Influenza Update N° 374

17 August 2020, based on data up to 02 August 2020

Information in this report is categorized by influenza transmission zones, which are geographical groups of countries, areas or territories with similar influenza transmission patterns. For more information on influenza transmission zones, see: https://www.who.int/influenza/surveillance_monitoring/updates/Influenza_Transmission_Zones20180914.pdf

Summary

- The current influenza surveillance data should be interpreted with caution as the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic might have influenced to varying extents health seeking behaviours, staffing/routines in sentinel sites, as well as testing priorities and capacities in Member States. The various hygiene and physical distancing measures implemented by Member States to reduce SARS-CoV-2 virus transmission might also have played a role in mitigating influenza virus transmission.

- Globally, influenza activity was reported at lower levels than expected for this time of the year. In the temperate zones of the southern hemisphere, the influenza season has not commenced. Despite continued or even increased testing for influenza in some countries in the southern hemisphere, very few influenza detections were reported.

- In the temperate zone of the northern hemisphere, influenza activity remained below inter-seasonal levels.

- In the Caribbean and Central American countries, sporadic influenza detections were reported. Severe acute respiratory infection (SARI) activity remained elevated in some reporting countries.
Influenza update | 17 August 2020

- In tropical South America and tropical Africa, there were sporadic influenza virus or no detections across reporting countries.
- In Southern Asia and South East Asia, no influenza detections were reported.
- Worldwide, of the very low numbers of detections reported, seasonal influenza A viruses accounted for the majority of detections.
- National Influenza Centres (NICs) and other national influenza laboratories from 65 countries, areas or territories reported data to FluNet for the time period from 20 July 2020 to 02 August 2020 (data as of 2020-08-19 09:14:02 UTC). The WHO GISRS laboratories tested more than 205049 specimens during that time period. A total of 40 specimens were positive for influenza viruses, of which 20 (50%) were typed as influenza A and 20 (50%) as influenza B. Of the sub-typed influenza A viruses, 3 (25%) were influenza A(H1N1)pdm09 and 9 (75%) were influenza A(H3N2). Of the characterized B viruses, 0 (0%) belonged to the B-Yamagata lineage and 8 (100%) to the B-Victoria lineage.
- WHO encourages the testing of routine influenza surveillance samples from sentinel and non-sentinel sources for influenza and SARS-CoV-2 virus where resources are available and report this information, separate data from sentinel and non-sentinel sites if possible, to established regional and global platforms (See the Operational considerations for COVID-19 surveillance using GISRS guidance).

For more detailed information, see the Influenza reports from WHO Regional Offices:
- WHO Region of the Americas (AMRO): [www.paho.org/influenzareports](http://www.paho.org/influenzareports)
- WHO European Region (EURO): [www.flunewseurope.org/](http://www.flunewseurope.org/)
- WHO Western Pacific Region (WPRO): [www.wpro.who.int/emerging_diseases/Influenza/en/](http://www.wpro.who.int/emerging_diseases/Influenza/en/)
- EuroMOMO Bulletin: [https://www.euromomo.eu](https://www.euromomo.eu)

Countries in the temperate zone of the southern hemisphere

- In the temperate zones of the southern hemisphere, influenza activity remained record low in comparison with previous seasons.
- In Oceania, influenza like illness (ILI) and other influenza activity indicators remained below usual levels for this time of year in general. While influenza testing in Australia and New Zealand is maintained or even increased, very few influenza viruses were detected. Among other respiratory viruses, rhinovirus was most frequently detected.
- In South Africa, no influenza viruses were detected in ILI and pneumonia samples from sentinel sites but up to 15% of pneumonia samples were positive for respiratory syncytial virus and up to 45% for SARS-CoV-2 during this reporting period.
- In temperate South America, few influenza virus detections were reported in Argentina despite the reportedly large number of specimens processed. SARI cases continued to

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1 Some countries reported large number of specimens processed for influenza. Such numbers may be mixed with those solely tested for SARS-CoV-2 and caution is advised if percent positivity is calculated.
decrease in Chile while increased and reached moderate level in Paraguay, correlating in time with elevated SARS-CoV-2 circulation.

Number of specimens positive for influenza by subtype in the southern hemisphere

Data source: FluNet (www.who.int/flunet). Global Influenza Surveillance and Response System (GISRS)
Data generated on 14/08/2020

Countries in the tropical zone

Tropical countries of Central America, the Caribbean and South America
- In the Caribbean and Central American countries, sporadic influenza detections were reported in Belize. In Costa Rica, SARI and ILL cases continued to decrease. In Honduras, SARI activity continued to decrease but remaining at extraordinary level. Detections of SARS-CoV-2 remained elevated across most countries in the sub-region.
- In the tropical countries of South America, no influenza detections were reported. SARI activity decreased in Brazil while increased above seasonal threshold in Colombia, correlated in time with high circulation of SARS-CoV-2 virus.

Tropical Africa
- In tropical Africa, there were sporadic influenza or no virus detections across reporting countries. In Western Africa, sporadic influenza B detections were reported from Cote d’Ivoire. Of samples tested for influenza in Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger, and Togo none tested positive for influenza. In Middle Africa, Central African Republic reported an increase in SARI cases, though there was no report on virological surveillance. In Eastern Africa, Mauritius reported testing for influenza though no detections were reported.
**Tropical Asia**

- In Southern Asia, ILI and SARI activity was reported low and no influenza detections were reported across reporting countries.
- In South East Asia, no influenza detections were reported across reporting countries.

**Countries in the temperate zone of the northern hemisphere**

- In the temperate zone of the northern hemisphere, influenza remained at inter-seasonal level overall.
- In the countries of North America, influenza activity indicators, including the percent of tests positive for influenza, were at very low levels. In the United States of America, at the national level, ILI activity increased slightly in recent weeks and was above usual levels for this time of the year but remained below the national baseline except for the activity in the 0-4 years old reported just above baseline. The percentage of deaths attributed to pneumonia, influenza or COVID-19 was above the epidemic threshold for pneumonia and influenza mortality established from historical data. COVID-19-related mortality may be affected by delayed or incomplete reporting.
- In Europe, influenza activity remained at inter-seasonal levels. Pooled mortality estimates from the EuroMOMO network returned to normal expected levels following a period of substantial excess mortality in some of the European participating countries and coinciding with the current SARS-CoV-2 reported infections.
- In Central Asia, there were no influenza updates for this reporting period.
- In Northern Africa, there were no influenza updates for this reporting period.
- In Western Asia, there were no influenza detections and ILI levels were low across reporting countries.
- In East Asia, influenza illness indicators and influenza activity remained at inter-seasonal levels across all countries.
Number of specimens positive for influenza by subtype in northern hemisphere

![Graph showing number of specimens positive for influenza by subtype from 2019 to 2020.](image)

Data source: FluNet (www.who.int/flunet). Global Influenza Surveillance and Response System (GISRS) Data generated on 14/08/2020

Sources of data
The Global Influenza Programme monitors influenza activity worldwide and publishes an update every two weeks. The updates are based on available epidemiological and virological data sources, including FluNet (reported by the WHO Global Influenza Surveillance and Response System), FluID (epidemiological data reported by national focal points) and influenza reports from WHO Regional Offices and Member States. Completeness can vary among updates due to availability and quality of data available at the time when the update is developed.

Seasonal influenza reviews: A review of the 2019 influenza season in the southern hemisphere, was published in January 2020 and can be found here: https://extranet.who.int/iris/restricted/bitstream/handle/10665/330368/WER9501-02-eng-fre.pdf

Epidemiological Influenza updates:
http://www.who.int/influenza/surveillance_monitoring/updates/latest_update_GIP_surveillance
Epidemiological Influenza updates archives 2015:
http://www.who.int/influenza/surveillance_monitoring/updates/GIP_surveillance_2015_archives
Virological surveillance updates: http://www.who.int/influenza/gisrs_laboratory/updates/summaryreport
Virological surveillance updates archives: http://www.who.int/influenza/gisrs_laboratory/updates/

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