Influenza Update N° 376

14 September 2020, based on data up to 01 September 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 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 have likely played a role in reducing 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 started. 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, no influenza detections were reported. Severe acute respiratory infection (SARI) activity, likely due to COVID-19, appeared to decrease in some reporting countries.
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- In tropical South America, tropical Africa and Southern Asia there were sporadic or no influenza detections across reporting countries.
- In South East Asia, influenza A(H3N2) virus detections were reported in Cambodia.
- 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 52 countries, areas or territories reported data to FluNet for the time period from 17 August 2020 to 30 August 2020 (data as of 2020-09-11 02:38:29 UTC). The WHO GISRS laboratories tested more than 145068 specimens during that time period: 34 were positive for influenza viruses, of which 19 (55.9%) were typed as influenza A and 15 (44.1%) as influenza B. Of the sub-typed influenza A viruses, 0 (0%) were influenza A(H1N1)pdm09 and 11 (100%) were influenza A(H3N2). Of the characterized B viruses, 3 (37.5%) belonged to the B-Yamagata lineage and 5 (62.5%) 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
- WHO Eastern Mediterranean Region (EMRO): http://www.emro.who.int/health-topics/influenza/situation-update.html
- WHO European Region (EURO): www.flunews europe.org/
- WHO Western Pacific Region (WPRO): www.wpro.who.int/emerging_diseases/Influenza/en/
- EuroMOMO Bulletin: 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.
- In South Africa, no influenza viruses were detected in ILI and pneumonia samples from sentinel sites but respiratory syncytial virus and SARS-CoV-2 were detected among pneumonia samples during this reporting period.
- In temperate South America, few influenza B virus detections were reported in Argentina. SARI cases continued to decrease in Chile and returned below epidemic threshold, correlating in time with decreased SARS-CoV-2 detections.

It includes data from countries reporting both positive and negative influenza detections.
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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 11/09/2020

Countries in the tropical zone

Tropical countries of Central America, the Caribbean and South America

- In the Caribbean and Central American countries, no influenza detections were reported across reporting countries. In Haiti, SARI cases increased above epidemic threshold in recent weeks. In Jamaica, SARI hospitalization rate remained above the epidemic threshold. In Costa Rica, the number of SARI cases decrease and reached moderate levels; ILI cases continued to decrease. In Honduras, SARI activity decreased to high level. Detections of SARS-CoV-2 continued to be reported though decreased in recent weeks across most countries in the sub-region.

- In the tropical countries of South America, no influenza detections were reported. SARI activity remained above seasonal threshold in Colombia, correlated in time with SARS-CoV-2 virus circulation.

Tropical Africa

- In tropical Africa, influenza B detections were reported in Cote d’Ivoire; of samples tested for influenza in Kenya, Niger and Zambia none tested positive for influenza. In Middle Africa, SARI cases decreased in Central African Republic.

Tropical Asia

- In Southern Asia, ILI and SARI activity was reported to be low and no influenza detections were reported across reporting countries.
In South East Asia, there were no influenza detection across reporting countries except for Cambodia that reported increased influenza A(H3N2) virus activity in recent weeks. ILI and SARI levels remained low or stable 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 remained below the national baseline except in the 0-4 years old where activity was reported at the baseline level. 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, likely related to the COVID-19.
- In Europe, influenza activity remained at inter-seasonal levels. Pooled mortality estimates from the EuroMOMO network returned to normal expected levels.
- 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

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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