

Influenza Weekly Surveillance Bulletin

Northern Ireland, Weeks 49 and 50 (5 – 18 December 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/flu-like illness (FLI) increased from 11.7 in week 48 to 18.2/100,000 population in week 50. Rates in weeks 49 and 50 were substantially lower than in 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.
- There were no influenza detections in weeks 49 and 50, 2011.
- There were 18 RSV detections in weeks 49 and 50, 2011.
- There have been no reports of any patients admitted to critical care units with confirmed influenza in the 2011/12 flu season to date.
- There have been no reports of any influenza-associated deaths in those with confirmed influenza this season.

Introduction

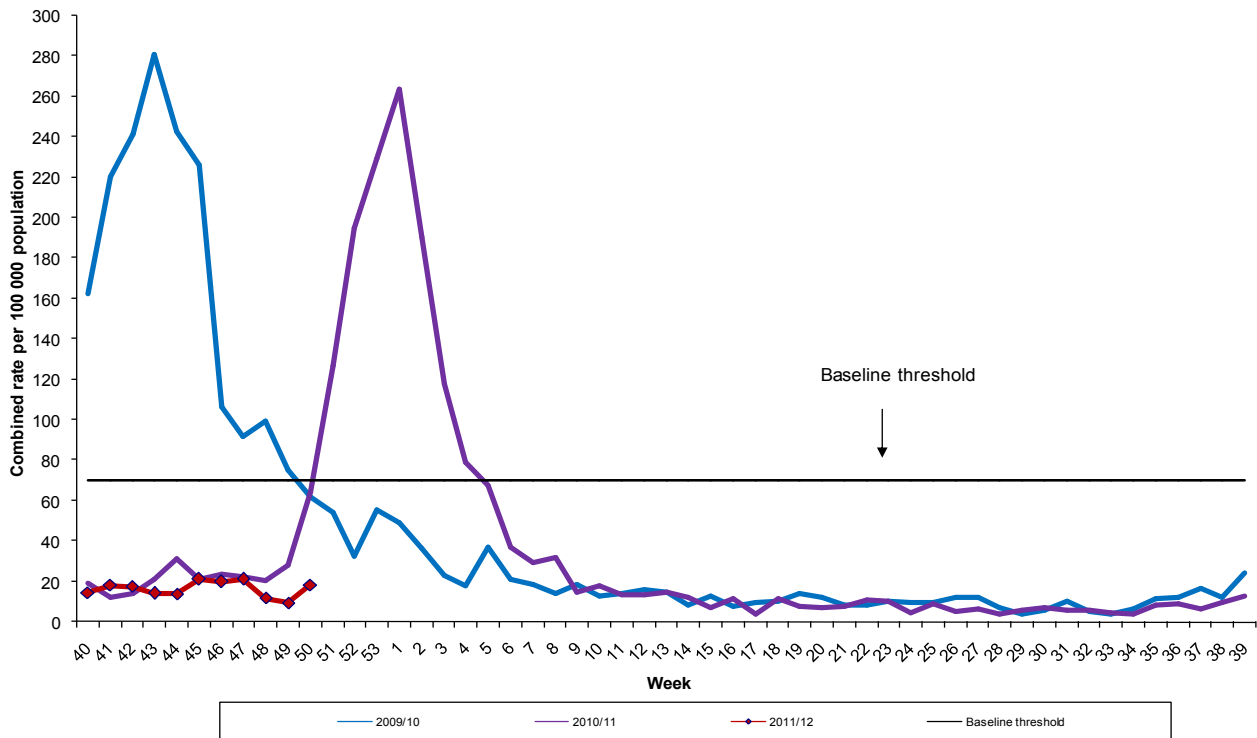
In order to monitor influenza activity in Northern Ireland, a number of surveillance systems are in place. A new development for this winter will be surveillance of critical care patients in hospitals with confirmed influenza.

Additional surveillance systems are:

- GP sentinel surveillance, representing 11.7% of the Northern Ireland population;
- a 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 FLI, 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 FLI, and number of virology flu detections, from week 40 2010

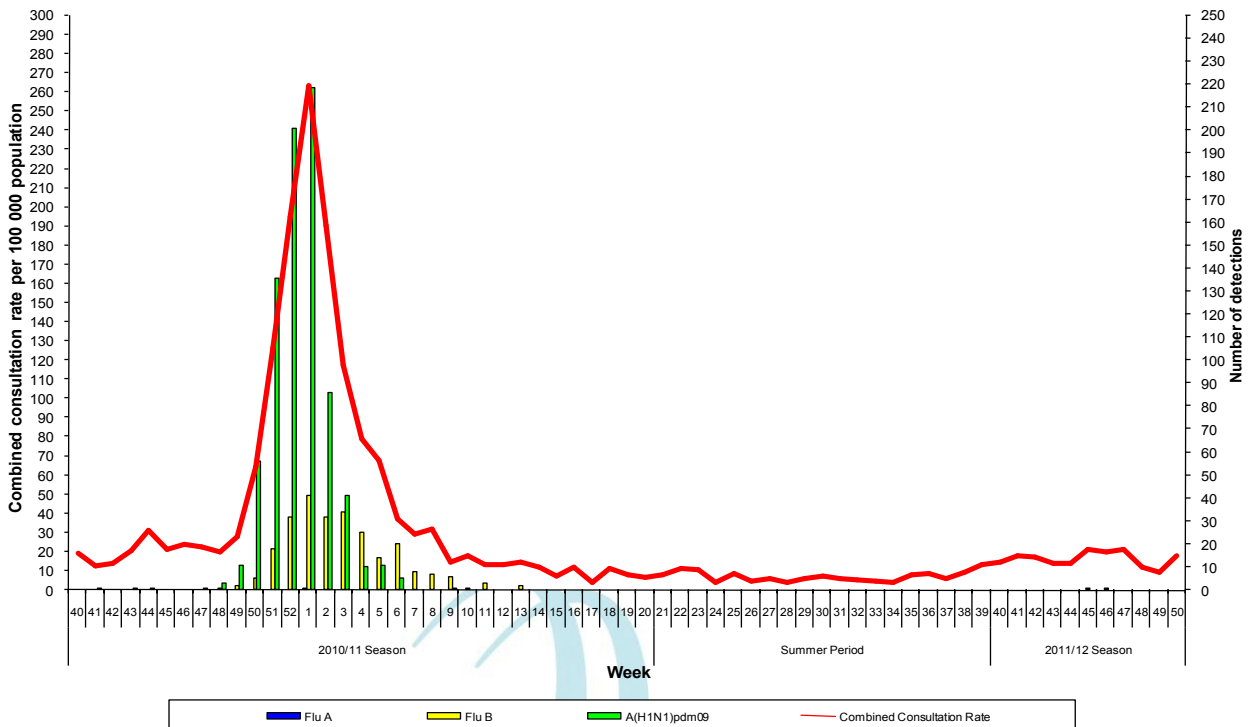
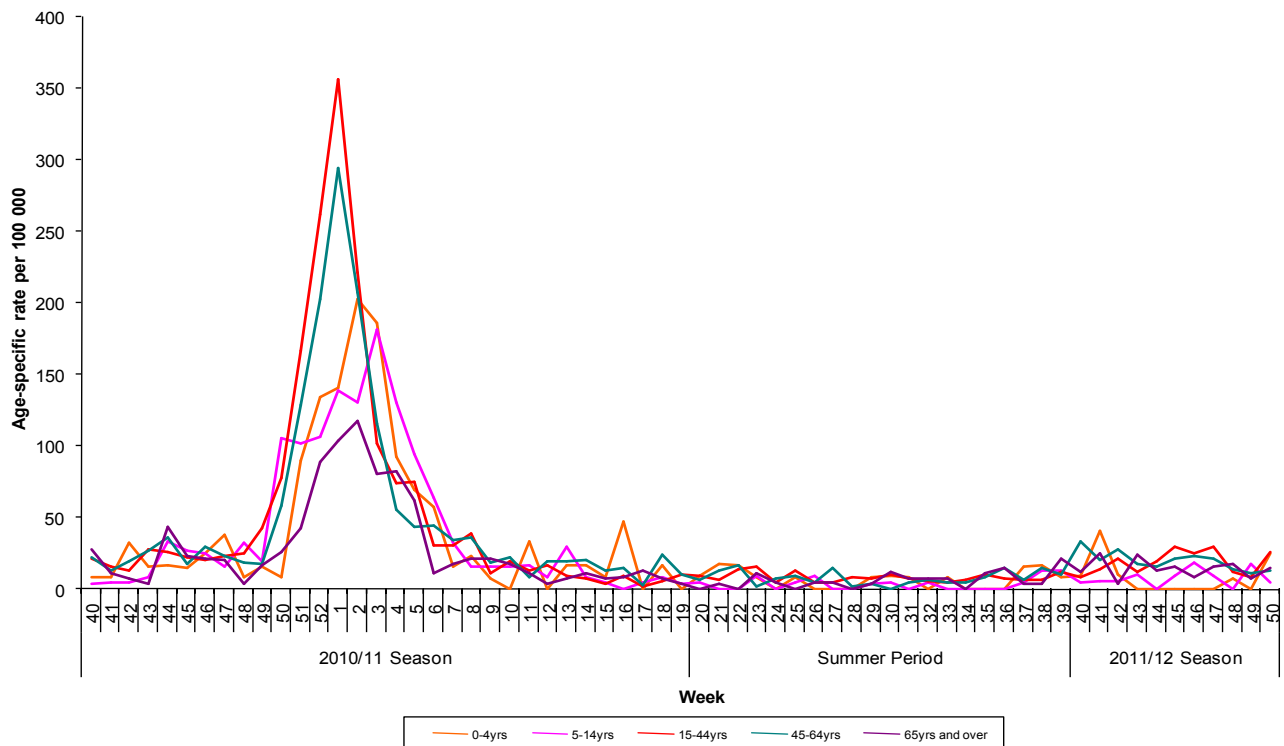


Figure 3: Sentinel GP age-specific consultation rates for combined flu and FLI, from week 40 2010



Comment

The GP combined consultation rate increased from 11.7 per 100,000 population in week 48 to 18.2 per 100,000 population in week 50 (56% increase). Rates for week 49 and 50 were substantially lower than in the same weeks last year (64.6 and 126.8 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 in all age groups, with slight increases reported in the 0–4 and 15–44 years age groups. Small numbers in some of the age groups will contribute to weekly fluctuation in rates.

Out-of-hours (OOH) centres call data

Figure 4: OOH total call rate (all diagnoses) and call rate for flu and FLI, from week 40 2010

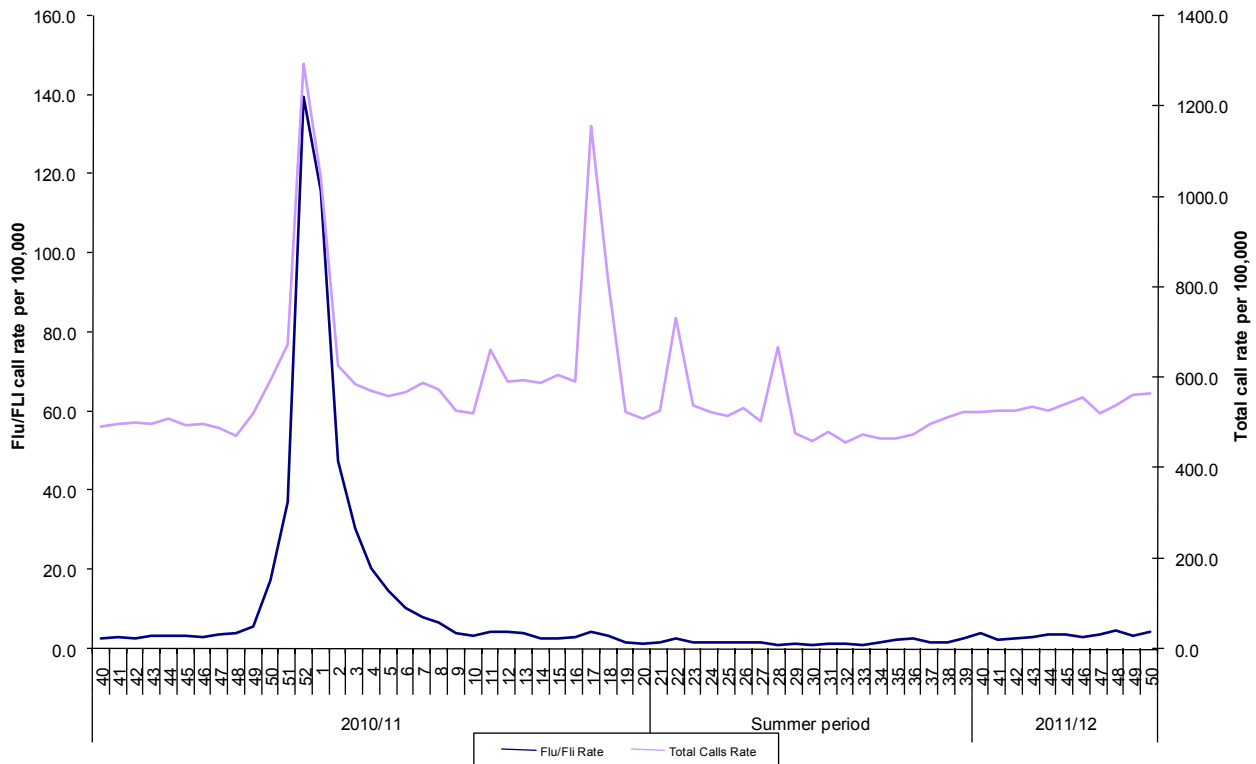
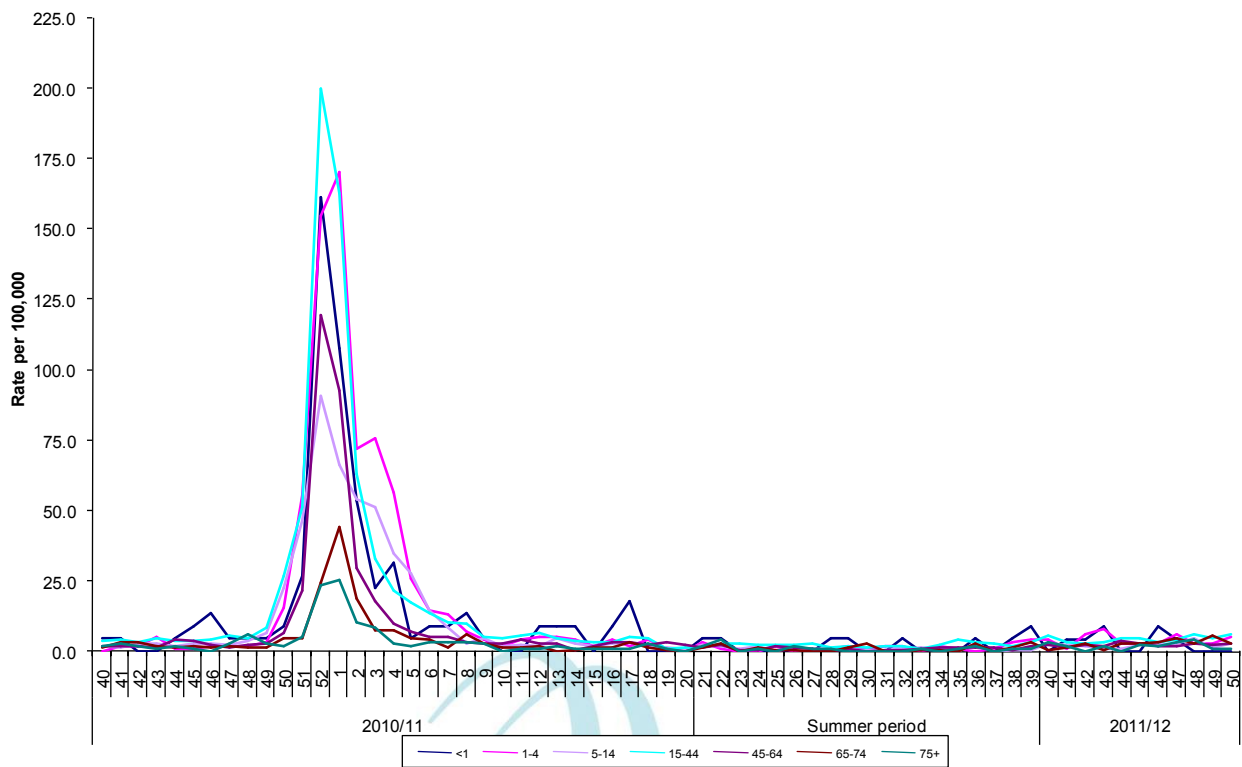


Figure 5: OOH call rates for flu and FLI, by age-group, from week 40 2010



Comment

OOH call rates for flu/FLI in weeks 49 and 50 remained low (3.3 and 4.1 per 100,000 population respectively) and stable. Rates were lower than in the same weeks last year at 5.7 and 17.3 per 100,000 population respectively. Age-specific flu/FLI rates in weeks 49 and 50 remained low in all age groups. Small numbers in some of the age groups will contribute to weekly fluctuation in rates.

Virology data

Table 1: Virus activity in Northern Ireland, weeks 49 and 50 2011

Source	Specimens tested	A(H1N1) pdm09	Influenza B	RSV	Total influenza positive	% influenza positive
Sentinel	15	0	0	0	0	0%
Non-sentinel	208	0	0	18	0	0%
Total	223	0	0	18	0	0%

Table 2: Cumulative total, week 40–week 50 2011

Age	A(H1N1) pdm09	AH3	Flu B	Total influenza	RSV
0–4	0	0	1	1	23
5–14	0	0	0	0	1
15–64	0	0	1	1	1
65+	0	0	0	0	0
Unknown	0	0	0	0	0
All ages	0	0	2	2	25

Table 3: Cumulative total, week 40–week 50 2011

Age	Sentinel				Non-sentinel			
	A(H1N1) pdm09	Flu B	Total influenza	RSV	(H1N1) 2009	Flu B	Total influenza	RSV
0–4	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	23
5–14	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
15–64	0	1	1	1	0	0	0	0
65+	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Unknown	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
All ages	0	1	1	1	0	1	1	24

Note

All virology data are provisional.

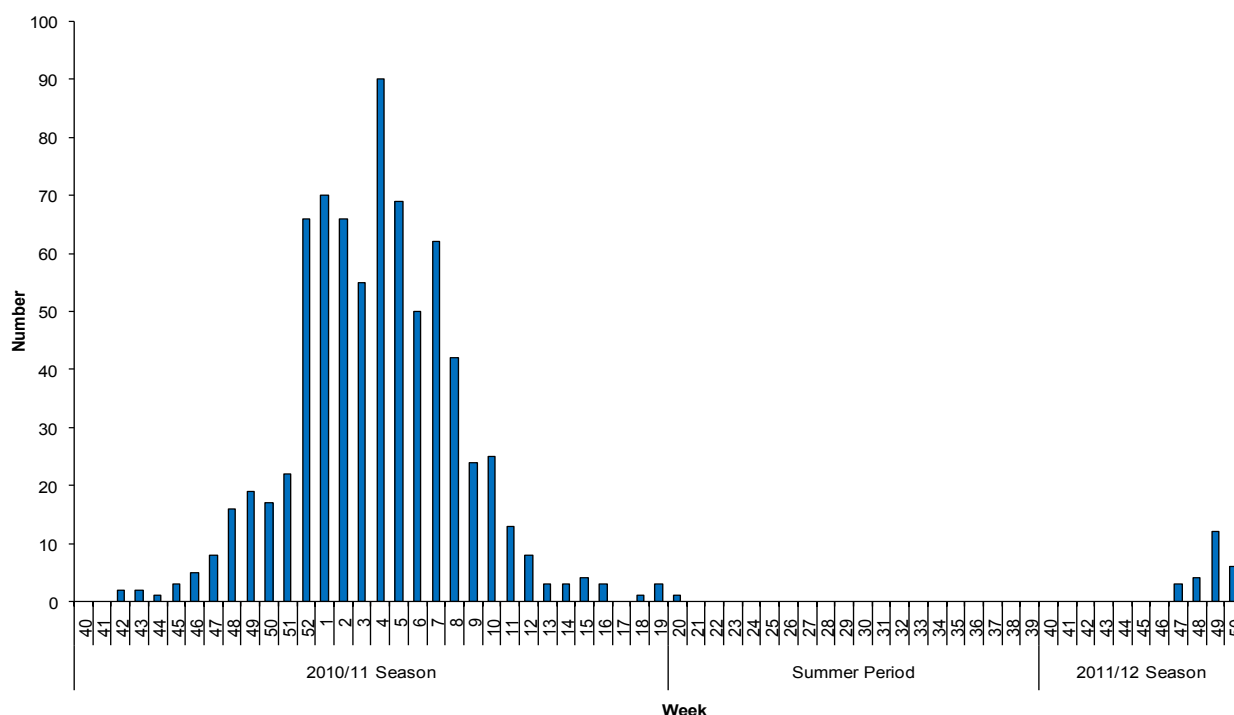
Sentinel and non-sentinel samples are tested for influenza and RSV.

Comment

There were 223 specimens (15 sentinel and 208 non-sentinel) tested by the Regional Virus Laboratory during weeks 49 and 50, 2011. There were no influenza positive detections during this period.

Other respiratory viruses

Figure 6: Weekly cases of RSV viruses in Northern Ireland, from week 40 2010



Comment

There were 18 RSV detections reported in weeks 49 and 50, compared to seven (updated) in weeks 47 and 48.

Hospital surveillance

There were no confirmed influenza patients or confirmed influenza deaths in critical care (level 2 and 3) in Northern Ireland in weeks 49 and 50.

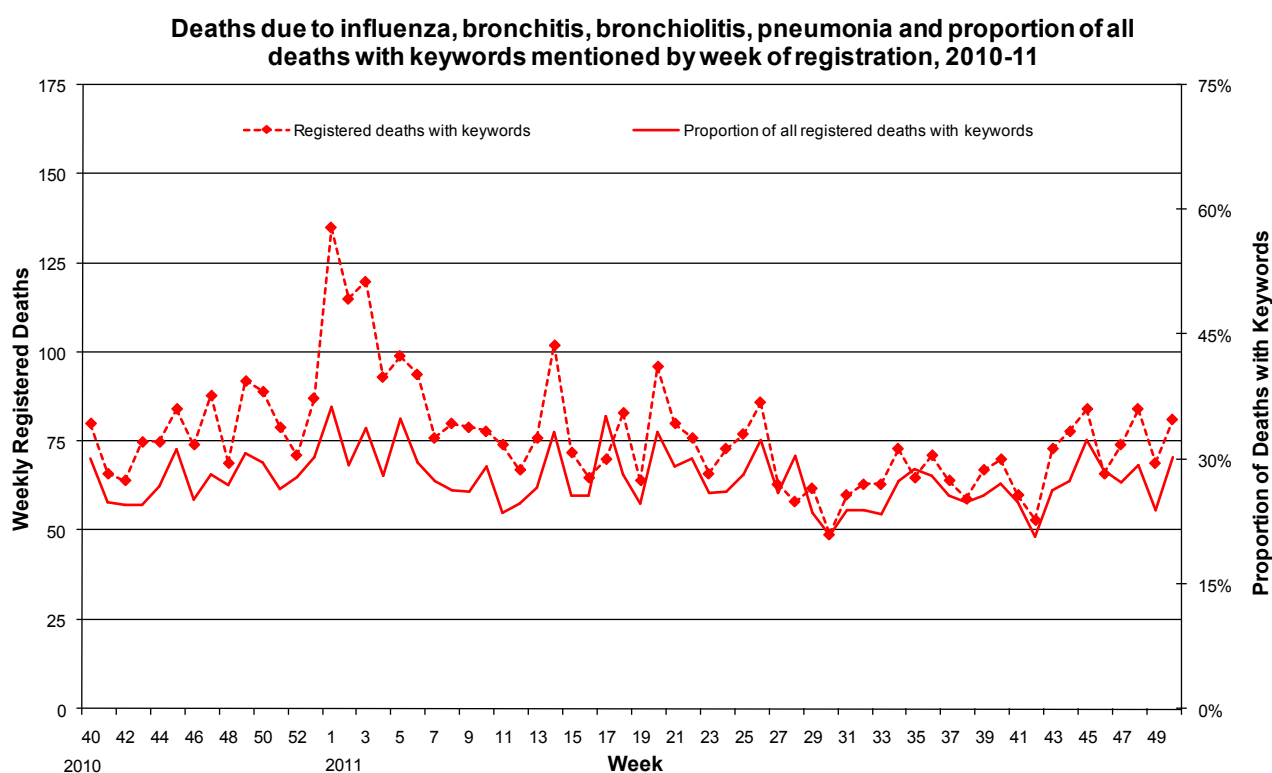
Additional information on confirmed influenza hospitalised patients will be available from the Health and Social Care Board (HSCB) once influenza starts to circulate.

Mortality data

Weekly mortality data are provided by the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA). The data relate 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 on 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.

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

Figure 7: Weekly registered deaths



Comment

The proportion of deaths related to respiratory keywords over this period increased slightly, from 29% in week 48 to 30% in week 50, and is similar to that for the same period last year. In weeks 49 and 50, there were 557 registered deaths, of which 150 related to these specific respiratory infections.

Vaccine uptake

As at the end of November 2011, the proportion of people in Northern Ireland aged 65 years and over who had received the seasonal influenza vaccine was 72.6%, while the uptake in those aged under 65 in an at-risk group was 74.6% (provisional data). This compares with 66.5% uptake in those aged 65 years and over, and 56.4% uptake in those aged under 65 in an at-risk group for the same period last year.

International summary

Europe

- During week 49 2011, low influenza activity was notified by all 26 countries reporting.
- Of 598 sentinel specimens tested, 12 (2%) were positive for influenza virus. Of the 67 influenza virus detections in sentinel specimens since week 40 2011, 51 were type A and 16 were type B viruses. Of the 35 influenza A viruses found in sentinel specimens and subtyped, three were A(H1) pdm09 and 32 were A(H3) viruses.
- Since week 40 2011, 78 SARI cases have been reported. Eighteen of them were confirmed influenza cases.
- With no evidence of sustained transmission in EU/EEA countries at week 49, the annual influenza epidemics have yet to start this season in Europe.

http://ecdc.europa.eu/EN/HEALTHTOPICS/SEASONAL_INFLUENZA/EPIDEMIOLOGICAL_DATA/Pages/Weekly_Influenza_Surveillance_Overview.aspx

USA

- During week 49 (December 4–10 2011), influenza activity remained low in the United States.
- US virological surveillance: of the 2,480 specimens tested by US, World Health Organization (WHO) and National Respiratory and Enteric Virus Surveillance System (NREVSS) collaborating laboratories and reported to CDC/Influenza Division, 48 (1.9%) were positive for influenza.
- Pneumonia and influenza (P&I) mortality surveillance: the proportion of deaths attributed to P&I was below the epidemic threshold.
- Influenza-associated paediatric mortality: no influenza-associated paediatric deaths were reported.
- Outpatient illness surveillance: the proportion of outpatient visits for influenza-like illness (ILI) was 1.2%, which is below the national baseline of 2.4%. All 10 regions reported ILI below region-specific baseline levels. Two states and New York City

experienced low ILI activity, 48 states experienced minimal ILI activity, and the District of Columbia had insufficient data.

- Geographic spread of influenza: the geographic spread of influenza in three states was reported as local; Guam, Puerto Rico and 32 states reported sporadic activity, and the District of Columbia, the US Virgin Islands and 15 states reported no influenza activity.
- An overview of US influenza can be viewed at: www.cdc.gov/flu/weekly/

Canada

Influenza activity in Canada is increasing in more regions compared to previous weeks. Two regions (within BC and SK) reported localised influenza activity and 10 regions (within BC, AB, ON and QC) reported sporadic influenza activity. Two outbreaks of influenza in long-term care facilities were reported this week. In week 49, 19 laboratory detections of influenza were reported (10 A/H3, 7 A unsubtype and 2 B). Three influenza hospitalisations were reported this week (two paediatric and one adult). The national ILI consultation rate declined to slightly below expected levels in week 49.

www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/fluwatch/11-12/w45_11/index-eng.php

Worldwide (WHO)

Influenza activity in the temperate regions of the northern hemisphere remains at low levels, with sporadic activity reported in Canada, the USA and some European countries.

Countries in the tropical zone mostly reported low influenza activity except Costa Rica, primarily influenza A(H3N2), and Cameroon, which is experiencing transmission of A(H3N2) following on recent peaks of A(H1N2) pdm09 and type B.

Influenza activity in the temperate countries of the southern hemisphere is at inter-seasonal levels.

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:

www.fluawareni.info Now on Facebook (Flu Aware NI)

www.hpa.org.uk

www.publichealth.hscni.net

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:

www.hpa.org.uk/Topics/InfectiousDiseases/InfectionsAZ/SeasonalInfluenza/EpidemiologicalData/

Republic of Ireland:

www.hpsc.ie/hpsc/A-Z/Respiratory/Influenza/SeasonalInfluenza/Surveillance/InfluenzaSurveillanceReports/20112012Season/

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:

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