

## Influenza Weekly Surveillance Bulletin

Northern Ireland, Weeks 43 and 44 (24 October – 6 November 2011)

Initially this bulletin will be released on a bi-weekly basis. However once flu activity begins to increase it will be produced on a weekly basis.

As the season develops additional charts and tables will be added where necessary.

### Summary

- GP consultation rates for combined flu/FLI decreased from 17.5 in week 42 to 14.0/100,000 population in week 44. Rates in weeks 43 and 44 are lower than the same weeks last year and remain well below the Northern Ireland threshold (70/100,000 population).
- Out-of-hours flu/FLI call rates remain stable and low.
- No flu detections.
- There were no RSV detections in weeks 43 and 44.

### Introduction

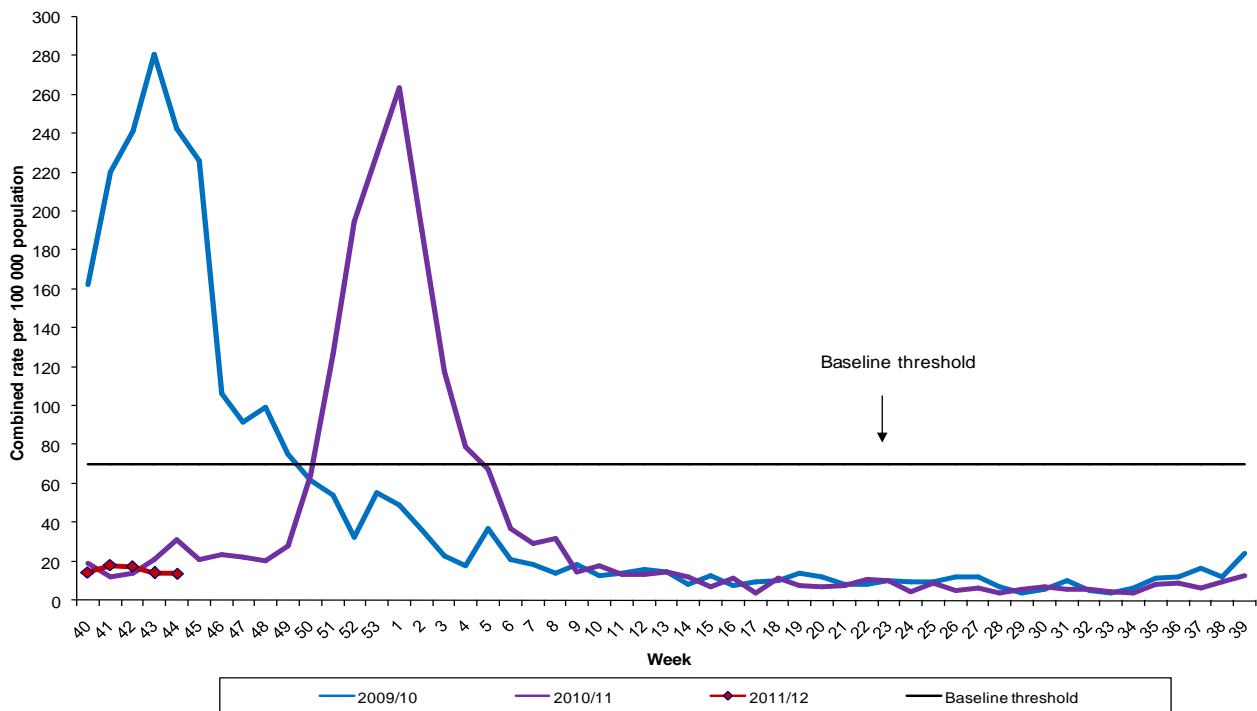
In order to monitor flu activity in Northern Ireland a number of surveillance systems are in place. A new development for this winter will be surveillance of critical care patients in hospitals with confirmed flu.

Additional surveillance systems are:

- GP sentinel surveillance representing 11.7% of Northern Ireland population;
- GP out-of-hours surveillance system;
- Virological reports from the Regional Virus Laboratory (RVL);
- Mortality data from Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA);

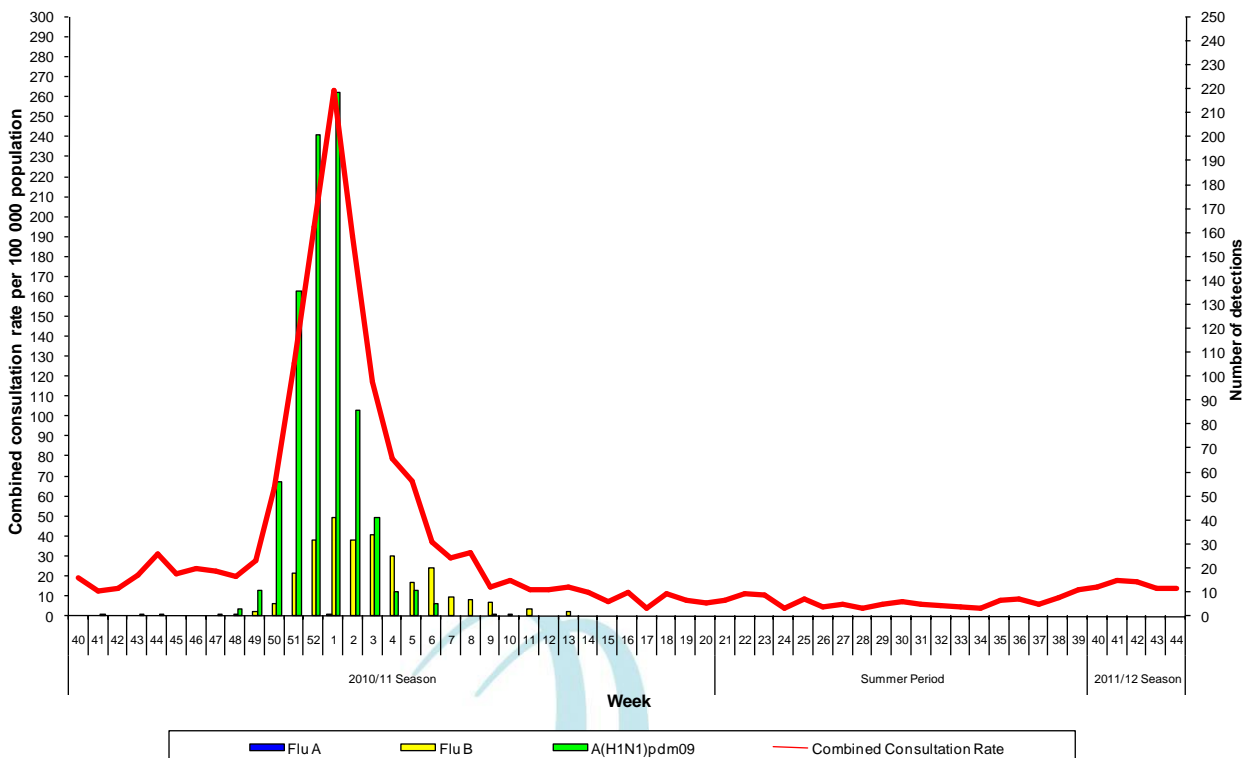
## Sentinel GP consultation data

**Figure 1. Sentinel GP consultation rate for combined flu and flu-like illness 2009/10 – 2011/12**

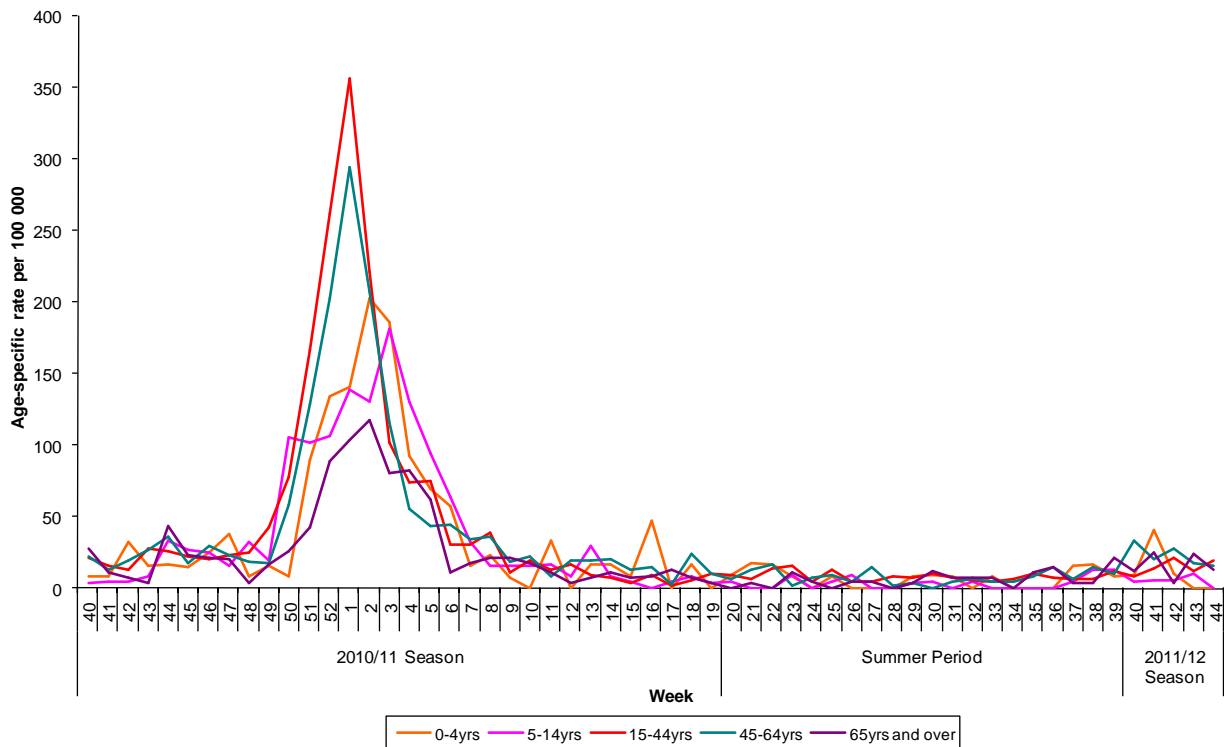


**Note:** 2009 had 53 weeks for surveillance purposes, therefore, an additional data point has been inserted in the graph for 2010/11 at week 53 based on the average of weeks 52 and 1.

**Figure 2. Sentinel GP consultation rate for combined flu and flu-like illness and number of virology flu detections from week 40 2010**



**Figure 3. Sentinel GP age-specific consultation rates for combined flu and flu-like illness from week 40 2010**



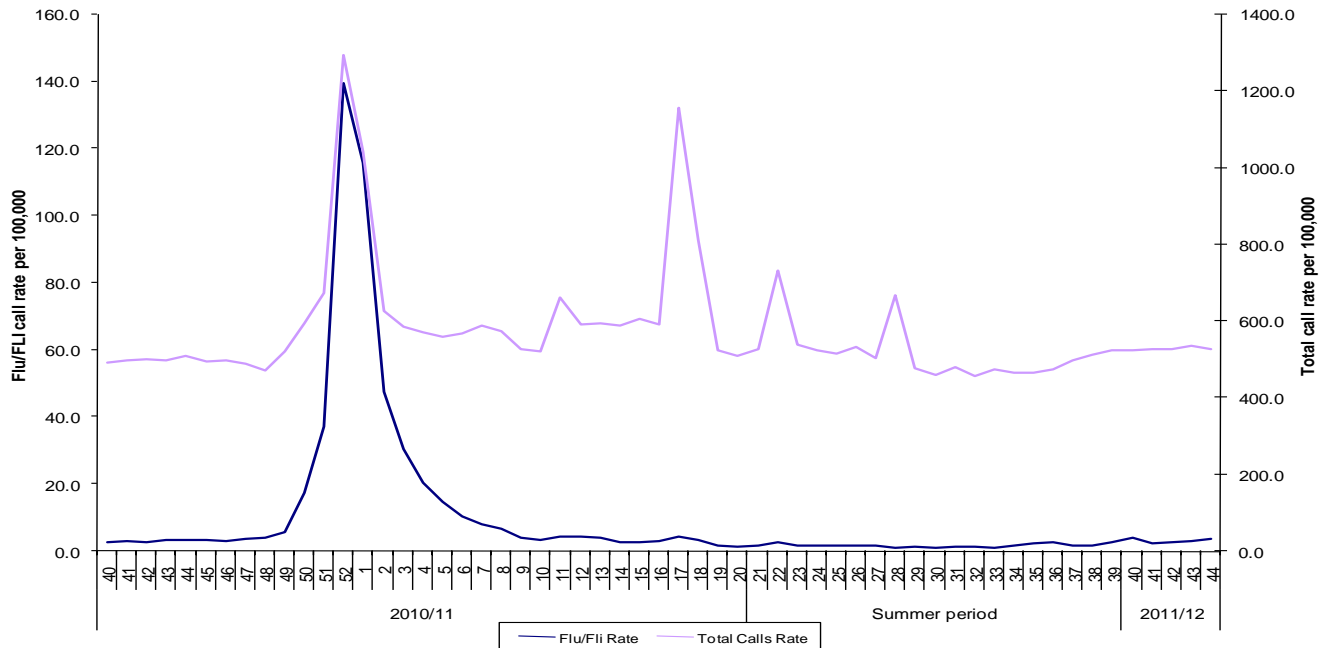
### Comment

The GP combined consultation rate has decreased from 17.5 per 100,000 population in week 42 to 14.0 per 100,000 population in week 44 (20% decrease). Rates for week 43 and 44 are lower than the same weeks last year (20.9 and 31.5 per 100,000 population, respectively) and are well below the Northern Ireland threshold of 70 per 100,000 population (Figure 1).

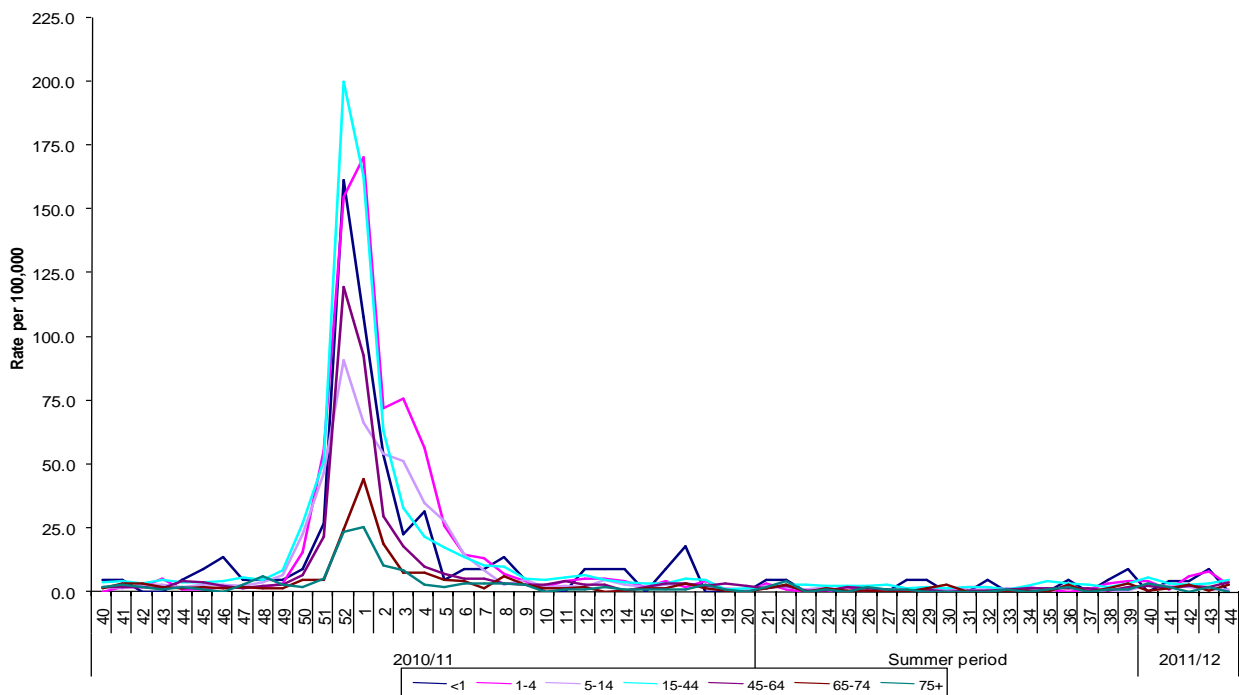
Age specific rates remain low with the highest age specific combined rates in week 43 in the over 65 year age group and in week 44 the 15–44 year age group. Small numbers in some of the age groups will contribute to weekly fluctuation in rates.

## Out-of-hours centres call data

**Figure 4. Out-of-hours total call rate (all diagnoses) and call rate for flu and flu-like illness from week 40 2010**



**Figure 5. Out-of-hours call rates of flu and flu-like illness by age-group from week 40 2010**



### Comment

Out-of-hours call rates for flu/Fli in weeks 43 and 44 remain low (2.8 and 3.5 per 100,000 population, respectively) and stable. In week 43 the highest flu/Fli consultation rate was in the under one year old age group and in week 44 in the 15–44 year age group (8.9 and

4.9 per 100,000 population, respectively). Small numbers in some of the age groups will contribute to weekly fluctuation in rates.

## Virology data

Table 1. Virus activity in Northern Ireland Week 43 and 44 2011						
Source	Specimens tested	A(H1N1)pdm09	Influenza B	RSV	Total flu positive	% Flu positive
Sentinel	10	0	0	0	0	0%
Non-sentinel	110	0	0	0	0	0%
<b>Total</b>	<b>120</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0%</b>

### Note

All virology data is provisional.

Sentinel and non-sentinel samples are tested for flu and for RSV.

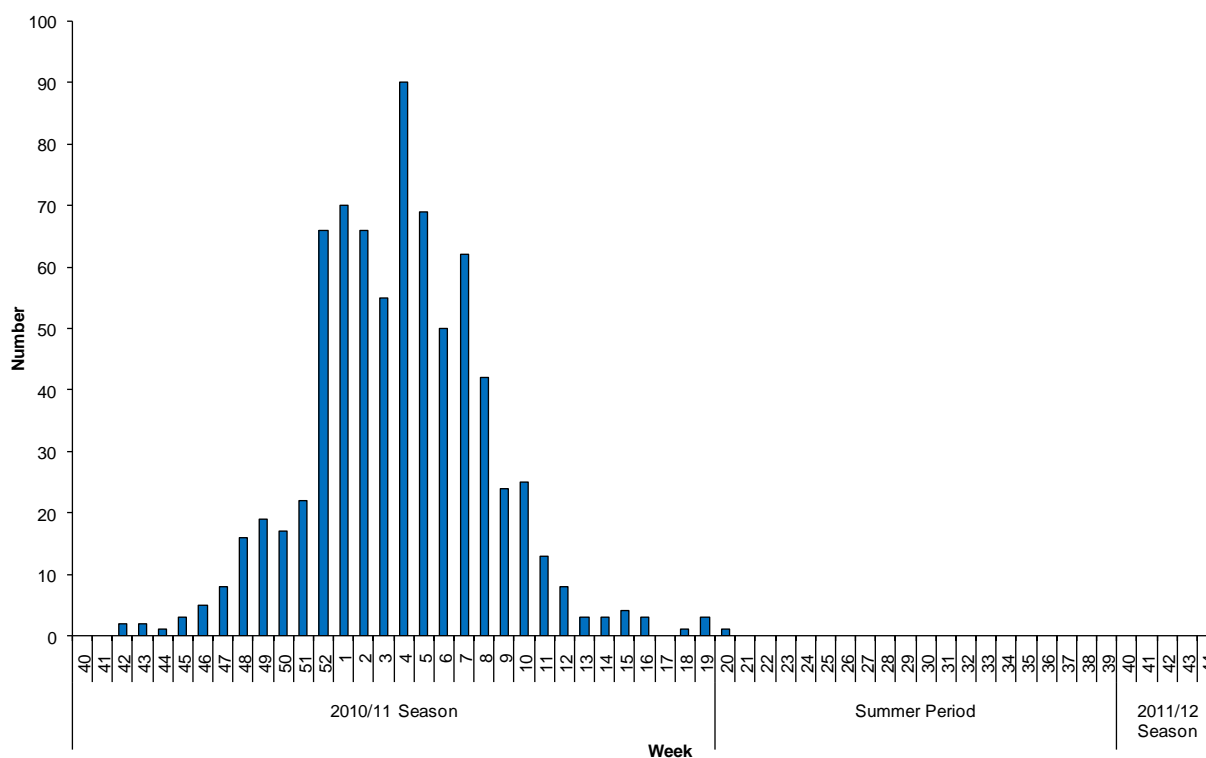
### Comment

The number of specimens submitted for testing remains low. There were no samples that tested positive for flu in weeks 43 and 44, with the last confirmed flu detection in week 13 (week commencing 26 March 2011).

During weeks 43 and 44 a total of 120 specimens (10 sentinel) were tested by the Regional Virus Laboratory.

## Other respiratory viruses

**Figure 6. Weekly cases of RSV viruses in Northern Ireland from week 40 2010**



### Comment

There were no RSV detections in weeks 43 and 44, with the last RSV detection being in week 20 (week commencing 14 May 2011).

### Hospital surveillance

There were no confirmed flu patients or confirmed influenza deaths in critical care (level 2 and 3) in Northern Ireland in weeks 43 and 44.

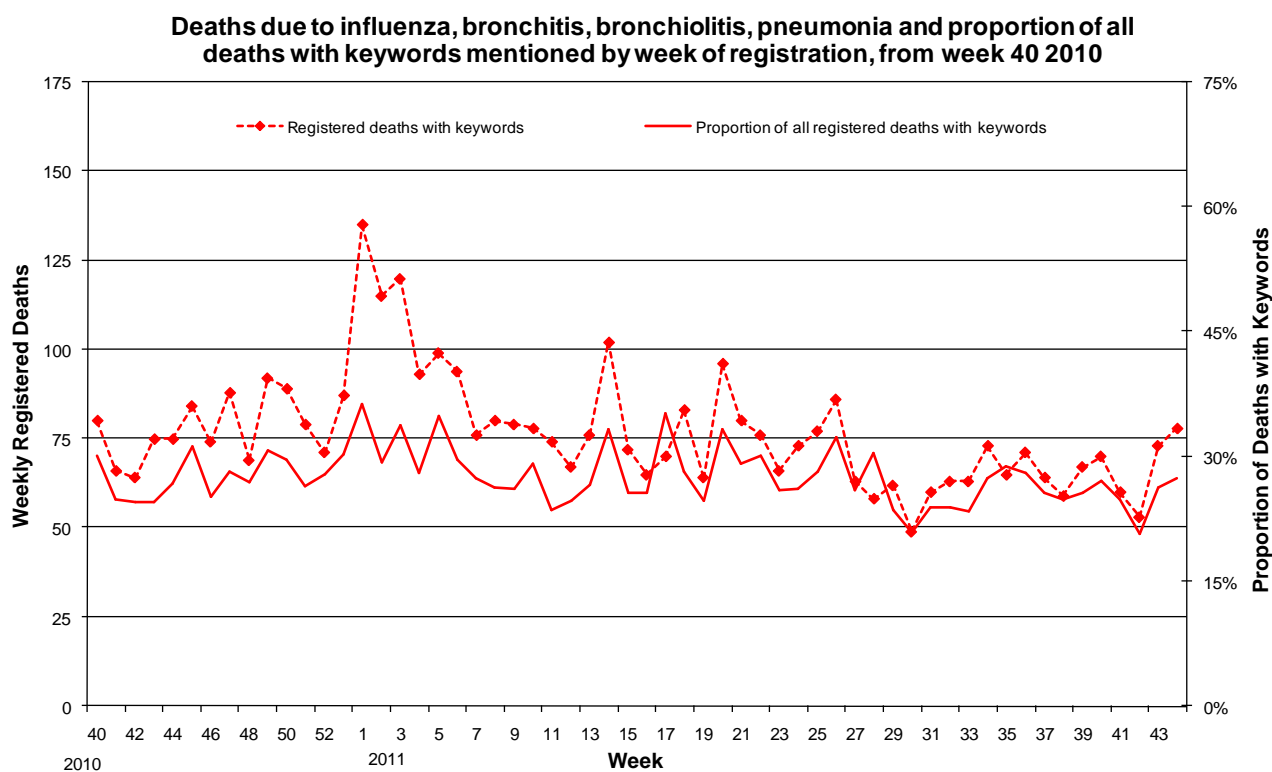
Additional information on confirmed flu hospitalised patients will be available from the Health and Social Care Board (HSCB) once flu starts to circulate.

## Mortality data

Weekly mortality data is provided from NISRA. The data relates to the number of deaths from selected respiratory infections (some of which may be attributable to flu 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 flu (bronchiolitis, bronchitis, influenza and pneumonia). Death registrations containing these keywords are presented as a proportion of all registered deaths.

In addition this winter there will be reporting of deaths with confirmed flu in patients in critical care (level 2 and level 3).

**Figure 7. Weekly registered deaths**



## Comments

The proportion of deaths related to respiratory keywords over this period increased from 21% in week 42 to 27% in week 44. In weeks 43 and 44 there were 562 registered deaths of which 151 related to these specific respiratory infections.

## International summary

### Europe

During week 43, low flu activity was notified by all 24 reporting countries. None of the 342 sentinel specimens tested positive for flu virus. Of thirteen positive non-sentinel specimens, two were influenza A virus subtyped A(H1)pdm09 and seven were A(H3).

No hospitalised cases of severe flu were reported.

In the first three weeks of the surveillance season for flu in the northern hemisphere there has been no evidence of sustained transmission in EU/EAA countries.

[http://ecdc.europa.eu/EN/HEALTHTOPICS/SEASONAL\\_INFLUENZA/EPIDEMIOLOGICAL\\_DATA/Pages/Weekly\\_Influenza\\_Surveillance\\_Overview.aspx](http://ecdc.europa.eu/EN/HEALTHTOPICS/SEASONAL_INFLUENZA/EPIDEMIOLOGICAL_DATA/Pages/Weekly_Influenza_Surveillance_Overview.aspx)

### USA

Overall flu activity in the USA remains low and below baseline levels. An overview of the US flu can be viewed on <http://www.cdc.gov/flu/weekly/>

### Canada

Flu activity continues at low inter-seasonal levels. In week 43, three laboratory detections of flu were reported (one H3 and two B). Only four regions reported sporadic flu activity (in British Columbia, Ontario and Quebec). The FLI consultation rate increased to slightly above the expected range for this week but still remains low.

[http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/fluwatch/11-12/w43\\_11/index-eng.php](http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/fluwatch/11-12/w43_11/index-eng.php)

### Worldwide

Flu activity in the temperate regions of the northern hemisphere remains low or undetectable.

Low level flu activity is reported in the tropical zone in a few countries of the Americas (Cuba, Dominican Republic and Honduras), central Africa (Cameroon), and southern and southeast asia (Cambodia, Thailand, Lao People's Democratic Republic and Vietnam).

Transmission in South Africa and South America remains low.

[http://www.who.int/influenza/surveillance\\_monitoring/updates/latest\\_update\\_GIP\\_surveillance/en/index.html](http://www.who.int/influenza/surveillance_monitoring/updates/latest_update_GIP_surveillance/en/index.html)

## Further information

Further information on influenza is available at the following websites:

<http://www.hpa.org.uk>

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

<http://www.who.int>

<http://ecdc.europa.eu>

<http://euroflu.org>

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

England, Scotland and Wales:

<http://www.hpa.org.uk/Topics/InfectiousDiseases/InfectionsAZ/SeasonalInfluenza/EpidemiologicalData/>

Republic of Ireland:

<http://www.hpsc.ie/hpsc/A-Z/Respiratory/Influenza/SeasonalInfluenza/Surveillance/InfluenzaSurveillanceReports/20112012Season/>

For further information on the enhanced surveillance of flu in Northern Ireland scheme or to be added to the circulation list for this bulletin please contact:

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## Acknowledgements

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**This report was compiled by Cathriona Kearns, Paul Cabrey, and Dr. Brian Smyth.**