation rates for flu/FLI from week 40, 2016



Comment

NI GP age-specific consultation rates have decreased for all of the age groups in week 17, 2018: 0-4 years (1.8 to 0.0 per 100,000 population), 5 -14 years (0.9 to 0.4 per 100,000), 15-44 years (5.5 to 4.3 per 100,000), 45-64 years (6.2 to 3.6 per 100,000) and 65 years and over (8.1 to 3.6 per 100,000).

Out-of-Hours (OOH) Centres Call Data

Figure 5. OOH call rate for flu/FLI, 2015/16 – 2017/18

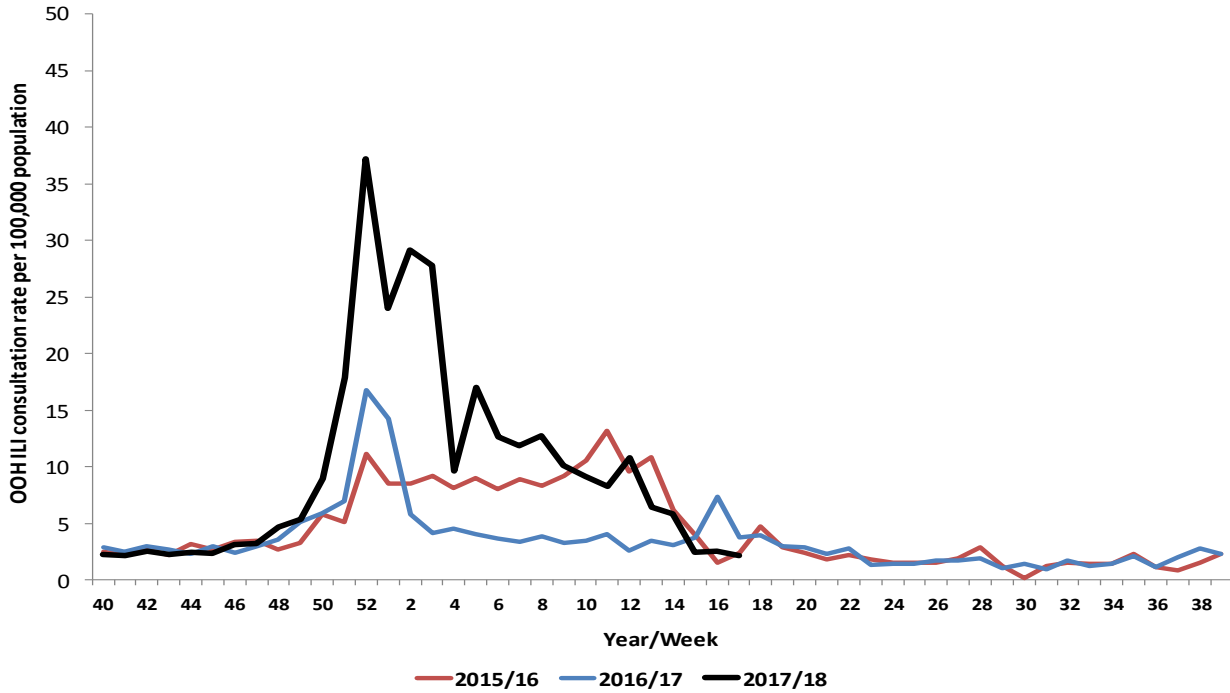
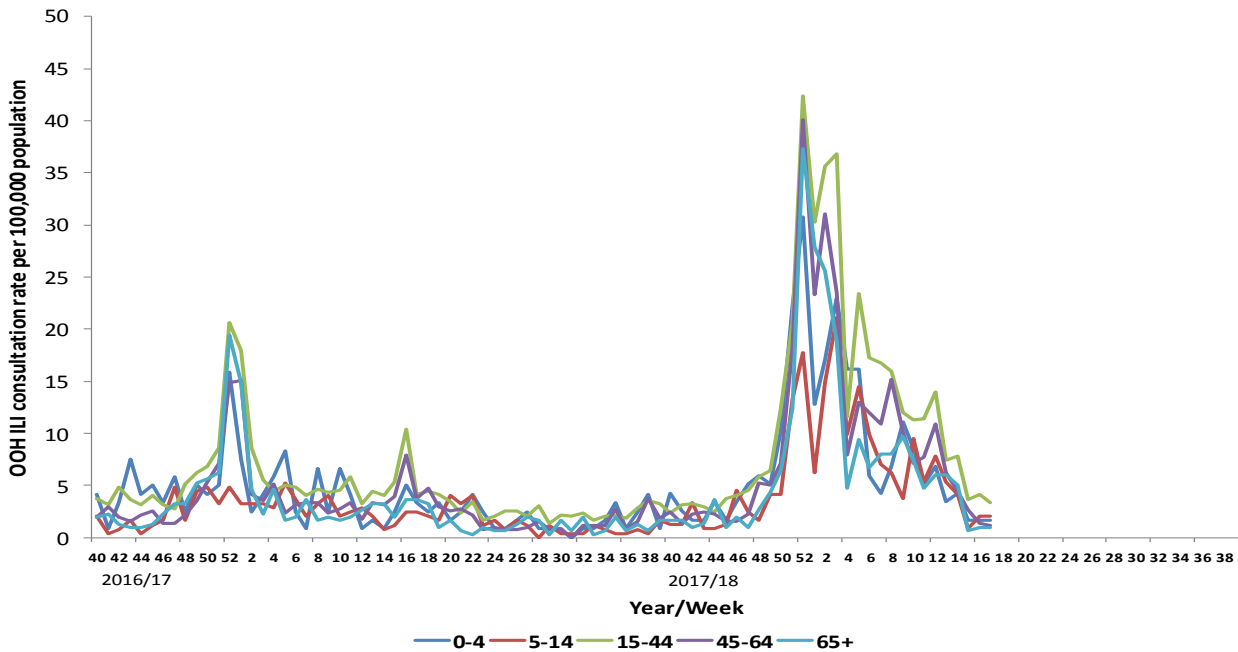


Figure 6. OOH call rates of flu/FLI by age-group from week 40, 2016



Comment

In week 17, 2018 there was a decrease in OOH GP consultation rates from 2.6 per 100,000 population in week 16 to 2.2 per 100,000. Rates are lower than the same period in 2016/17 (3.7 per 100,000) (Figure 5).

The proportion of calls related to flu in OOH centres decreased from 0.5% in week 16, 2018 to 0.4% in week 17.

In week 17, OOH flu/FLI rates remained unchanged for age groups 0-4 years (1.7 per 100,000), 5-14 years (2.1 per 100,000) and 65 years and over (1.0 per 100,000). Rates decreased for age groups 15-44 years (4.2 to 3.4 per 100,000) and 45-64 years (1.4 to 1.2 per 100,000).

Virology Data

Table 1. Virus activity in Northern Ireland by source, Week 17, 2017/18

Source	Specimens Tested	Flu AH3	Flu A(H1N1) 2009	A (untyped)	Flu B	RSV	Total influenza Positive	% Influenza Positive
Sentinel	3	1	0	0	0	0	1	33%
Non-sentinel	243	3	1	0	4	1	8	3%
Total	246	4	1	0	4	1	9	4%

Table 2. Cumulative virus activity from all sources by age group, Week 40 - 17, 2017/18

	Flu AH3	Flu A(H1N1) 2009	A (untyped)	Flu B	Total Influenza	RSV
0-4	45	8	26	41	120	336
5-14	33	1	11	46	91	13
15-64	480	42	188	703	1413	93
65+	771	30	230	656	1687	140
Unknown	1	0	0	2	3	1
All ages	1330	81	455	1448	3314	583

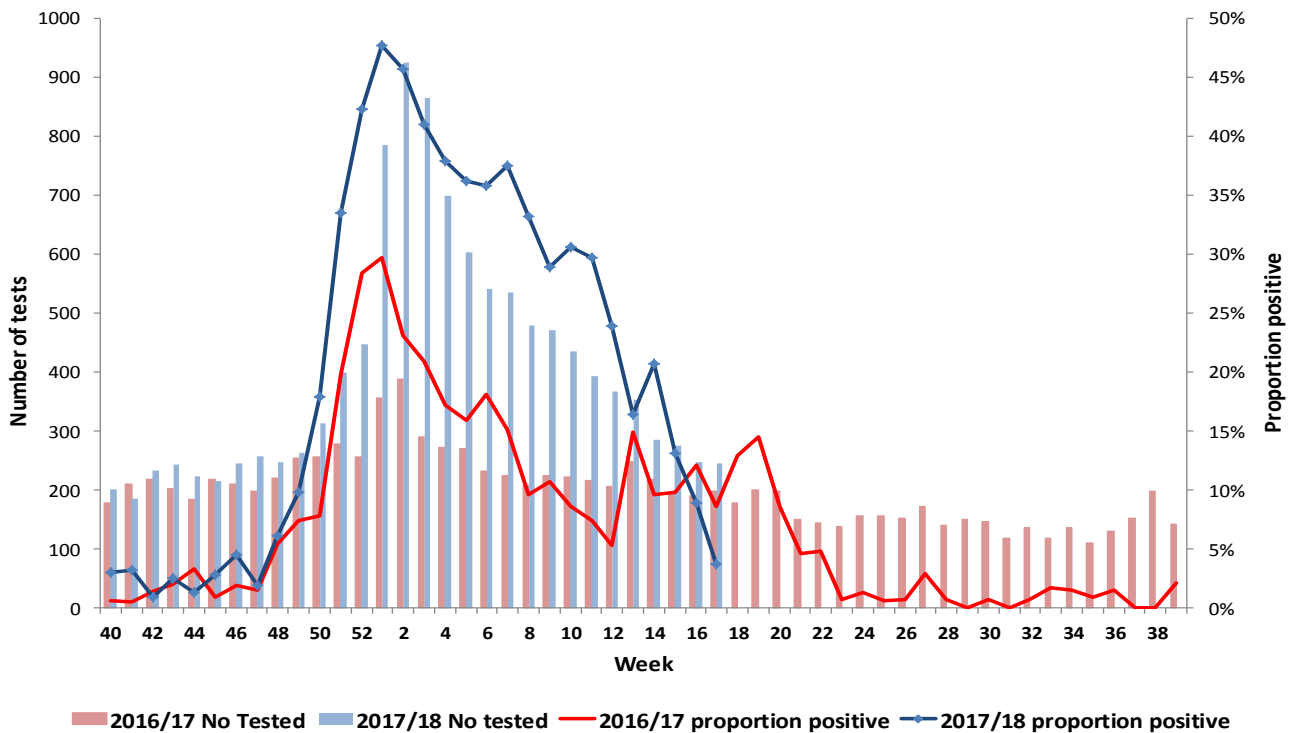
Table 3. Cumulative virus activity by age group and source, Week 40 - Week 17, 2017/18

	Sentinel						Non-sentinel					
	Flu AH3	Flu A(H1N1) 2009	A (untyped)	Flu B	Total Influenza	RSV	Flu AH3	Flu A(H1N1) 2009	A (untyped)	Flu B	Total Influenza	RSV
0-4	1	0	0	1	2	0	44	8	26	40	118	336
5-14	5	0	0	10	15	1	28	1	11	36	76	12
15-64	75	10	14	124	223	9	405	32	174	579	1190	84
65+	26	3	3	21	53	1	745	27	227	635	1634	139
Unknown	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	2	3	1
All ages	107	13	17	156	293	11	1223	68	438	1292	3021	572

Note

All virology data are provisional. The virology figures for previous weeks included in this or future bulletins are updated with data from laboratory returns received after the production of the last bulletin. The current bulletin reflects the most up-to-date information available. Sentinel and non-sentinel samples are tested for influenza and for RSV. Cumulative reports of influenza A (untyped) may vary from week to week as these may be subsequently typed in later reports.

Figure 7. Number of samples tested for influenza and proportion positive, 2016/17 and 2017/18, all sources



Comment

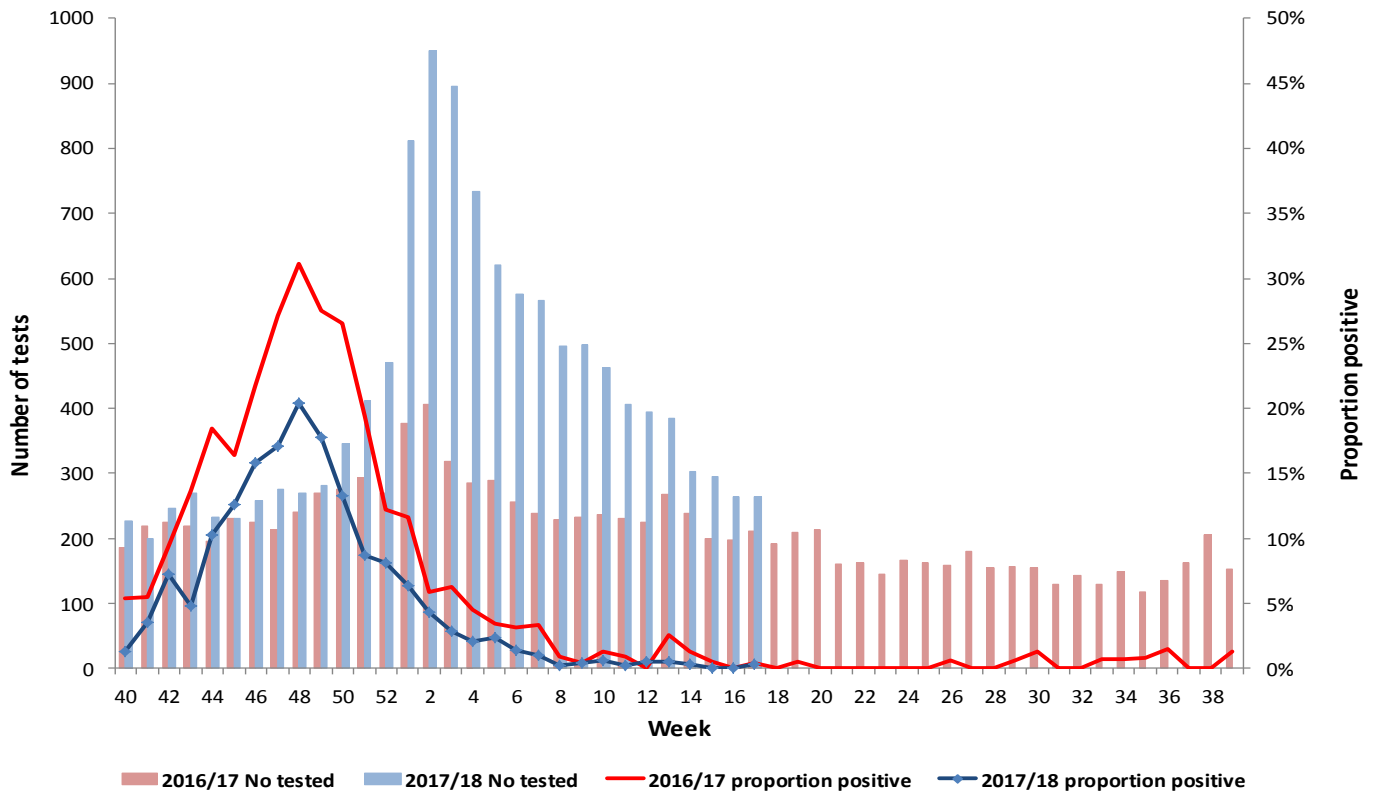
Additional virology testing has been undertaken at one local laboratory since week 2, 2018. This bulletin now includes this data along with the data from the Regional Virology Laboratory. Other local laboratories may begin undertaking influenza testing and this data will be included in later bulletins if applicable.

During week 17, 2018 there were 246 specimens submitted for virological testing. There were 9 detections of influenza in total (positivity rate of 4%), of which four were influenza A(H3), four influenza B and one influenza A(H1N1)pdm09 (Figure 7 and Table 1).

There were three samples submitted through the GP based sentinel scheme across Northern Ireland during this period, of which one was positive for influenza A(H3) (positivity rate of 33%) (Tables 1, 2, 3; Figures 2 and 3).

Respiratory Syncytial Virus (RSV)

Figure 8. Number of samples tested for RSV and proportion positive, 2016/17 and 2017/18, all sources

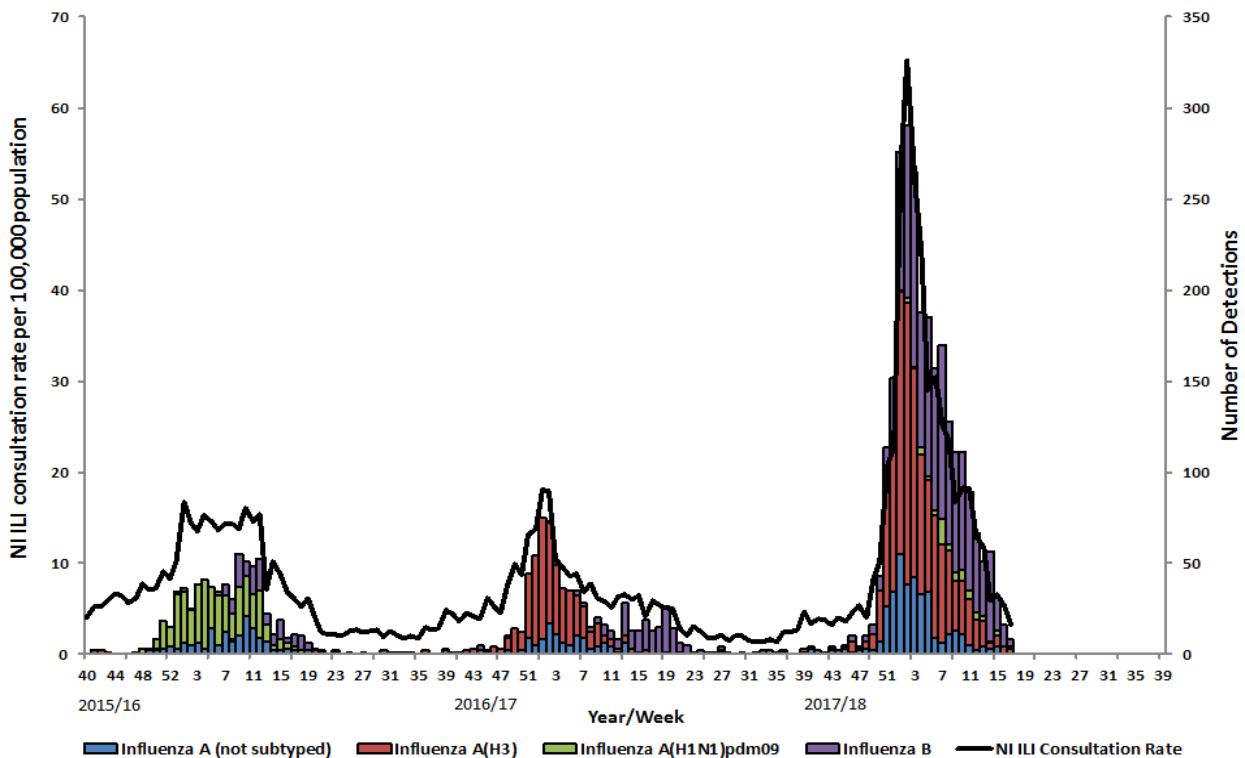


Comment

There was one positive detection of RSV reported in week 17, 2018. To date there have been a total of 583 detections of RSV of which the majority (58%) were in those aged 0-4 years (Figure 8 and Table 2).

Hospital Surveillance (Non-ICU/HDU)

Figure 9. Confirmed influenza cases in hospital by week of specimen, with Northern Ireland ILI consultation rate, 2015/16 - 2017/18



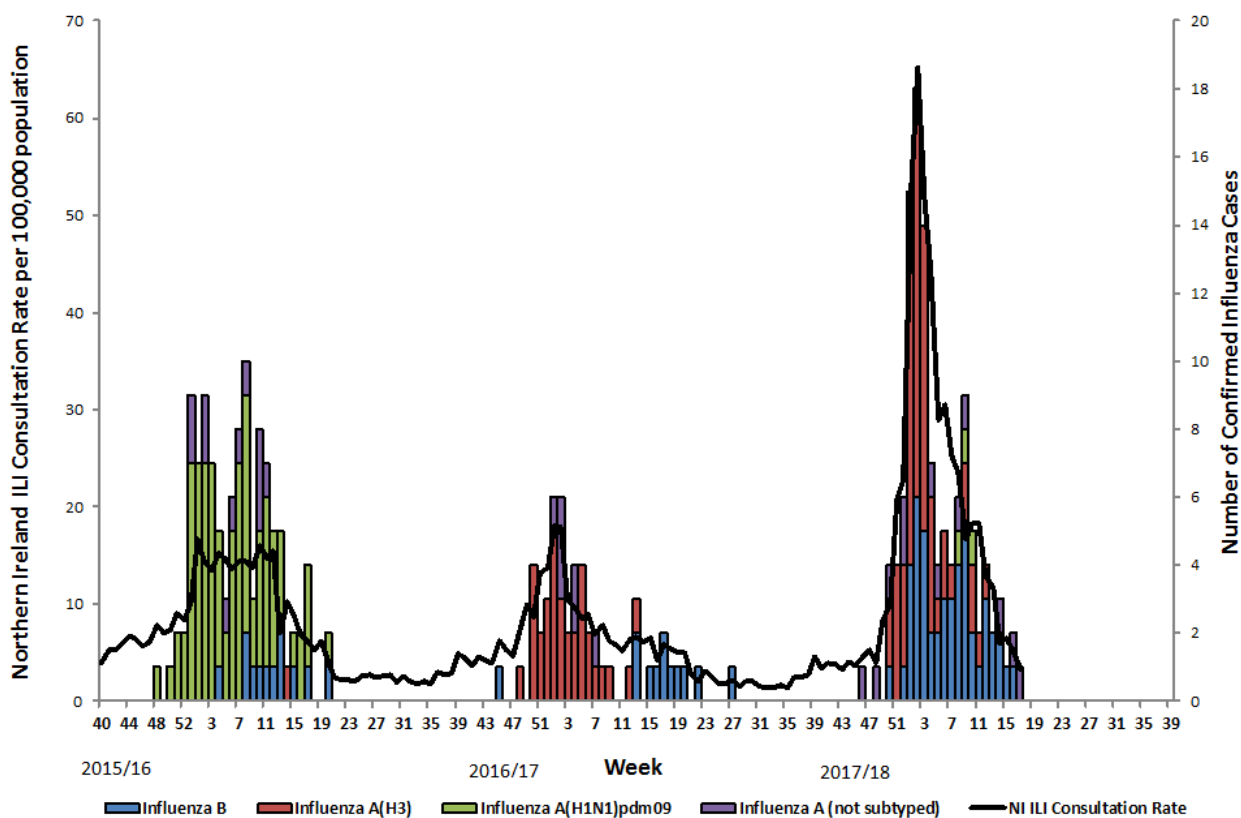
Comment

For the first time in 2017/18 the PHA will be reporting on detections of influenza from specimens taken in hospital wards across Northern Ireland, reported to PHA through the regional virology laboratory.

During week 17, 2018 there were a total of eight detections of influenza from specimens taken in hospital settings across Northern Ireland. Of these there were three detections of influenza A(H3), four of influenza B and one of influenza A(H1N1)2009. This represents a decrease from week 16 (16 positive reports); however, it should be kept in mind that not all positive specimens for week 13 may have been reported at this point.

ICU/HDU Surveillance

Figure 10. Confirmed ICU/HDU influenza cases by week of specimen, with Northern Ireland ILI consultation rate, 2015/16 - 2017/18



Comment

Data are collected on laboratory confirmed influenza patients and deaths in critical care (level 2 and level 3).

During week 17, 2018, there was one new admission to ICU with confirmed influenza reported to the PHA. There were no deaths reported in ICU patients who had laboratory confirmed influenza in week 17. There were 21 deaths in ICU this season in which a diagnosis of influenza was confirmed. There have been 119 confirmed cases of influenza in ICU reported this season to date, of which 53 have been typed as influenza A(H3), 48 influenza B, three as influenza A(H1N1)2009, 14 as influenza A (typing awaited) and one confirmed case of both influenza A and B (not shown in figure 10).

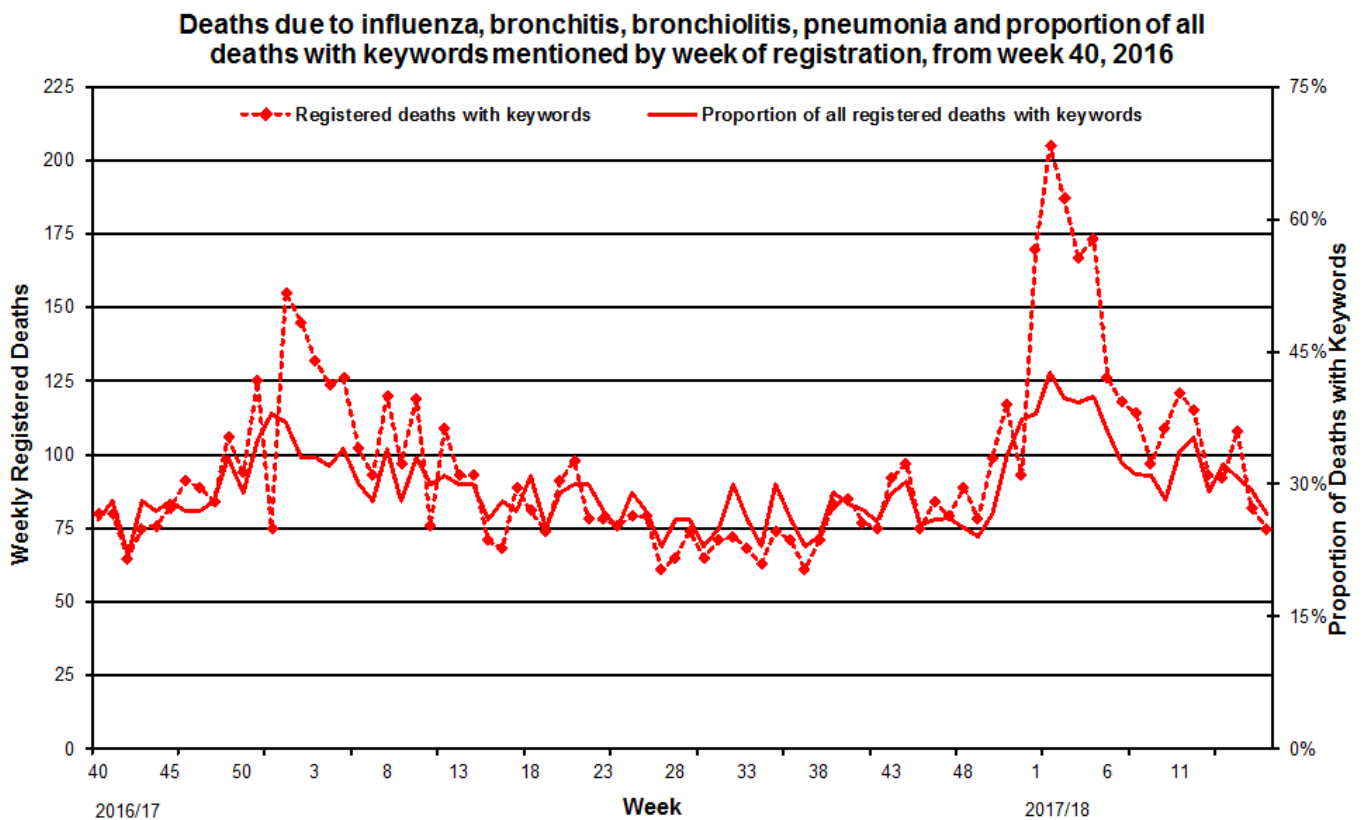
Outbreak Surveillance

During week 17, 2018 there were no influenza outbreaks reported. The total confirmed influenza outbreaks to date are 39.

Mortality Data

Weekly mortality data is provided from Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA). The data relates to the number of deaths from selected respiratory infections (some of which may be attributable to influenza, and other respiratory infections or complications thereof) registered each week in Northern Ireland. This is not necessarily the same as the number of deaths occurring in that period. Searches of the medical certificates of the cause of death are performed using a number of keywords that could be associated with influenza (bronchiolitis, bronchitis, influenza and pneumonia). Death registrations containing these keywords are presented as a proportion of all registered deaths.

Figure 11. Weekly registered deaths



Comment

The proportion of deaths related to respiratory keywords decreased from 29% in week 16, 2018 to 27% in week 17. In week 17 there were 282 registered deaths, of which 75 related to specific respiratory infections (Figure 11). The proportion of deaths attributed to specific respiratory infections is slightly less at this point in the season as the same period in 2016/17 (28%).

EuroMOMO

Information on mortality from all causes is provided for management purpose from Public Health England. Excess mortality is defined as a statistically significant increase in the number of deaths reported over the expected number for a given point in time. This calculation allows for a weekly variation in the number of deaths registered and takes account of deaths registered retrospectively. Information is used to provide an early warning to the health service of any seasonal increases in mortality to allow further investigation of excess detections.

There is no single cause of 'additional' deaths in the winter months but they are often attributed in part to cold weather (e.g. directly from falls, fractures, road traffic accidents), through worsening of chronic medical conditions e.g. heart and respiratory complaints and through respiratory infections including influenza.

For more information on EuroMOMO and interactive maps of reporting across the season please see <http://www.euromomo.eu/index.html>.

There was no excess all-cause mortality reported in Northern Ireland in week 17, 2018. There has been a total of nine weeks in the season where there has been excess all-cause mortality (weeks 49, 51-5, and 7). This excess mortality was seen in the elderly (>65 years of age).

Please note this data is provisional due to the time delay in registration; numbers may vary from week to week.

Influenza Vaccine Uptake

	2017/18 (to Mar 31 st)	2016/17 (to Mar 31 st)
>65 years	71.8%	71.9%
<65 years at risk	56.0%	57.1%
Pregnant women	56.7%	58.6%
2 to 4 year olds	50.6%	52.6%
Primary School	76.5%	78.3%
Trust Frontline	33.4%	29.0%

*vaccine uptake data is provisional

International Summary

Europe

Week 16/2018 (16 - 22 April 2018)

- Influenza activity was at inter-season levels in all but one reporting country.
- While low in number, 12% of the individuals sampled from primary healthcare settings tested positive for influenza viruses (compared to 23% in the previous week).
- Both influenza virus types A and B were co-circulating with the majority being type A.

2017/18 season overview

- Influenza viruses have been circulating widely in the Region between weeks 52/2017 and 16/2018 (based on increased proportions - 10% and above - of sentinel specimens testing positive for influenza viruses). This is longer than in recent seasons and may contribute to the severity of this season.
- For the Region overall, the majority of influenza viruses detected were type B, representing a high level of circulation of influenza B viruses compared to recent seasons. B/Yamagata lineage viruses have greatly outnumbered those of the B/Victoria lineage. [Click here for more information](#)
- Different patterns of dominant type and A subtypes were observed between the countries of the Region.
- Of the type A virus detections from sentinel sources, the majority of which were subtyped, A(H1N1)pdm09 viruses have outnumbered A(H3N2) viruses. In non-sentinel sources, similar numbers of A(H3N2) viruses and A(H1N1)pdm09 viruses were reported. [Click here for more information](#)
- While low in numbers, characterized A(H3N2) viruses fell mainly in clade 3C.2a (57%) and subclade 3C.2a1 (42%), while 42% of B/Victoria lineage viruses fell in a subclade of clade 1A viruses that are antigenically distinct from the current trivalent vaccine component. [Click here for more information](#)
- The majority of severe cases reported this season were due to influenza virus type B infection and have mostly occurred in persons older than 15 years. [Click here for more information](#)
- Mortality from all causes now appears to have returned to normal expected levels in all 21 participating countries and regions that report to EuroMOMO. [Click here for more information](#)
- Interim results from [5 European studies](#) indicate 25 to 52% vaccine effectiveness against any influenza. [Click here for more information](#)

<http://www.flunewseurope.org/>

Worldwide (WHO) Influenza

30 April 2018 - Update number 314, based on data up to 15 April 2018

Summary

Influenza activity returned to inter-seasonal levels in most of the countries in the temperate zone of the northern hemisphere except for Eastern Europe. In the temperate zone of the southern hemisphere, influenza activity remained below the seasonal thresholds. Worldwide, seasonal influenza subtypes A and B accounted for approximately the same proportion of influenza detections.

National Influenza Centres (NICs) and other national influenza laboratories from 113 countries, areas or territories reported data to FluNet for the time period from 02 April 2018 to 15 April 2018 (data as of 2018-04-27 03:39:08 UTC). The WHO GISRS laboratories tested

more than 137071 specimens during that time period of which 21639 were positive for influenza viruses.

Among positive viruses 12034 (55.6%) were typed as influenza A and 9605 (44.4%) as influenza B. Of the sub-typed influenza A viruses, 3077 (58.2%) were influenza A(H1N1)pdm09 and 2211 (41.8%) were influenza A(H3N2). Of the characterized B viruses, 917 (88.7%) belonged to the B-Yamagata lineage and 117 (11.3%) to the B-Victoria lineage.

http://www.who.int/influenza/surveillance_monitoring/updates/latest_update_GIP_surveillance/en/index.html

<http://www.cdc.gov/flu/weekly/>

Acknowledgments

We would like to extend our thanks to all those who assist us in the surveillance of influenza in particular the sentinel GPs, Out-of-Hours Centres, Apollo Medical, Regional Virus Laboratory, Critical Care Network for Northern Ireland and Public Health England. Their work is greatly appreciated and their support vital in the production of this bulletin.

The author also acknowledges the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA) and the General Register Office Northern Ireland (GRONI) for the supply of data used in this publication. NISRA and GRONI do not accept responsibility for any alteration or manipulation of data once it has been provided.

Further information

Further information on influenza is available at the following websites:

<http://www.fluawareni.info>

<https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/public-health-england>

<http://www.publichealth.hscni.net>

<http://www.who.int>

<http://ecdc.europa.eu>

<http://www.flunewseurope.org/>

Internet-based surveillance of influenza in the general population is undertaken through the FluSurvey. A project run jointly by PHE and the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine. If you would like to become a participant of the FluSurvey project please do so by visiting the [Flusurvey website](#) for more information.

Detailed influenza weekly reports can be found at the following websites:

Republic of Ireland:

<http://www.hpsc.ie/hpsc/A-Z/Respiratory/Influenza/SeasonalInfluenza/Surveillance/InfluenzaSurveillanceReports/>

England:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/weekly-national-flu-reports>

Scotland

<http://www.hps.scot.nhs.uk/resp/seasonalinfluenza.aspx>

Wales

<http://www.wales.nhs.uk/sites3/page.cfm?orgid=457&pid=34338>

For further information on the Enhanced Surveillance of Influenza in Northern Ireland scheme or to be added to the circulation list for this bulletin please contact:

Dr Mark O'Doherty
Senior Epidemiological
Scientist
Public Health Agency

Miss Frances Redmond
Surveillance Information
Officer
Public Health Agency

Dr Muhammad Sartaj
Public Health Consultant
Public Health Agency

Email: flusurveillance@hscni.net

This report was compiled by Dr Cathriona Kearns, Dr Mark O'Doherty, Paul Cabrey, Miss Frances Redmond and Dr Muhammad Sartaj.