

Influenza Weekly Surveillance Bulletin

Northern Ireland, Week 10 (07 March 2016 – 13 March 2016)

Summary

In Northern Ireland, as of week 10 2016, the 2015/16 influenza season has seen decreasing community influenza activity, with moderate GP consultation rates and numbers of Care Home outbreaks remaining low. However, numbers of ICU admissions remain higher than the same period last year. This year the predominant circulating influenza strain is influenza A (H1N1) pdm09. This strain first occurred in 2009, is of swine origin, and is sometimes referred to as ‘swine flu’. It is now one of the annual circulating seasonal viruses and is contained in the 2015/16 vaccine.

In week 10, 2016:

- GP consultation rates for combined flu and flu-like illness (flu/FLI) decreased to 29.0 per 100,000 population, are lower than the same period in the previous two seasons and remain below the 2015/16 pre-epidemic threshold¹
- OOH consultation rate for flu/FLI increased to 10.5 per 100,000 population, also increasing among most age groups.
- RSV activity has decreased and is lower than the same period during last season
- Two confirmed influenza outbreaks were reported to the PHA
- The proportion of positive influenza detections increased to 27%, with influenza A (H1N1) pdm09 the dominant circulating strain
- Seven admissions to ICU were reported with confirmed influenza
- No deaths were reported in ICU patients with laboratory confirmed influenza
- No significant excess mortality was reported through the EuroMOMO algorithm

Introduction

Influenza activity in Northern Ireland is monitored throughout the year using a number of surveillance systems. The influenza season typically runs from week 40 to week 20. Week 40 2015 commenced on 28th September 2015.

Surveillance systems include:

- GP sentinel surveillance representing 11.7% of Northern Ireland population;
- GP Out-of-Hours surveillance system representing the entire population;
- Virological reports from the Regional Virus Laboratory (RVL);
- Influenza outbreak report notification to PHA Duty Room;
- Critical Care Network for Northern Ireland reports on critical care patients with confirmed influenza;
- Mortality data from Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA);
- Excess mortality estimations are also provided by Public Health England using the EuroMOMO (Mortality Monitoring in Europe) model based on raw death data supplied by NISRA;

¹ The pre-epidemic threshold for Northern Ireland is 49.4 per 100,000 population this year (2015/16)

Sentinel GP Consultation Data

Figure 1. Sentinel GP consultation rates for flu/FLI 2013/14 - 2015/16

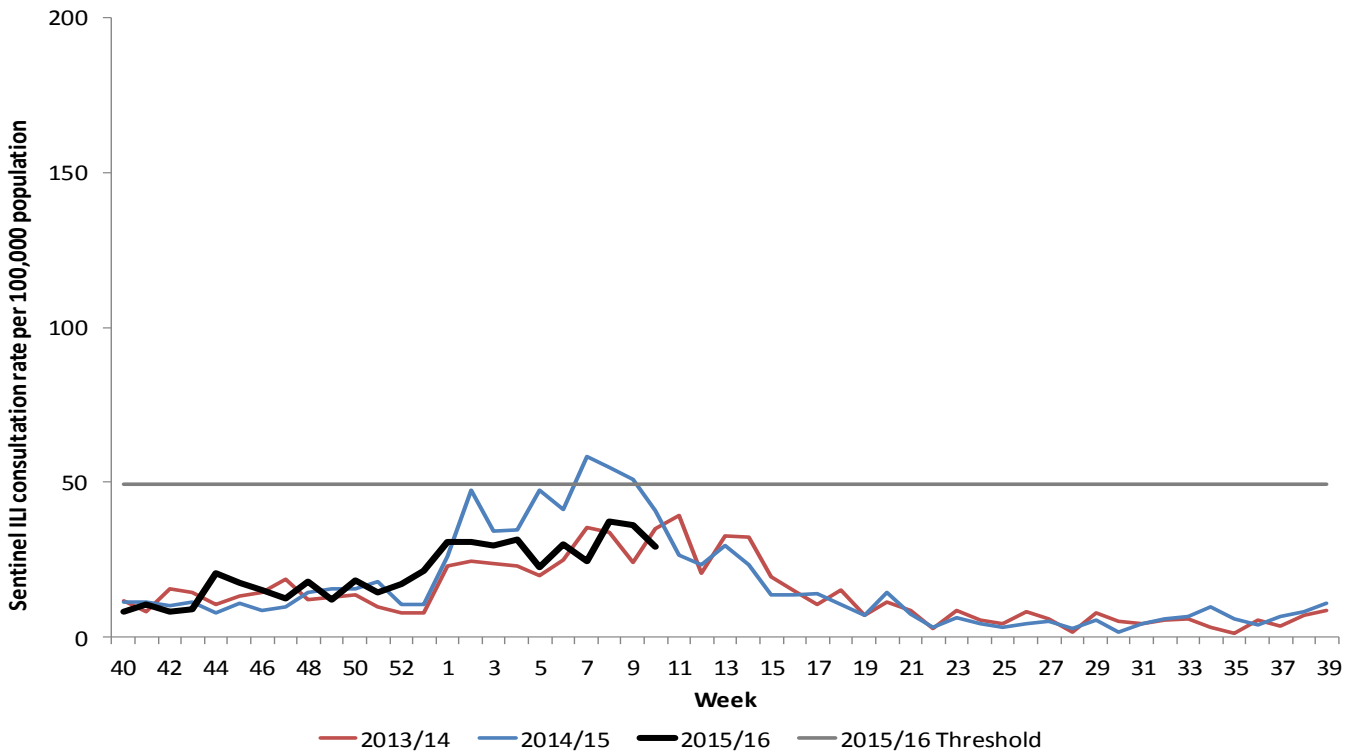


Figure 2. Sentinel GP combined consultation rates for flu/FLI and number of influenza positive detections 2010/11 – 2015/16

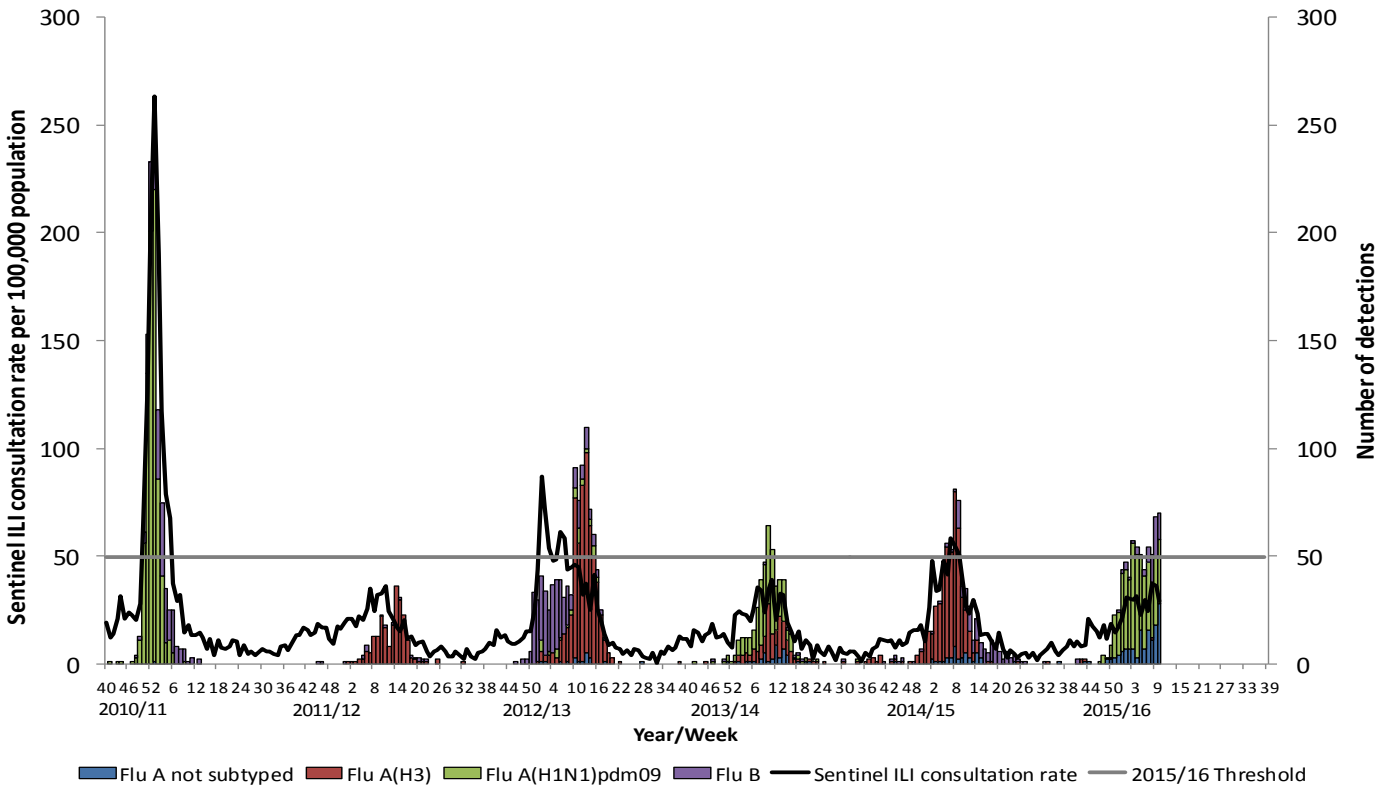
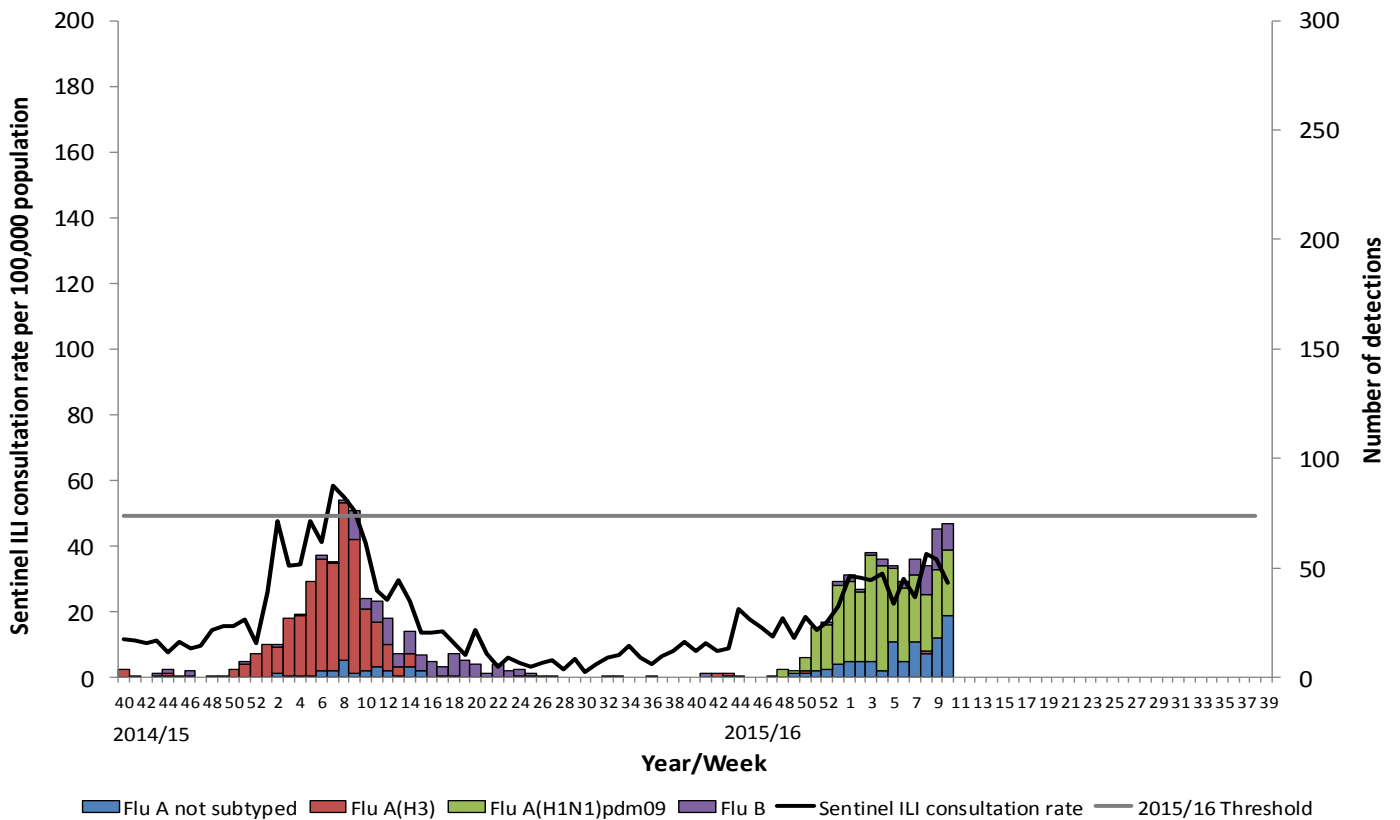


Figure 3. Sentinel GP consultation rates for flu/FLI and number of virology 'flu detections from week 40, 2014

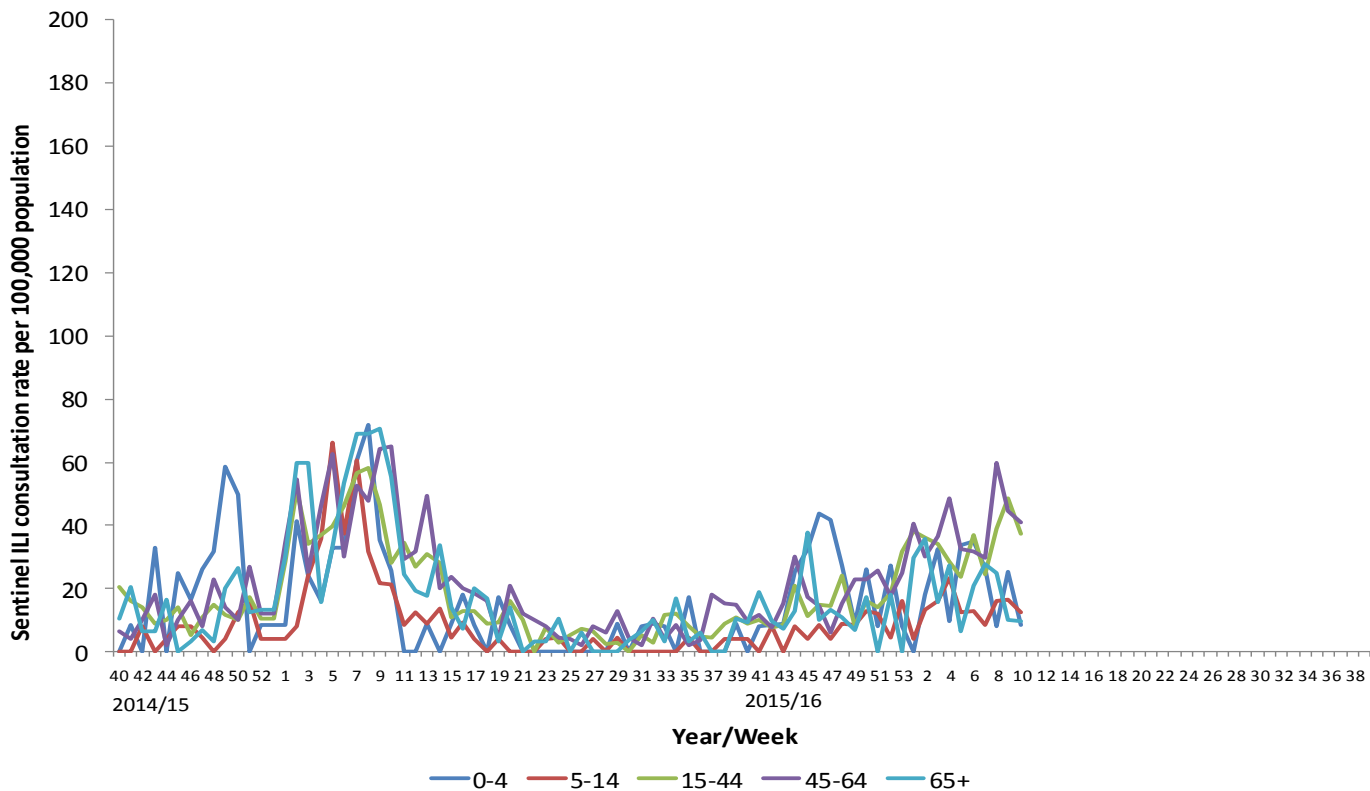


Comment

GP consultation rates have decreased in week 10, 2016 to 29.0 per 100,000 population compared with 36.1 per 100,000 in week 9. The GP consultation rate is lower than the same period in both 2014/15 and 2013/14.

Rates remain below the pre-epidemic Northern Ireland 2015/16 threshold of 49.4 per 100,000 (Figures 1, 2 and 3).

Figure 4. Sentinel GP age-specific consultation rates for flu/FLI from week 40, 2014



Comment

During week 10 2016, GP consultation rates decreased among all age groups in comparison with the previous week. Age-specific consultation rates are also lower than noted during the same period in both 2014/15 and 2013/14.

The highest consultation rate in week 10 was noted in those aged 45-64 years at 40.8 per 100,000 population (Figure 4).

Out-of-Hours (OOH) Centres Call Data

Figure 5. OOH call rate for flu/FLI, 2013/14 – 2015/16

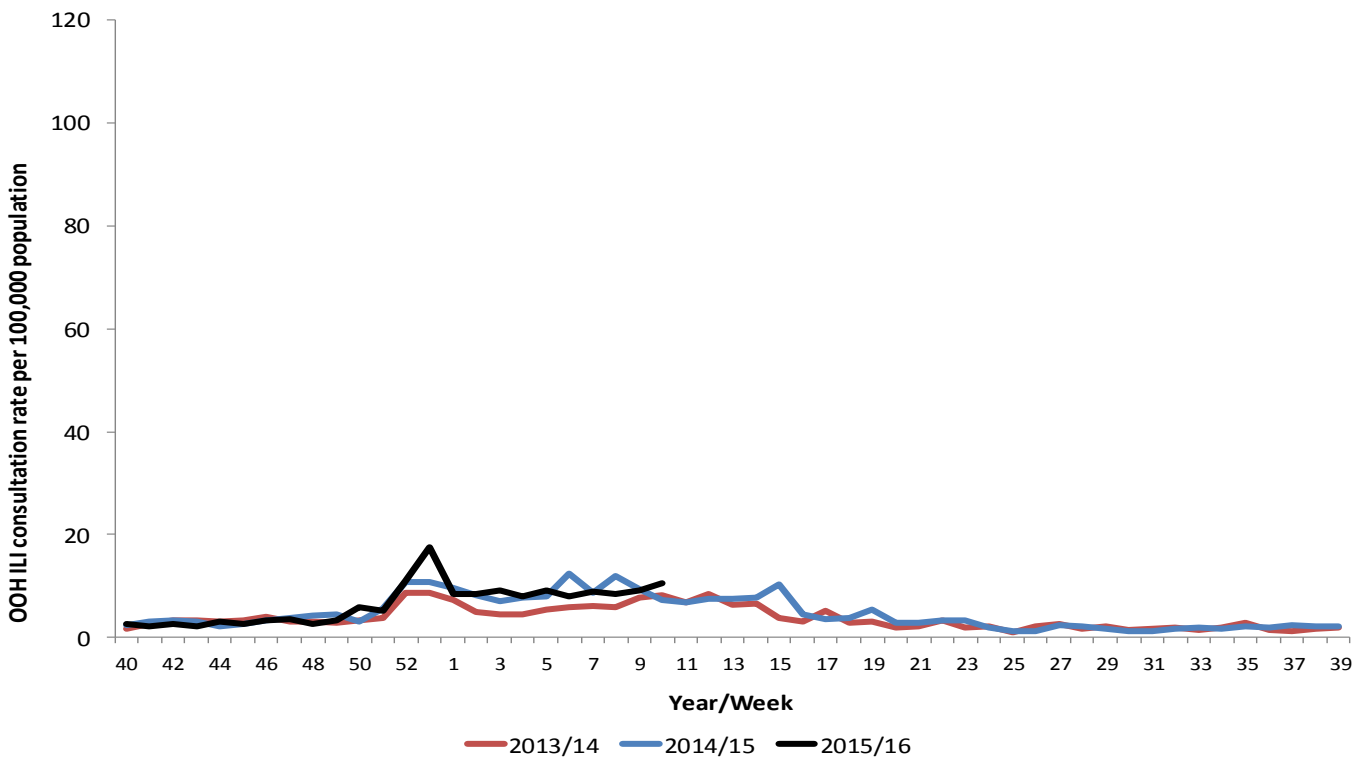
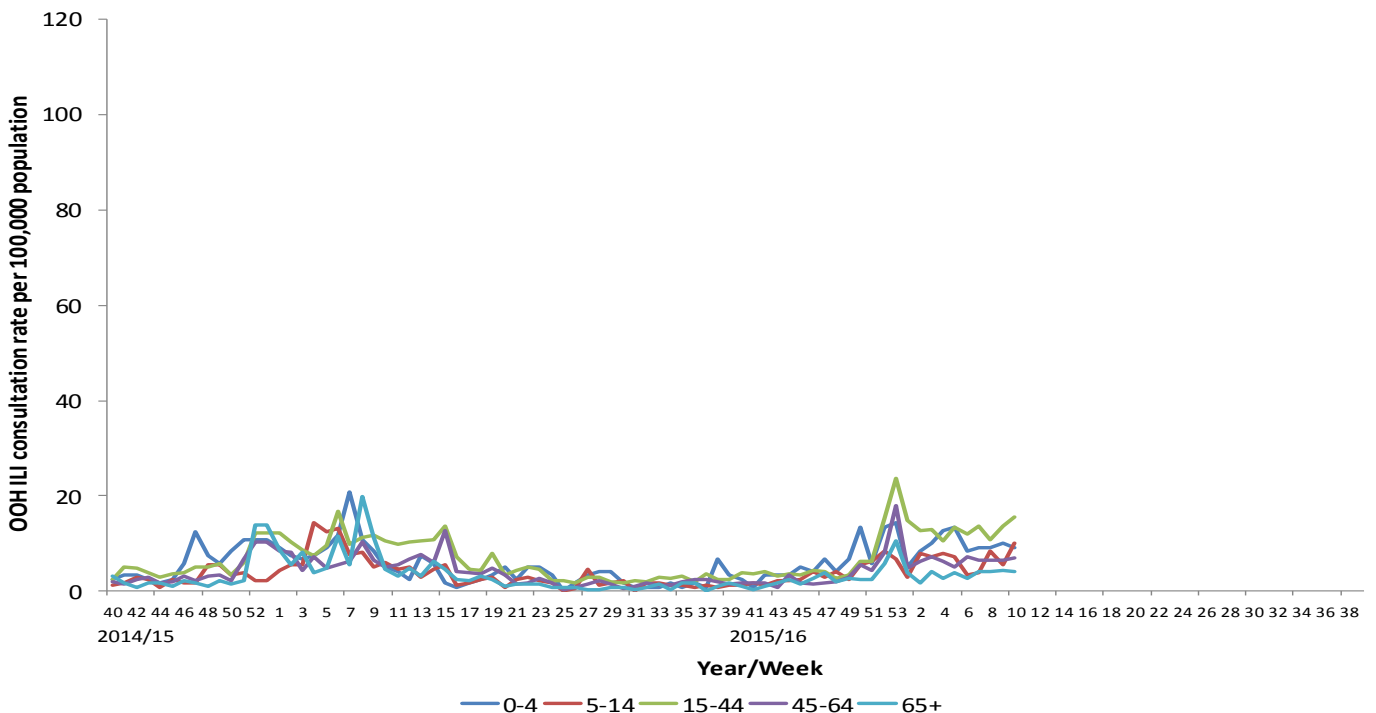


Figure 6. OOH Call rates of flu/FLI by age-group from week 40, 2014



Comment

OOH data has now been updated for weeks 7 to 10. During week 10, 2016 the OOH GP consultation rate increased slightly to 10.5 per 100,000 population compared with 9.2 in week 9. The OOH GP consultation rate is higher than the same period in both 2014/15 and 2013/14 (Figure 5).

The proportion of calls related to flu in week 10 represents 1.6% of total calls to the OOH service.

During week 10, OOH flu/FLI rates have increased in the 5-14, 15-44 and 45-64 years age groups, while rates among those aged 0-4 years and 65 years and over have decreased. The highest OOH flu/FLI rate was noted in those aged 15-44 years at 15.5 per 100,000 population (Figure 6). Age-specific rates are also higher than noted during the same period in both 2014/15 and 2013/14.

Virology Data

Table 1. Virus activity in Northern Ireland, Week 10, 2015/16

Source	Specimens Tested	Flu AH3	Flu A(H1N1) 2009	A (untyped)	Flu B	RSV	Total influenza Positive	% Influenza Positive
Sentinel	14	0	7	3	1	0	11	79%
Non-sentinel	241	0	23	25	11	1	59	24%
Total	255	0	30	28	12	1	70	27%

Table 2. Cumulative virus activity in Northern Ireland, Week 40 - 10, 2015/16

	Flu AH3	Flu A(H1N1) 2009	A (untyped)	Flu B	Total Influenza	RSV
0-4	0	62	10	7	79	418
5-14	0	21	1	9	31	17
15-64	1	270	88	43	402	71
65+	4	87	40	9	140	73
Unknown	0	0	0	0	0	0
All ages	5	440	139	68	652	579

Table 3. Cumulative virus activity, Week 40 - Week 10, 2015/16

	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	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	62	10	7	79	417
5-14	0	4	0	1	5	1	0	17	1	8	26	16
15-64	0	43	5	10	58	9	1	227	83	33	344	62
65+	0	2	2	0	4	1	4	85	38	9	136	72
Unknown	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
All ages	0	49	7	11	67	12	5	391	132	57	585	567

Note

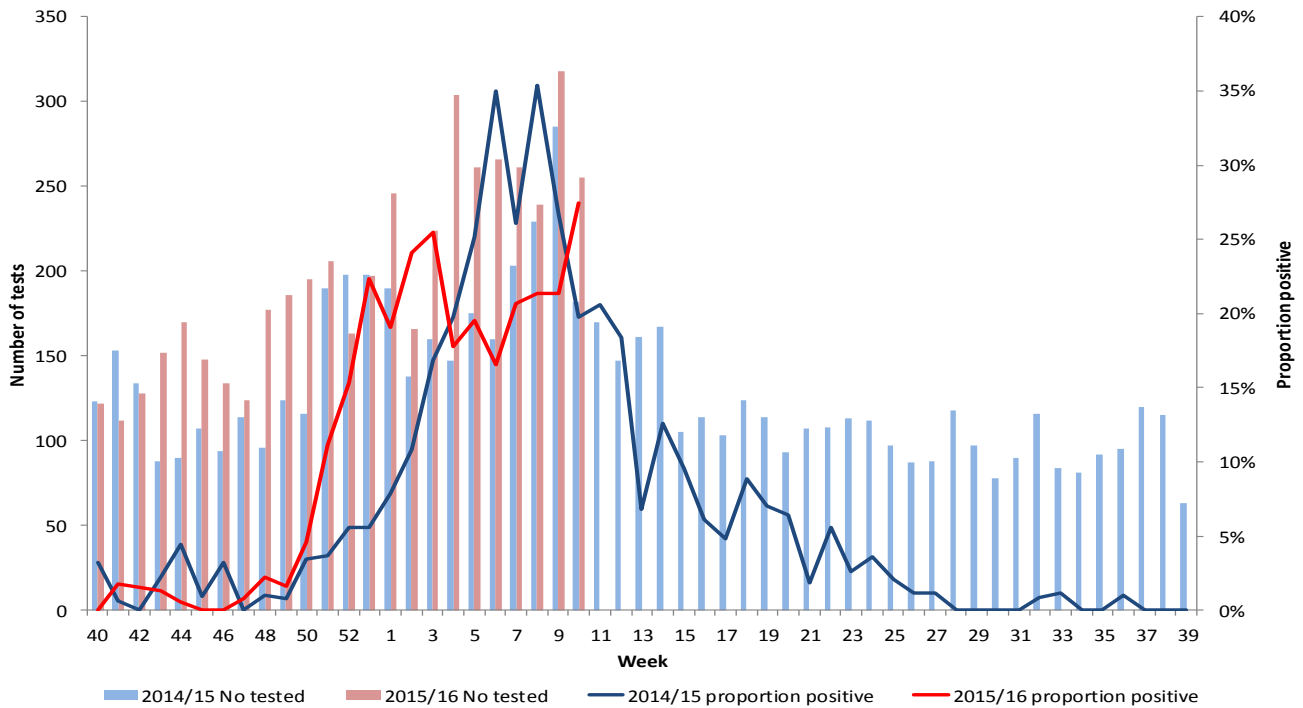
All virology data is provisional. The virology figures for previous weeks included in this or future bulletins are updated with data from laboratory returns received after the production of the last bulletin. The current bulletin reflects the most up-to-date information available. Sentinel and non-sentinel 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.

Comment

During week 10, 255 specimens were submitted for virological testing. There were 70 detections of influenza (positivity rate of 27%) - 30 were typed as influenza A(H1N1)pdm09, 28 as influenza A (typing awaited) and 12 as influenza B. The positivity rate for influenza has increased from 21% in week 9 (Figure 7).

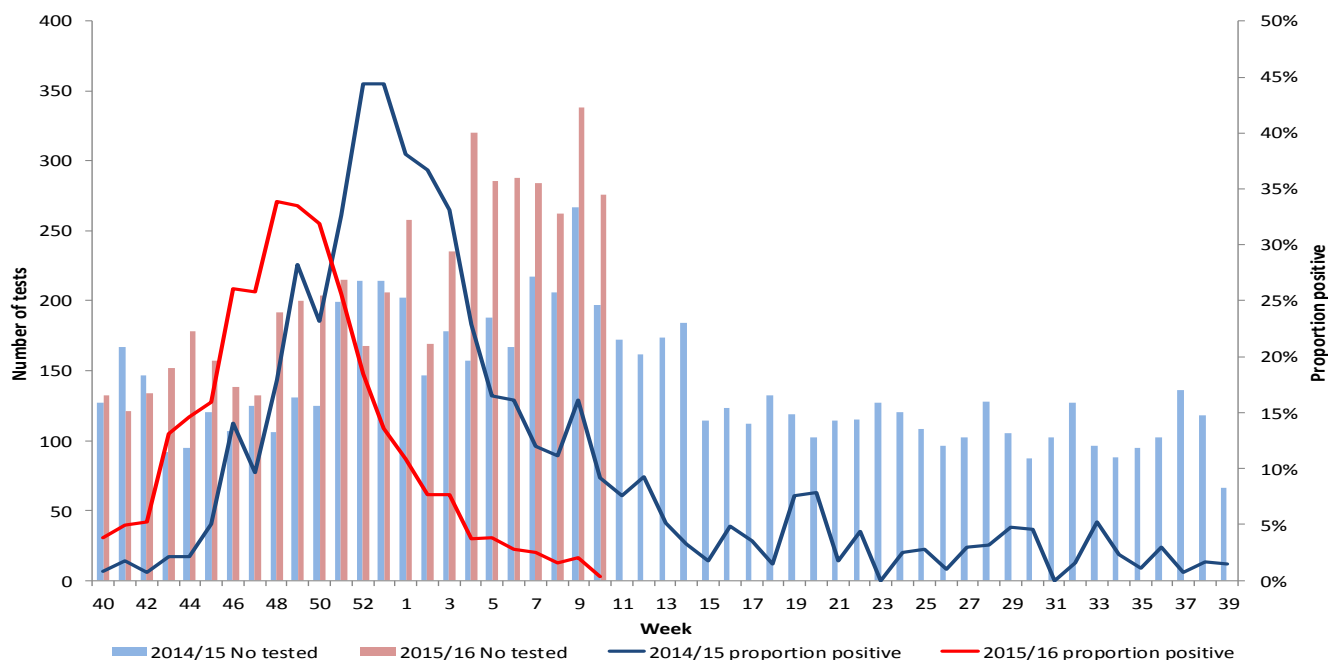
Overall this season, there have been 652 detections of influenza reported, more than in the same period in 2013/14 (n=254) and 2014/15 (n=471) (Tables 1, 2, and 3).

Figure 7. Number of samples tested for influenza and proportion positive, 2014/15 and 2015/16, all sources



Respiratory Syncytial Virus

Figure 8. Number of samples tested for RSV and proportion positive, 2014/15 and 2015/16, all sources



Comment

During week 10, there was 1 RSV positive detection. Positivity rates have decreased to less than 1% from 2% in week 9. RSV positivity rates during this period are the lowest recorded in recent years. Overall this season there have been 578 detections of RSV, of which the majority (72%) were in those aged 0-4 years (Figure 8 and table 2).

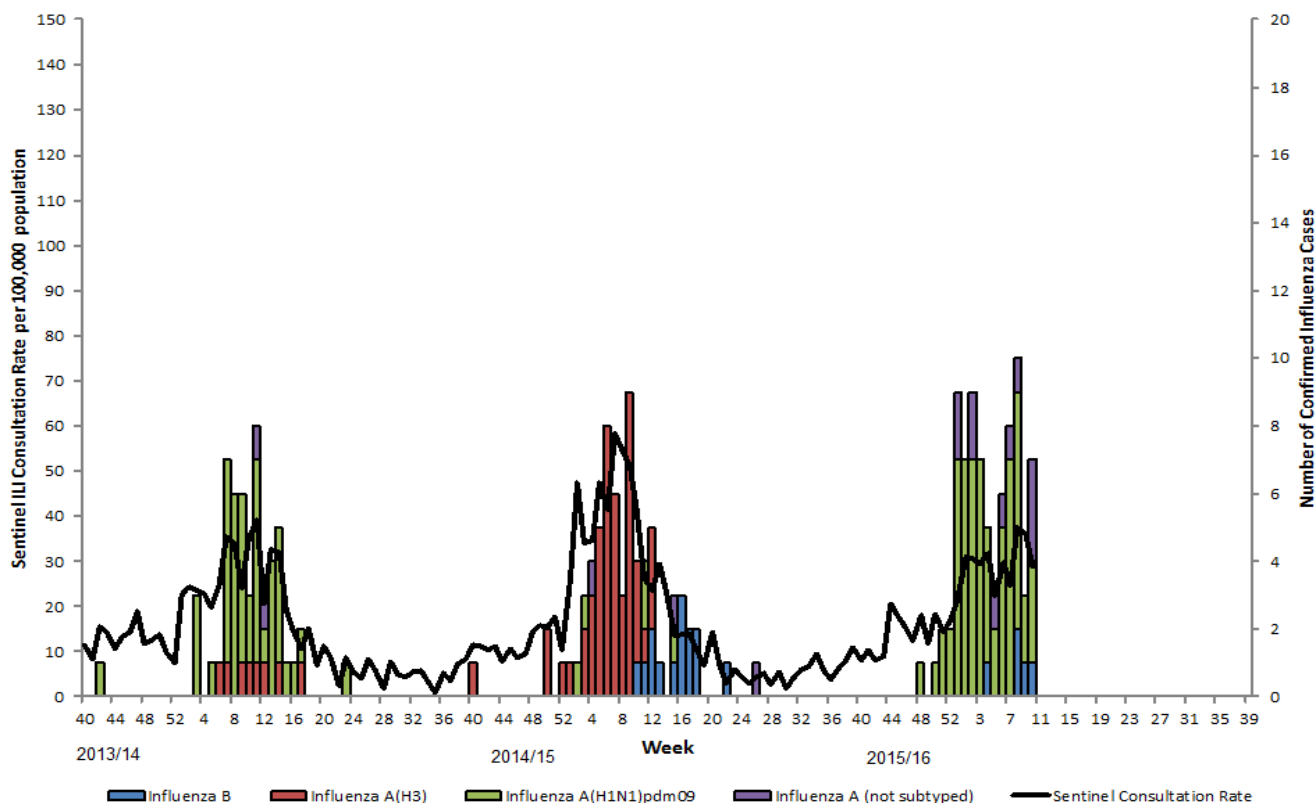
Influenza Vaccine Uptake

The most recent provisional data suggest that vaccine uptake for those aged 65 years and over is 68.9%, lower than the same period in 2014/15; while 53.2% of those under 65 and in an at risk group received the vaccine, lower than in 2014/15 when 69.0% received the vaccine.

Similar to last season, all children aged between 2 and 4 years and all primary school children in 2014/15 have been offered the seasonal influenza vaccine. The most recent provisional data suggest that vaccine uptake among 2-4 year old children is 46.4%, lower than in 2014/15 during the same period. Uptake among children in primary school is 76.5%, slightly lower than in 2014/15.

ICU/HDU Surveillance

Figure 9. Confirmed ICU influenza cases by week of specimen, with sentinel ILI consultation rate, 2013/14 - 2015/16



Comment

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

During week 10, there were seven admissions to ICU confirmed with influenza reported to the PHA – three with influenza A (H1N1)pdm09, three with influenza A untyped (typing awaited) and one with influenza B.

Overall, there have been 80 admissions to ICU with confirmed influenza reported this season, of which 64 have been confirmed as influenza A (H1N1)pdm09, 11 as influenza A untyped (typing awaited) and 5 as influenza B (Figure 9).

Up to week 10, 2016, 49 of the 80 ICU patients with confirmed influenza had co-morbidities. Provisional data show that 44 of the 80 (55%) cases met the criteria for influenza vaccination and only 13 had received the vaccination (30%) (Table 4).

There were no deaths in ICU patients with laboratory confirmed influenza reported since the last bulletin. To date, there have been 9 deaths in ICU patients with laboratory confirmed influenza, all of whom had underlying comorbidities.

Table 4. Flu Confirmed ICU Cases in Northern Ireland, Week 40 - 10, 2015/16

Age Group	No of patients	Flu vaccine eligibility group*	Vaccinated	Flu A(H1N1)pdm09	Flu A(H3)	Flu A(untyped)	Flu B
0 - 4	12	4	0	9	0	1	2
5-14	2	2	0	2	0	0	0
15-44	20	7	1	18	0	1	1
45-64	34	19	5	25	0	8	1
65+	12	12	7	10	0	1	1
All	80	44	13	64	0	11	5

*Includes all children aged 2-4 and those in primary school, people aged under 65 in an at risk group, and all those aged 65 years and over.

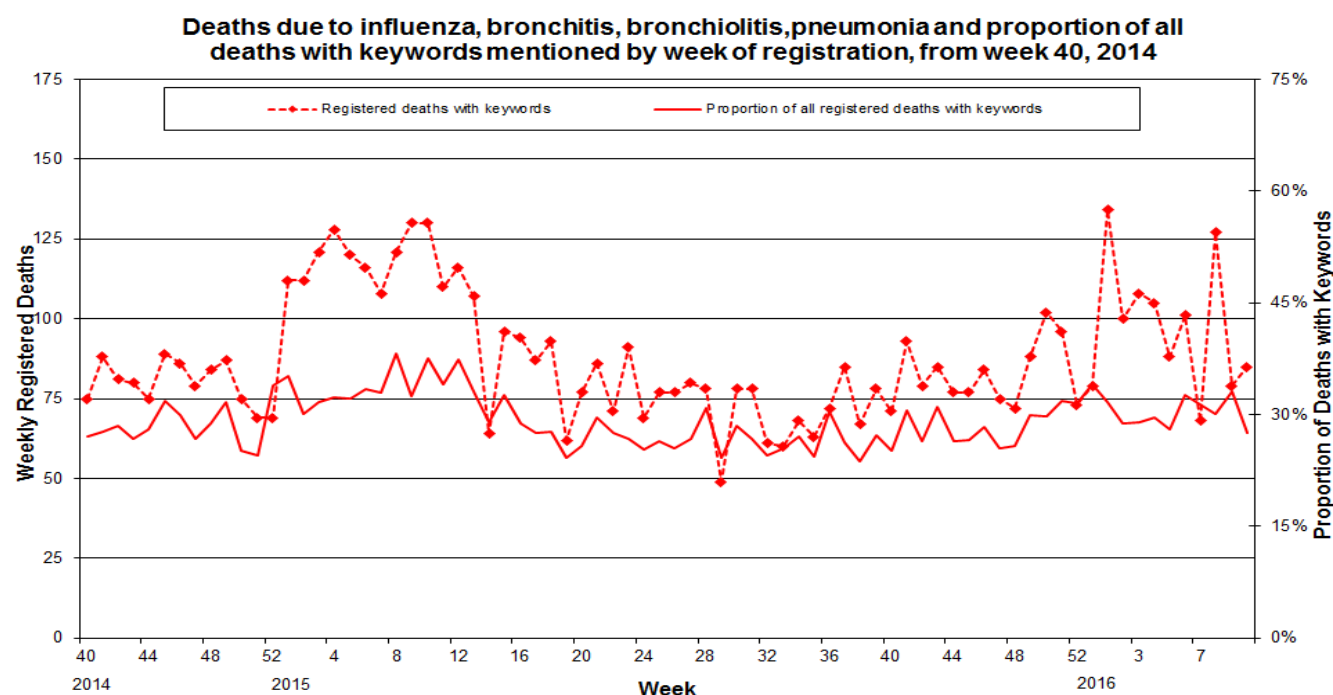
Outbreak Surveillance

During week 10, 2016 there were two reports of confirmed influenza A (typing awaited) outbreaks to the PHA. There have been a total of five confirmed influenza outbreaks reported to the PHA this season to date; two influenza A(H1N1)pdm09 and three influenza A (untyped).

Mortality Data

Weekly mortality data is provided from Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency. 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 9. Weekly registered deaths



Comment

During week 10, the proportion of registered deaths from specific respiratory infections decreased to 28% from 33% in week 9 (Figure 9).

In week 10 there were 309 registered deaths, of which 85 related to specific respiratory infections (28%). The proportion of deaths attributed to specific respiratory infections is lower at this point in the season than in 2014/15 but similar to 2013/14.

EuroMOMO

No significant excess all-cause mortality was reported for week 10 in Northern Ireland. To date, excess all-cause mortality had been reported in four weeks of the current influenza season (weeks 49, 52, 53 and 2).

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

International Summary

Europe

Week 9, 2016:

- Influenza continues to circulate widely mainly in countries of western, northern and central Europe. Both widespread influenza activity and medium/high intensity were reported by 19 countries.
- The proportion of sentinel specimens positive for influenza showed a slight decrease this week, to 44%, after plateauing during three consecutive weeks.
- Influenza B virus constituted 55% of influenza virus detections in sentinel samples compared to 47% for the previous week, indicating a gradual shift towards influenza B over the last few weeks.
- Among influenza A viruses, A(H1N1)pdm09 remained the predominant virus in all surveillance systems (87% in sentinel surveillance).
- The number of cases of severe disease was lower than in previous weeks. Most severe cases continued to be associated with A(H1N1)pdm09 virus infection and occurred in people aged 15–64 years.
- In the 17 countries or regions reporting to the European monitoring of excess mortality for public health action project (EuroMOMO), a pattern suggests excess all-cause mortality among those aged 15-64 years, some of which may be associated with influenza infection.

Season:

- Among A viruses, the A(H1N1)pdm09 subtype predominated in almost all countries in the Region, except in Italy and Slovenia where the proportions of A(H3N2) virus were higher.
- Since week 52/2015, European countries reporting severe acute respiratory infections (SARI) and laboratory-confirmed influenza cases in hospitals and intensive care units (ICUs) have reported high numbers of cases associated with A(H1N1)pdm09 infection. During the last weeks however, these numbers have been declining in almost all reporting countries.

- Most of the viruses characterized so far this season have been similar to those recommended for inclusion in the trivalent or quadrivalent seasonal influenza northern hemisphere vaccines for the 2015-2016 season.
- WHO recommendations for the 2016–2017 northern hemisphere [vaccine composition](#).

Additional information on influenza in the world is available from WHO's global [updates](#).

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

Worldwide (WHO) and CDC

As at 7th March 2016:

In the Northern Hemisphere high levels of influenza activity continued with influenza A(H1N1)pdm09 predominating and an increase in the proportion of influenza B viruses detected. In the Southern Hemisphere and in tropical countries influenza activity was generally low.

- In Europe ongoing high levels of influenza activity continued to be reported, although in some countries activity seemed to have peaked already. Influenza A(H1N1)pdm09 accounted for most virus detections with an increase in the proportion of influenza B detections. In Russian Federation and Ukraine, elevated SARI activity continued but at lower levels compared to previous weeks.
- In North America, influenza activity increased further with influenza A(H1N1)pdm09 predominating in Canada and United States of America and A(H3N2) in Mexico.
- In Northern/Temperate Asia, influenza activity remained high but seemed to have peaked already in some countries.
- In Western Asia, influenza activity continued to decrease. Oman reported ongoing low levels of both influenza A(H1N1)pdm09 and influenza B viruses.
- In Africa influenza A(H1N1)pdm09 activity was reported in northern Africa.
- In tropical countries of the Americas, Central America and the Caribbean, influenza and other respiratory virus activity were overall at low levels, except Jamaica, and Puerto Rico with high but decreasing influenza activity.
- In South East Asia, ongoing low influenza activity was reported during this period.
- In the temperate countries of the Southern Hemisphere influenza activity remained low at inter-seasonal level.
- National Influenza Centres (NICs) and other national influenza laboratories from 98 countries, areas or territories reported data to FluNet for the time period from 08 February 2016 to 21 February 2016* (data as of 2016-03-04 07:20:12 UTC). The WHO GISRS laboratories tested more than 158158 specimens during that time period. 42727 were positive for influenza viruses, of which 33745 (79%) were typed as influenza A and 8982 (21%) as influenza B. Of the sub-typed influenza A viruses, 19269 (87.7%) were influenza A(H1N1)pdm09 and 2709 (12.3%) were influenza A(H3N2). Of the characterized B viruses, 589 (24.4%) belonged to the B-Yamagata lineage and 1821 (75.6%) 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, Regional Virus Laboratory, Critical Care Network for Northern Ireland, Public Health England and NISRA. Their work is greatly appreciated and their support vital in the production of this bulletin.

Further information

Further information on influenza is available at the following websites:

<http://www.fluawareni.info> Now on Facebook (Flu Aware NI)

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

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

<http://www.who.int>

<http://ecdc.europa.eu>

<http://euroflu.org>

Flusurvey, an online flu surveillance system run by the PHE and London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine was launched in 2013/14 and continues in 2015/16. For further information and please see the [Flusurvey website](#).

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

Northern Ireland:

<http://www.publichealth.hscni.net/directorate-public-health/health-protection/seasonal-influenza>

England, Scotland and Wales:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/seasonal-influenza-guidance-data-and-analysis#epidemiology>

Republic of Ireland:

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

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:

Chris Nugent
Surveillance Officer
Public Health Agency
028 9536 3407

Dr Naomh Gallagher
Senior Epidemiological Scientist
Public Health Agency
028 9536 3498

Email: flusurveillance@hscni.net

This report was compiled by Chris Nugent, Dr Naomh Gallagher and Dr Jillian Johnston.