

Influenza Surveillance in Ireland – Weekly Report

Influenza Week 2 2015 (5th – 11th January 2015)



 Intensive Care Society of Ireland

Summary

Influenza-like illness GP consultation rates increased above baseline levels for the first time this season, during week 2 2015. Influenza activity remained at low levels in Ireland during week 2 2015; however most indicators of influenza activity are increasing.

- **Influenza-like illness (ILI):** The sentinel GP influenza-like illness (ILI) consultation rate was 29.0 per 100,000 population in week 2 2015, remaining low, however increasing above baseline levels for the first time this season.
 - ILI rates are above the Irish baseline threshold (21.0 per 100,000 population)
 - ILI rates increased in the 5-14 and 15-64 year age groups during week 2 2015.
- **GP Out of Hours:** The proportion of influenza-related calls to GP Out-of-Hours services remained stable during week 2 2015.
- **National Virus Reference Laboratory (NVRL):**
 - Influenza positivity increased during week 2 2015, with 48 influenza positive specimens reported from the NVRL: 45 influenza A(H3), 1 A(H1)pdm09 and 2 influenza A (not subtyped).
 - Respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) positivity decreased further during week 2 2015, however remained at elevated levels, as expected at this time of year.
- **Respiratory admissions:** The latest complete data on respiratory admissions reported from a network of sentinel hospitals were elevated, as expected at this time of year.
- **Hospitalisations:** 15 confirmed influenza hospitalised cases were notified to HPSC during the week ending January 10th 2015: 12 associated with influenza A(H3) and three associated with influenza A (not subtyped).
- **Critical care admissions:** To date this season, two confirmed influenza cases were admitted to critical care and reported to HPSC, one associated with influenza A(H3) and one associated with influenza A(H1)pdm09.
- **Mortality:** Three influenza A(H3)-associated deaths have been reported to HPSC this season.
- **Outbreaks:** Eight acute respiratory outbreaks were reported to HPSC during the week ending January 10th 2015: four associated with influenza A, two with RSV, and two with unknown pathogens.
- **International:** Globally, influenza activity continued to increase in the northern hemisphere with influenza A(H3N2) viruses predominating so far this season.

1. GP sentinel surveillance system - Clinical Data

During week 2 2015 (the week ending 11th January 2015), 75 influenza-like illness (ILI) cases were reported from sentinel GPs, corresponding to an ILI consultation rate of 29.0 per 100,000 population, remaining low, however increasing above the Irish baseline threshold (21/100,000 population), for the first time during the 2014/2015 influenza season. The updated rate for week 1 2015 was 15.5 per 100,000 population. ILI age specific rates increased in the 5-14 and 15-64 year age groups during week 2 2015 (figures 1 & 2).

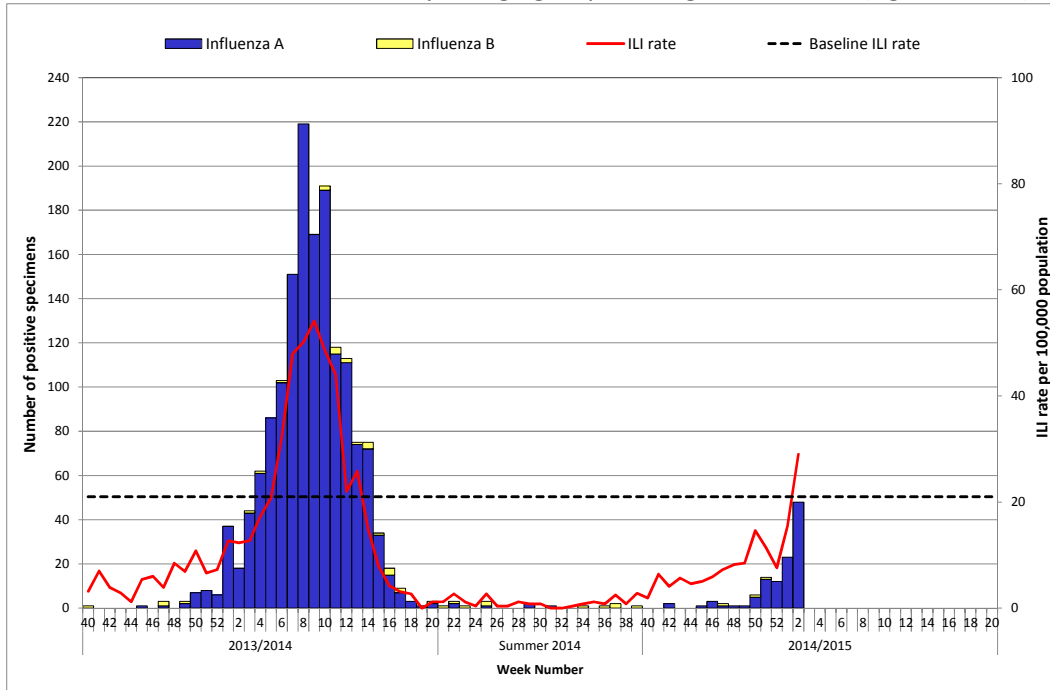


Figure 1. ILI sentinel GP consultation rates per 100,000 population, baseline ILI threshold rate, and number of positive influenza A and B specimens tested by the NVRL, by influenza week and season. *Source: ICGP and NVRL*

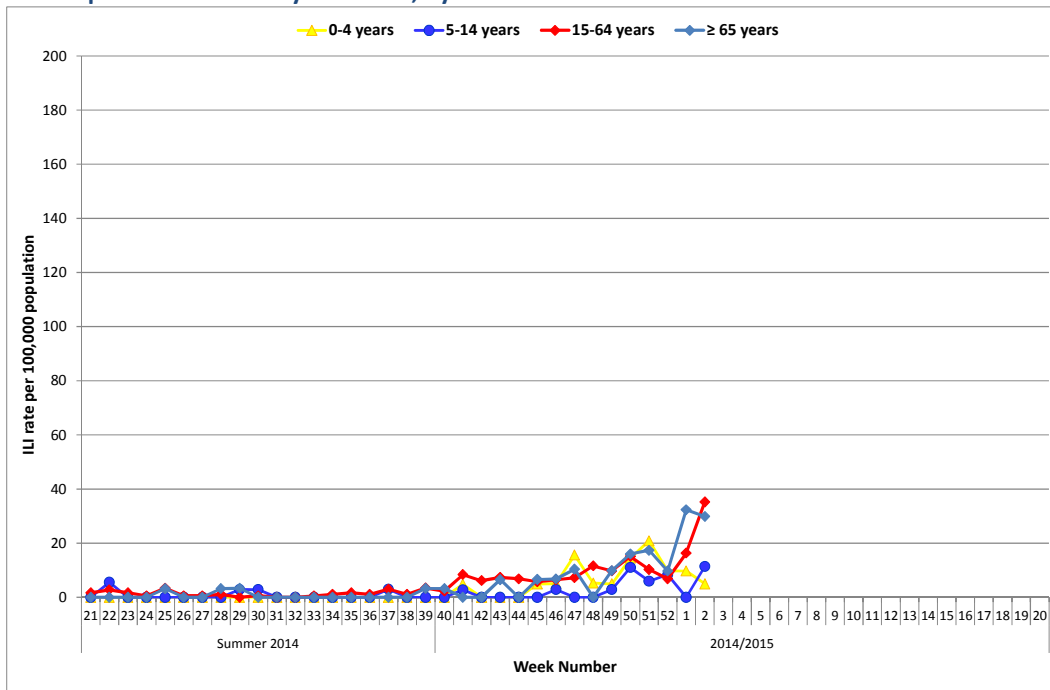


Figure 2: Age specific sentinel GP ILI consultation rate per 100,000 population by week during the summer of 2014 and the 2014/2015 influenza season to date. *Source: ICGP.*

2. Influenza and Other Respiratory Virus Detections - NVRL

The data reported in this section refers to sentinel and non-sentinel respiratory specimens routinely tested for influenza, respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) and human metapneumovirus (hMPV) by the National Virus Reference Laboratory (NVRL). The NVRL also test respiratory specimens for adenovirus and parainfluenza viruses types 1, 2 & 3 (PIV-1, -2, & -3) upon clinical request (figures 3, 4 and 5 and tables 1 and 2).

- Influenza positivity increased during week 2 2015, with 48 (15.2%) influenza positive specimens reported from the National Virus Reference Laboratory (NVRL): 45 influenza A(H3), 1 influenza A(H1)pdm09 and 2 influenza A (not subtyped). To date this season, of the 113 confirmed influenza positive specimens reported by the NVRL, 90% (n=102) were positive for influenza A(H3).
- Week 2 2015:
 - 12 of 31 (38.7%) sentinel specimens were influenza positive: 12 A(H3).
 - 36 of 284 (12.7%) non-sentinel specimens were influenza positive: 33 A(H3), 1 A(H1)pdm09 and 2 A (not subtyped).
- Fifty-two (52/315; 16.5%) respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) positive sentinel GP and non-sentinel specimens were reported during week 2 2015.
 - RSV positivity remained elevated during week 2 2015, however has continued to decrease in recent weeks (figure 5).
- Sporadic detections of human metapneumovirus (hMPV), adenovirus and parainfluenza virus types -1, -3 & -4 have been reported for the season to date.

Genetic characterisation of influenza viruses circulating this season has been carried out by the NVRL, on 13 positive samples to date. A total of 11 influenza A(H3) viruses have been genetically characterised. Eight of 11 (72.7%) viruses were A/Hong Kong/5738/2014-like (3C.2a), which is a genetic group of viruses that have shown antigenic drift from the vaccine strain. The remaining viruses belong to the genetic group 3C.3, which is reportedly antigenically similar to the 2014/2015 influenza A(H3) vaccine strain. Antigenic characterisation testing is currently in process. Two influenza B viruses were characterised and are B/Yamagata-like viruses. Further testing is ongoing, and the NVRL and HPSC are carefully monitoring the situation. The latest ECDC rapid risk assessment on the circulation of drifted influenza A(H3N2) viruses in Europe is available [here](#).

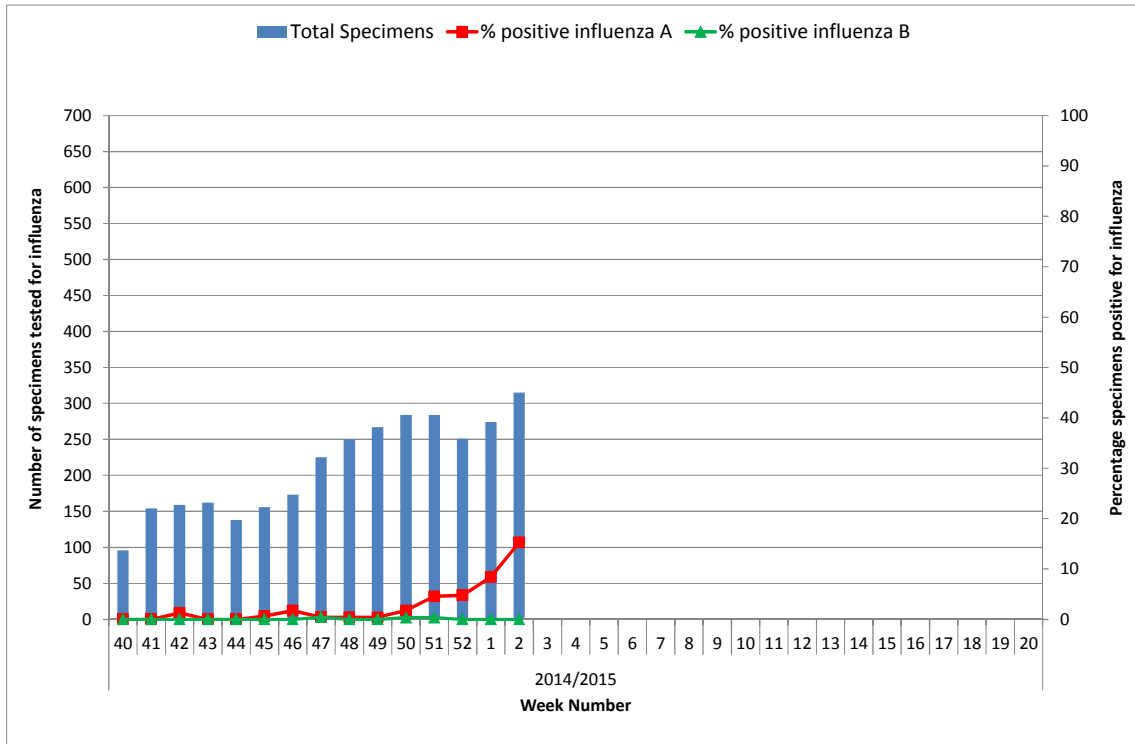


Figure 3: Number of sentinel and non-sentinel specimens tested by the NVRL for influenza and percentage influenza positive by week for the 2014/2015 influenza season. *Source: NVRL*

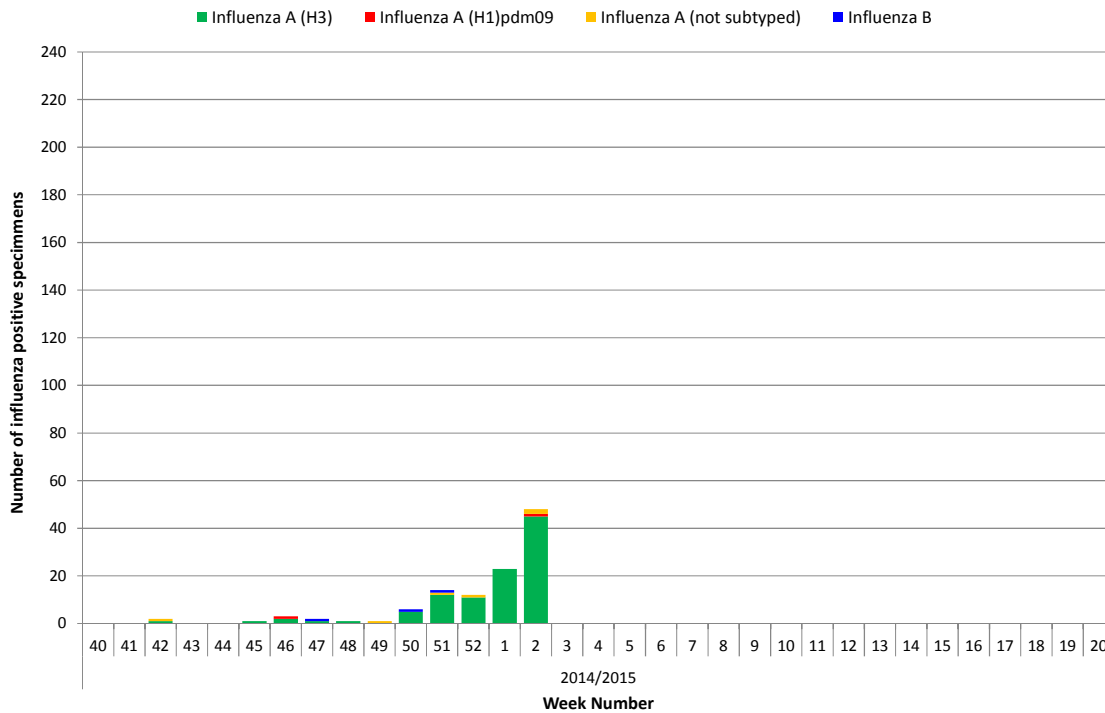


Figure 4: Number of positive influenza specimens by influenza type/subtype from sentinel and non-sentinel sources tested by the NVRL, by week for the 2014/2015 influenza season. *Source: NVRL.*

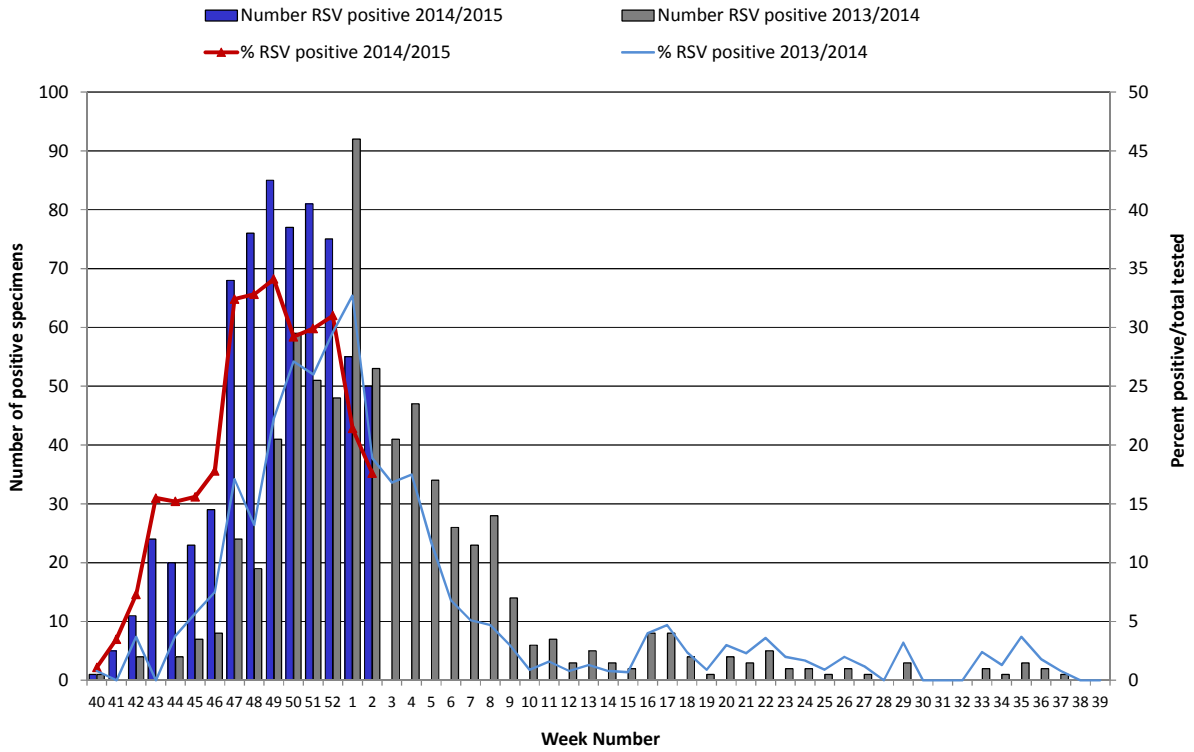


Figure 5: Number and percentage of non-sentinel RSV positive specimens detected by the NVRL during the 2014/2015 season, compared to the 2013/2014 season. Source: NVRL.

Table 1: Number of sentinel and non-sentinel* respiratory specimens tested by the NVRL and positive influenza results, for week 2 2015 and the 2014/2015 season to date. Source: NVRL

Week	Specimen type	Total tested	Number influenza positive	% Influenza positive	Influenza A				Influenza B
					A (H1)pdm09	A (H3)	A (not subtyped)	Total influenza A	
2 2015	Sentinel	31	12	38.7	0	12	0	12	0
	Non-sentinel	284	36	12.7	1	33	2	36	0
	Total	315	48	15.2	1	45	2	48	0
2014/2015	Sentinel	197	30	15.2	0	29	0	29	1
	Non-sentinel	2991	83	2.8	2	73	6	81	2
	Total	3188	113	3.5	2	102	6	110	3

Table 2: Number of sentinel and non-sentinel specimens tested by the NVRL for other respiratory viruses and positive results, for week 2 2015 and the 2014/2015 season to date. Source: NVRL

Week	Specimen type	Total tested	RSV	% RSV	Adenovirus	% Adenovirus	PIV-1	% PIV-1	PIV-2	% PIV-2	PIV-3	% PIV-3	PIV-4	% PIV-4	hMPV	% hMPV
2 2015	Sentinel	31	2	6.5	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	1	3.2
	Non-sentinel	284	50	17.6	1	0.4	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	4	1.4
	Total	315	52	16.5	1	0.3	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	5	1.6
2014/2015	Sentinel	197	13	6.6	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	13	6.6
	Non-sentinel	2991	680	22.7	10	0.3	1	0.0	0	0.0	49	1.6	3	0.1	61	2.0
	Total	3188	693	21.7	10	0.3	1	0.0	0	0.0	49	1.5	3	0.1	74	2.3

* Please note that non-sentinel specimens relate to specimens referred to the NVRL (other than sentinel specimens) and may include more than one specimen from each case.

3. Regional Influenza Activity by HSE-Area

Influenza activity is based on sentinel GP ILI consultation rates, laboratory data and outbreaks.

Localised influenza activity was reported in HSE-E, -MW and -NW during week 2 2015. Sporadic influenza activity (based on ILI cases and/or confirmed influenza cases) was reported from all other areas during week 2 2015 (figure 6).

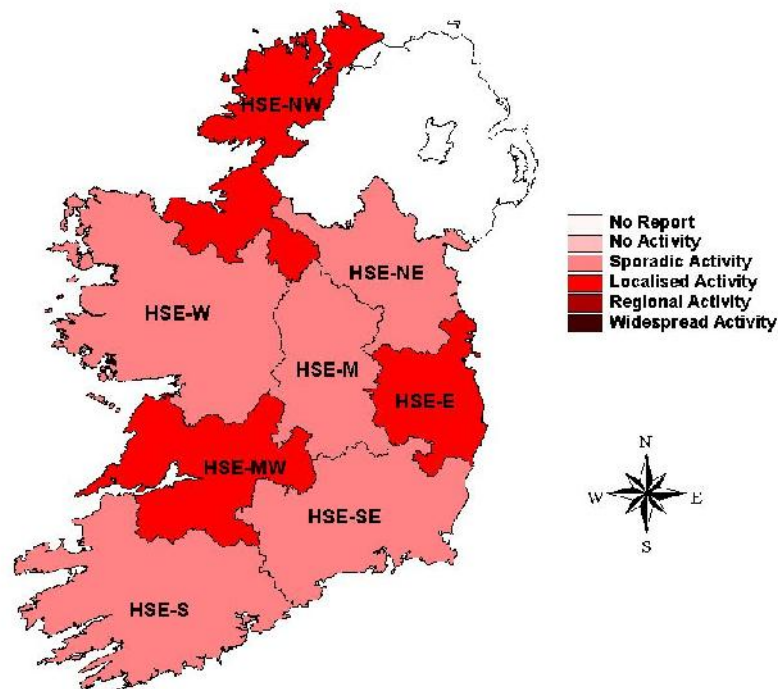


Figure 6: Map of provisional influenza activity by HSE-Area during influenza week 2 2015.

Sentinel hospitals

The Departments of Public Health have established at least one sentinel hospital in each HSE-Area, to report data on total, emergency and respiratory admissions on a weekly basis.

Respiratory admissions reported from sentinel hospitals were high during week 1 2015, with 416 respiratory admissions reported, compared to 386 in week 52 2014 (figure 7). Data reported for week 2 2015 (shown in figure 7) should be interpreted with caution as data were incomplete; with reports from 7/8 sentinel hospitals.

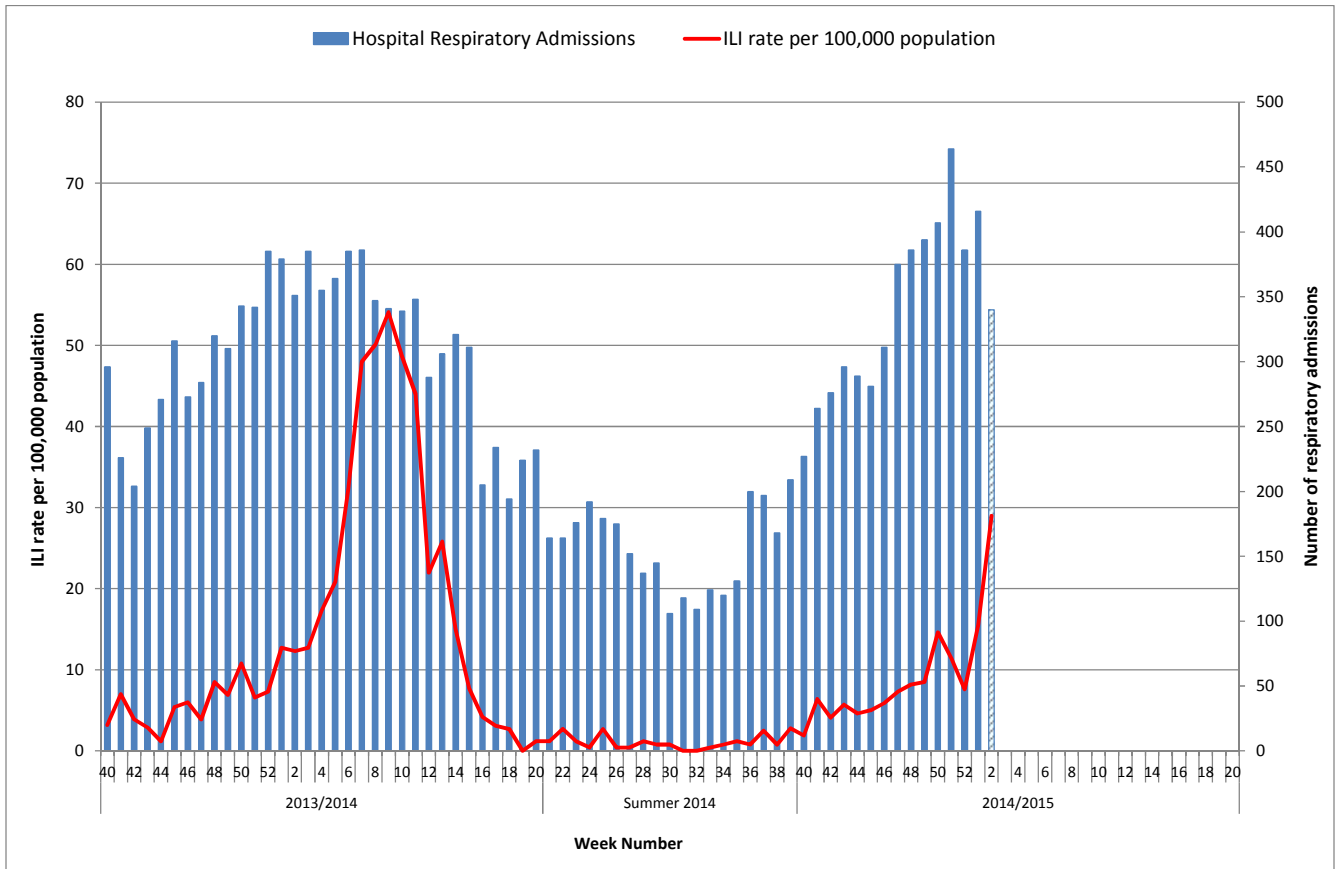


Figure 7: Number of respiratory admissions reported from sentinel hospitals and ILI sentinel GP consultation rate per 100,000 population by week and season. *Source: Departments of Public Health - Sentinel Hospitals & ICGP. It should be noted that data for week 2 2015 were incomplete.*

4. GP Out-Of-Hours services surveillance

The Department of Public Health in HSE-NE is collating national data on calls to nine of thirteen GP Out-of-Hours services in Ireland. Records with clinical symptoms reported as flu or influenza are extracted for analysis. This information may act as an early indicator of increased ILI activity. However, data are self-reported by callers and are not based on coded influenza diagnoses.

The proportion of influenza-related calls to GP Out-of-Hours services stabilised during week 2 2015, at 3.5% (figure 8).

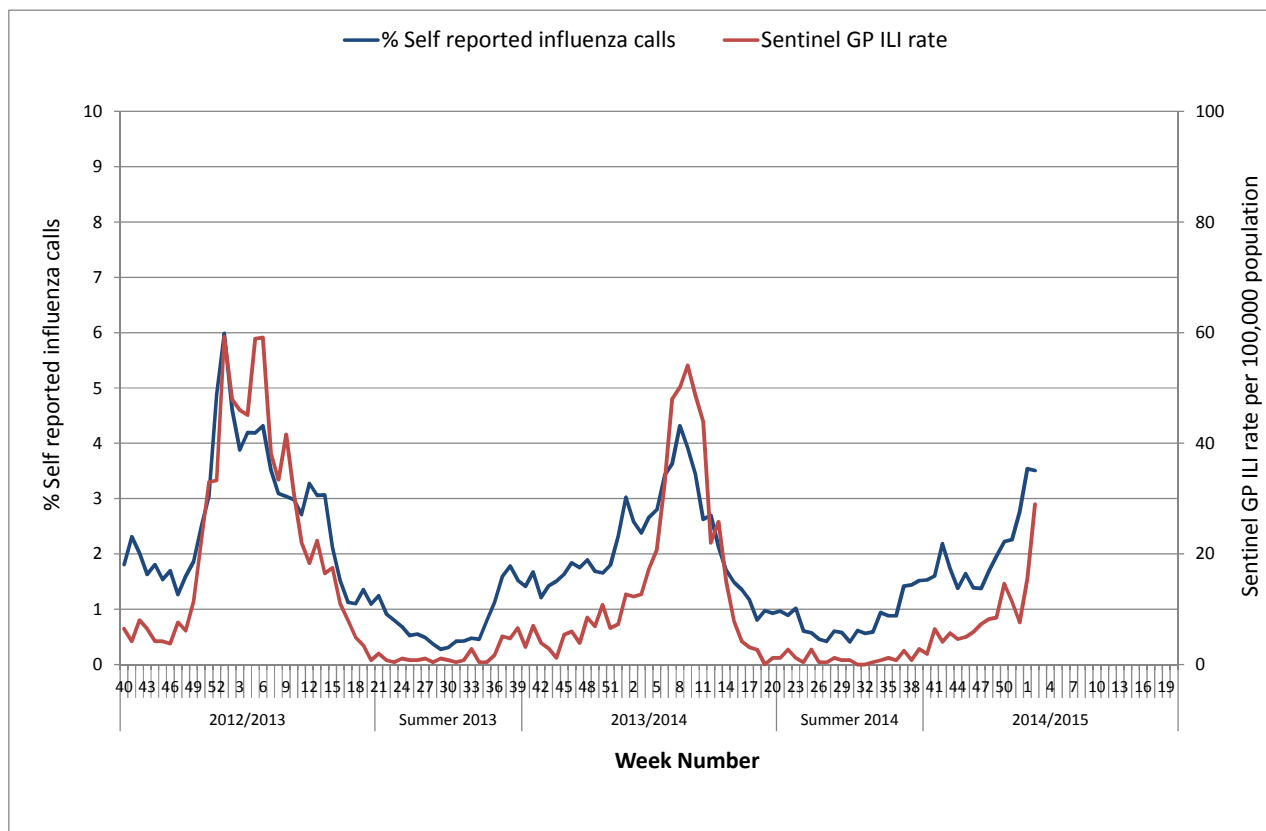


Figure 8: Self-reported influenza-related calls as a proportion of total calls to Out-of-Hours GP Co-ops and sentinel GP ILI consultation rate per 100,000 population by week and season. *Source: GP Out-Of-Hours services in Ireland (collated by HSE-NE) & ICGP.*

5. Influenza & RSV notifications

Influenza and RSV cases notifications are reported on Ireland's Computerised Infectious Disease Reporting System (CIDR), including all positive influenza/RSV specimens reported from all laboratories testing for influenza/RSV and reporting to CIDR.

Influenza and RSV notifications are reported in the [Weekly Infectious Disease Report for Ireland](#).

6. Influenza Hospitalisations

Fifteen confirmed influenza hospitalised cases were notified to HPSC during the week ending January 10th 2015: 12 associated with influenza A(H3) and three associated with influenza A (not subtyped). For the 2015/2015 season to date (up to week ending 10th January 2015), 22 confirmed influenza cases were reported as hospitalised to HPSC, 15 associated with influenza A(H3), five influenza A (not subtyped) and two associated with influenza B.

7. Critical Care Surveillance

The Intensive Care Society of Ireland (ICSI) are continuing with the enhanced surveillance system set up during the 2009 pandemic, on all critical care patients with confirmed influenza. HPSC process and report on this information on behalf of the regional Directors of Public Health/Medical Officers of Health.

To date this season, two confirmed influenza cases were admitted to critical care and reported to HPSC, one associated with influenza A(H3) and one associated with influenza A(H1)pdm09.

8. Mortality Surveillance

Influenza-associated deaths include all deaths where influenza is reported as the primary/main cause of death by the physician or if influenza is listed anywhere on the death certificate as the cause of death. HPSC receives daily mortality data from the General Register Office (GRO) on all deaths from all causes registered in Ireland. These data have been used to monitor excess all-cause and influenza and pneumonia deaths as part of the influenza surveillance system and the European Mortality Monitoring Project. These data are provisional due to the time delay in deaths' registration in Ireland. <http://www.euromomo.eu/>

- Three influenza A(H3)-associated deaths were reported to HPSC this season to date, all three cases were in those aged 65 years or older.
- During week 2 2015, no excess all-cause mortality was reported in Ireland after correcting GRO data for reporting delays with the standardised EuroMOMO algorithm.
- All-cause mortality is within the normal range for this time of the season in most reporting European countries, however in Portugal, an all-cause excess of deaths have been observed among the elderly (65+) during recent weeks. This excess number of deaths observed in Portugal may be associated with the current extreme cold, increase in acute respiratory illness and start of the influenza season. Complications from underlying chronic conditions could also play a role. <http://www.euromomo.eu/>

9. Outbreak Surveillance

- Eight acute respiratory outbreaks were reported to HPSC during the week ending January 10th 2015. Four of these outbreaks were associated with influenza A: three associated with influenza A(H3) and one associated with both influenza A(H3) and influenza A(H1)pdm09, two outbreaks were associated with RSV. No pathogens were identified for two acute respiratory outbreaks reported during the week ending 10th January 2015.
- For the 2014/2015 influenza season to date (up to the week ending January 10th 2015), 12 acute respiratory outbreaks were reported to HPSC. Five of these outbreaks were associated with influenza A: four associated with A(H3) and one associated with both A(H3) and A(H1)pdm09. Two outbreaks were associated with RSV and five acute respiratory outbreaks had no pathogens identified. The majority of these outbreaks occurred in residential care facilities/community hospital settings, mainly affecting the elderly. One outbreak occurred in an acute hospital.

10. International Summary

Globally, influenza activity continued to increase in the northern hemisphere with influenza A(H3N2) viruses predominating so far this season. In Europe overall influenza activity, mainly associated with A(H3N2) viruses, continued to increase, but remained at low levels. The proportion of influenza positive sentinel specimens in Europe was above 10% for the third consecutive week. In North America, influenza A(H3N2) viruses were predominating, with levels of influenza activity continuing to increase and have passed the seasonal thresholds. Antigenic characterisation of most recent A(H3N2) viruses to date this season has indicated differences from the A(H3N2) virus used in the influenza vaccines for the northern hemisphere 2014/2015 season. Although this may compromise the effectiveness of the A(H3N2) component of the vaccine, it is still important that people are vaccinated, particularly those at risk of developing severe influenza symptoms. Vaccination remains the most effective means of preventing infection by seasonal influenza viruses. The latest ECDC rapid risk assessment on the circulation of drifted influenza A(H3N2) viruses in Europe is available [here](#). See [ECDC](#) and [WHO](#) influenza surveillance reports for further information.

- Further information is available on the following websites:
 - Northern Ireland <http://www.fluawareni.info/>
 - Europe – ECDC <http://ecdc.europa.eu/>
 - Public Health England <http://www.hpa.org.uk/Topics/InfectiousDiseases/InfectionsAZ/SeasonalInfluenza/>
 - United States CDC <http://www.cdc.gov/flu/weekly/fluactivitysurv.htm>
 - Public Health Agency of Canada <http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/fluwatch/index-eng.php>
- For up to date information on human infection with avian influenza A(H7N9) virus in China including the current case numbers and the WHO assessment of the situation please see [here](#).
- For information on highly pathogenic avian influenza A(H5N8) in Germany, please see [here](#).
- For information on human infection with avian influenza A(H5N1) in Egypt, please see [here](#).
- Information on Middle Eastern Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus (MERS-CoV), including the latest ECDC rapid risk assessment is available on the [ECDC website](#). Further information and guidance documents are also available on the [HPSC website](#).
- Information on Enterovirus 68 (EV-D68), including the ECDC rapid risk assessment is available on the [ECDC website](#).

11. WHO recommendations on the composition of influenza virus vaccines

The WHO vaccine strain selection committee recommended that vaccines for use in the 2014/2015 influenza season (northern hemisphere winter) contain the following: an A/California/7/2009 (H1N1)pdm09-like virus; an A/Texas/50/2012 (H3N2)-like virus; a B/Massachusetts/2/2012-like virus.

Further information on influenza in Ireland is available at www.hpsc.ie

Acknowledgements

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