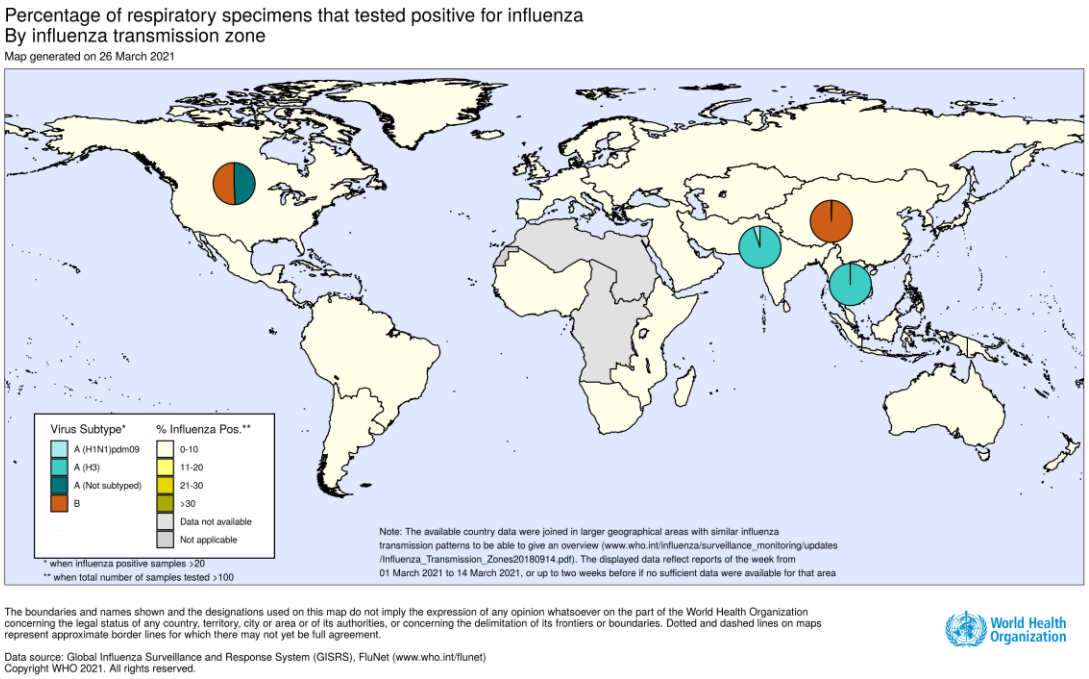
Influenza Update N° 390

29 March 2021, based on data up to 14 March 2021

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 has 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, despite continued or even increased testing for influenza in some countries, influenza activity remained at lower levels than expected for this time of the year.
- In the temperate zone of the northern hemisphere, influenza activity remained below baseline, though sporadic detections of influenza A and B viruses continued to be reported in some countries.
- In the temperate zone of the southern hemisphere, influenza activity was reported at inter-seasonal level.
- In the Caribbean and Central American countries, no influenza detections were reported.

- In tropical South America, no influenza but low levels of detection of other respiratory viruses (ORVs) were reported in some countries.
- In tropical Africa, influenza activity was reported in some reporting countries in Western and Eastern Africa in recent weeks.
- In Southern Asia, sporadic influenza detections were reported in India and Nepal.
- In South East Asia, influenza A(H3N2) detections continued to be reported in Lao People's Democratic Republic (PDR).
- Worldwide, influenza B detections accounted for the majority of the very low numbers of detections reported.
- National Influenza Centres (NICs) and other national influenza laboratories from 85 countries, areas or territories reported data to FluNet for the time period from 01 March 2021 to 14 March 2021 (data as of 2021-03-26 08:06:28 UTC).The WHO GISRS laboratories tested more than 291427 specimens during that time period. A total of 375 specimens were positive for influenza viruses, of which 132 (35.2%) were typed as influenza A and 243 (64.8%) as influenza B. Of the sub-typed influenza A viruses, 5 (6.1%) were influenza A(H1N1)pdm09 and 77 (93.9%) were influenza A(H3N2). Of the characterized B viruses, 0 (0%) belonged to the B-Yamagata lineage and 188 (100%) to the B-Victoria lineage.
- During the COVID-19 pandemic, WHO encourages countries, especially those that have received the multiplex influenza and SARS-CoV-2 reagent kits from GISRS, to continue routine influenza surveillance, test samples from influenza surveillance sites for influenza and SARS-CoV-2 viruses where resources are available and report epidemiological and laboratory information in a timely manner to established regional and global platforms. Updated considerations for addressing disruptions in the influenza sentinel surveillance and extending to include COVID-19 wherever possible are available in the interim guidance, Maintaining surveillance of influenza and monitoring SARS-CoV-2 – adapting Global Influenza surveillance and Response System (GISRS) and sentinel systems during the COVID-19 pandemic. Updated algorithms for testing of both influenza and SARS-CoV-2 for surveillance are also included.

For more detailed information, see the Influenza reports from WHO Regional Offices:

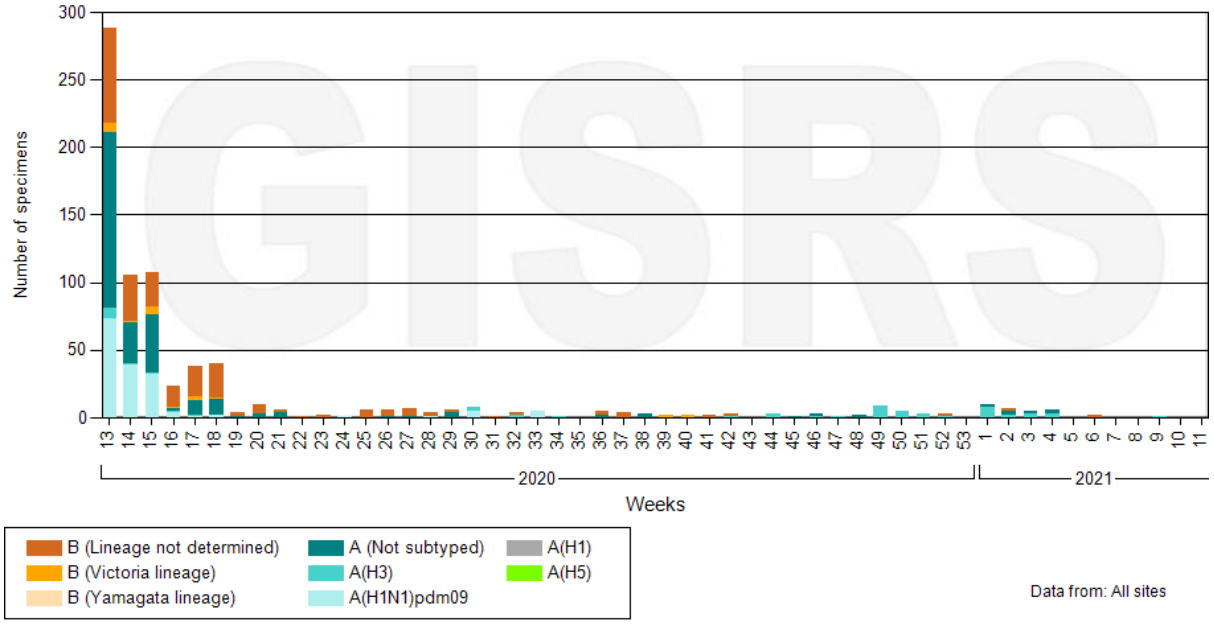
- WHO Region of the Americas (AMRO): www.paho.org/influenzareports
- WHO Eastern Mediterranean Region (EMRO): http://www.emro.who.int/health-topics/influenza/situation-update.html
- WHO European Region (EURO):www.flunewseurope.org/
- WHO Western Pacific Region (WPRO): https://www.who.int/westernpacific/emergencies/surveillance/seasonal-influenza
- EuroMOMO Bulletin: https://www.euromomo.eu

Countries in the temperate zone of the northern hemisphere

- In the temperate zones of the northern hemisphere, influenza activity remained below baseline overall.

- In the countries of North America, influenza activity indicators, including the percent of tests positive for influenza and influenza like illness (ILI) activity, were at very low levels, despite testing at usual or increased levels. In the United States of America, the percentage of deaths attributed to pneumonia, influenza or COVID-19 remained above the epidemic threshold for pneumonia and influenza mortality established from historical data.
- In Europe, influenza activity was at very low level with sporadic detections of influenza A and B viruses reported in some countries. Respiratory illness indicators slightly increased in some reporting countries, though no influenza detections were reported. Increased detections of other respiratory viruses were reported in some countries performing surveillance for ORVs. Pooled mortality estimates from the EuroMOMO network appeared to show a decrease in excess mortality in most participating European countries after a period with high levels, likely related to SARS-CoV-2 circulation.
- In Central Asia, no influenza detections were reported across reporting countries.
- In Northern Africa, there were no influenza detections reported for this period.
- In Western Asia, influenza and ILI activity remained low overall. Sporadic detections of influenza B viruses in Iraq, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE). The UAE also reported sporadic detections of influenza A(H3N2) during this period.
- In East Asia, influenza illness indicators and influenza activity remained low or below baseline in reporting countries. ILI activity was below usual levels in China for this time of the year, with continued detections of influenza B-Victoria virus reported from Southern China.

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



Data source: FluNet (www.who.int/toolkits/flunet). Global Influenza Surveillance and Response System (GISRS)
Data generated on 26/03/2021

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 for this period. Pneumonia cases increased to moderate level in Jamaica, likely related with increased SARS-CoV-2 circulation. SARI cases were low in most reporting countries. Few respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) detections were reported in Guatemala and Nicaragua in recent weeks.
- In the tropical countries of South America, no influenza detections were reported for this period. Few RSV and ORVs detections were reported in Brazil, Colombia and Ecuador. SARI activity was reported at moderate levels in Ecuador.

Tropical Africa

- In Western Africa, continued but decreasing influenza activity was reported with detections of influenza A(H1N1)pdm09 in Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana, and detections of influenza A(H3N2) and B in Mauritania. SARI activity continued to increase in Togo in recent weeks.
- In Middle Africa, there were no influenza updates for this period, but recent activity with detections of influenza A(H1N1)pdm09 and B viruses was reported from Cameroon.
- In Eastern Africa, detections of influenza A(H3N2) were reported in Kenya and Uganda and detection of influenza B in Kenya. SARI activity continued to increase in Kenya.

Tropical Asia

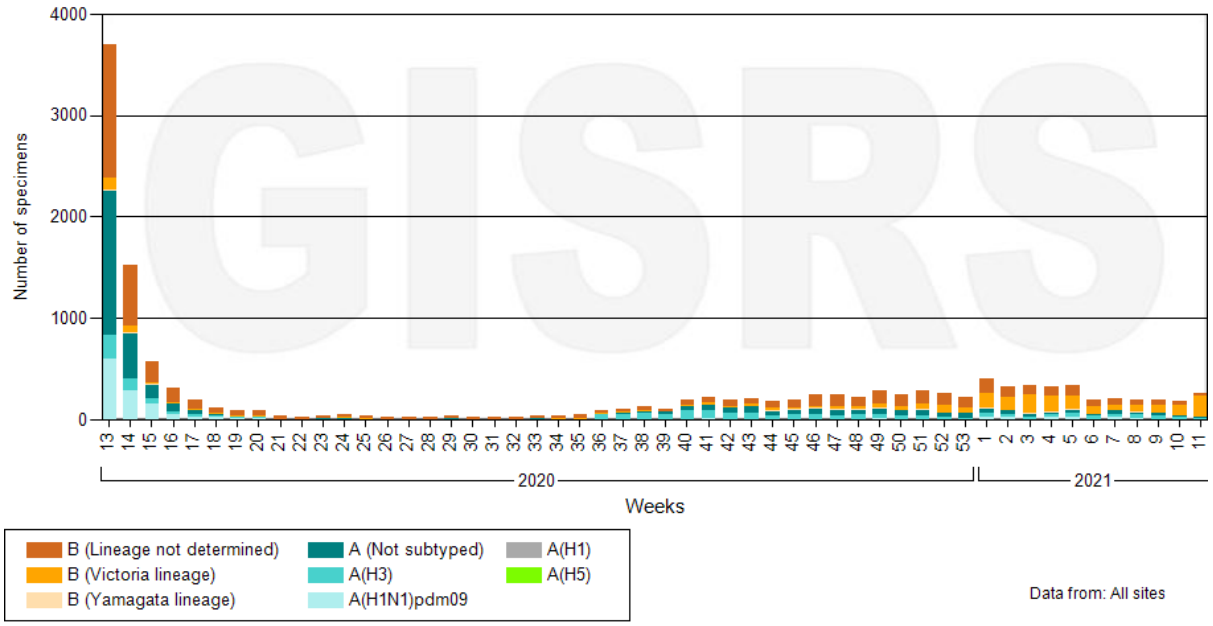
- In Southern Asia, detections of influenza A(H3N2) viruses were reported in India and Nepal. In Bangladesh, ILI and SARI activity remained elevated though no influenza detections reported in this period.
- In South East Asia, influenza activity of predominately influenza A(H3N2) continued to be reported in Lao PDR with ILI and SARI rates remaining stable.

Countries in the temperate zone of the southern hemisphere

- In the temperate zones of the southern hemisphere, influenza activity remained at inter-seasonal level.
- In Oceania, influenza remained at inter-seasonal level. In parts of Australia, RSV continued to be reported at higher levels than the average of previous years and rhinovirus and enterovirus circulated at levels like 2020.
- In South Africa, one influenza detection was reported from pneumonia surveillance, but RSV detections continued to be reported from all surveillance sites. SARS-CoV-2 detections continued to decline among samples from ILI and pneumonia surveillance in recent weeks.

- In temperate South America, no influenza detections were reported across reporting countries. Sporadic RSV detections were reported in Chile and Paraguay. SARI activity was reported at low levels in Chile and Uruguay, likely related to SARS-CoV-2 circulation.

Number of specimens positive for influenza by subtype in southern hemisphere



Data source: FluNet (www.who.int/toolkits/flunet). Global Influenza Surveillance and Response System (GISRS)
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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: https://www.who.int/influenza/surveillance_monitoring/updates/en/
Virological surveillance updates:
https://www.who.int/influenza/gisrs_laboratory/updates/summaryreport/en/
Virological surveillance updates archives:
https://www.who.int/influenza/gisrs_laboratory/updates/en/

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