

# National Influenza and COVID-19 surveillance report

Week 35 report (up to week 34 data) 31 August 2023

## Correction

19 September 2023: due to a transcription error zero counts were imported for influenza subtypes A(H3N2) and not subtyped samples in figure 4. This has now been amended in figure 4 and in the datafile. This does not alter the numbers written in this report.

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For additional information including regional data on COVID-19 and other respiratory viruses, COVID-19 in educational settings, co- and secondary infections with COVID-19 and other data supplementary to this report, please refer to the <u>accompanying graph pack</u>.

For additional information regarding data source please refer to <u>Sources of surveillance data for</u> influenza, COVID-19 and other respiratory viruses

## **Executive summary**

This report summarises the information from the surveillance systems which are used to monitor coronavirus (COVID-19), influenza, and other seasonal respiratory viruses in England. References to COVID-19 represent the disease name and SARS-CoV-2 represent the virus name. The report is based on data from week 34 (between 21 August and 27 August 2023) and for some indicators daily data up to 30 August 2023.

#### Overall

In week 34, from most indicators, influenza activity remained low and stable. COVID-19 activity showed a mixed picture with stabilisation of pillar 1 positivity rates, hospital admissions and outbreaks but an increase in Datamart testing positivity rates and small increases in ED attendances and GP sentinel swabbing positivity rates.

#### COVID-19

COVID-19 case rates and positivity rates through Pillar 1 stabilised in most age groups, regions and most ethnic groups in week 34.

Through Respiratory Datamart, SARS-CoV-2 positivity increased to 9.7% in week 34 compared to 8.6% in the previous week.

The overall number of reported SARS-CoV-2 confirmed outbreaks decreased compared to the previous week. 24 SARS-CoV-2 confirmed outbreaks were reported in week 34 in England.

Overall, COVID-19 hospitalisations stabilised in week 34 compared to the previous week. Hospitalisations were highest in the 85 years and over age group. COVID-19 ICU admissions remained low and stable in week 34 compared to the previous week.

Through syndromic surveillance indicators, emergency department attendances for covid-like illness increased nationally.

#### Influenza

In week 34, influenza positivity rates remained low and stable at 0.8%.

Through primary care surveillance, the influenza-like-illness consultations indicator remained stable in week 34 compared to the previous week and was within the baseline activity level range.

There was one influenza confirmed outbreak reported in England in week 34.

There were two influenza ICU admissions in week 34.

Emergency department attendances for influenza-like illness remained stable nationally.

#### RSV

The overall positivity for RSV remained low at 0.6%, with the highest positivity in those aged under 5 years old at 3.5%. Emergency department attendances for acute bronchiolitis decreased nationally.

#### **Other viruses**

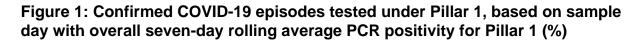
Adenovirus positivity remained low at 2.1%, with the highest positivity in children under 5 years old at 6.0%. Human metapneumovirus (hMPV) positivity remained low at 0.3%, with the highest positivity in children under 5 years old at 1.1%. Parainfluenza positivity remained low at 2.1%, with the highest positivity in children under 5 years old at 3.5%. Rhinovirus positivity decreased slightly to 10.1% overall, with the highest positivity in children under 5 years.

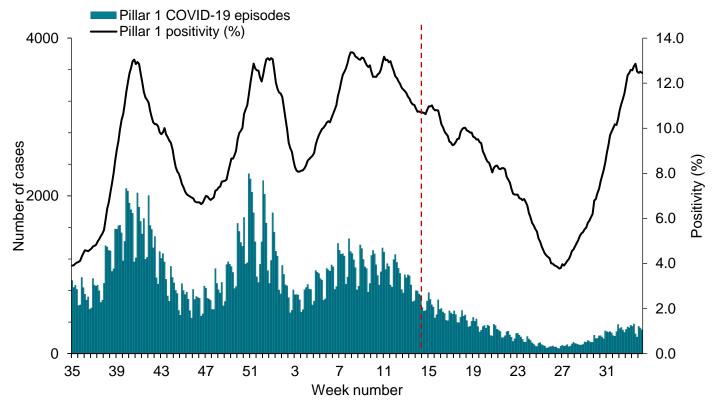
## Laboratory surveillance

### Confirmed COVID-19 cases (England)

As of 9am on 27 August 2023, a total of 2,116,618 episodes have been confirmed for COVID-19 in England under Pillar 1, and 18,771,827 episodes under Pillar 2, since the beginning of the pandemic. COVID-19 case rates through Pillar 1 stabilised in week 34.

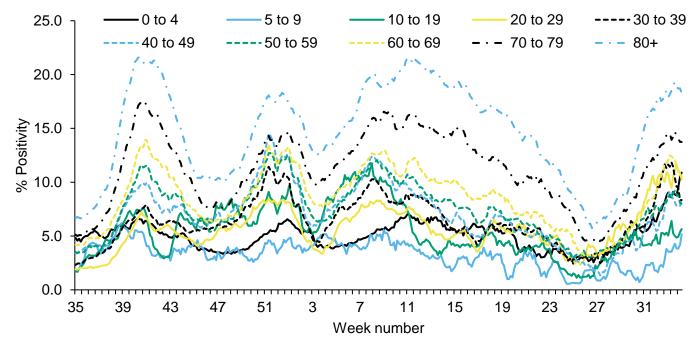
Data notes: Changes to testing policies over time may affect positivity rates and incidence rates and should be interpreted accordingly. COVID-19 case reporting in England uses an episodebased definition which includes possible reinfections, each infection episode is counted separately if there are at least 91 days between positive test results (polymerase chain reaction (PCR) or rapid lateral flow device). Each infection episode begins with the earliest positive specimen date. Additionally, further changes in <u>testing policy</u> are in effect since 1 April 2023, which may affect case rates and positivity rates.





The vertical dashed line (red) denote changes in testing policies.

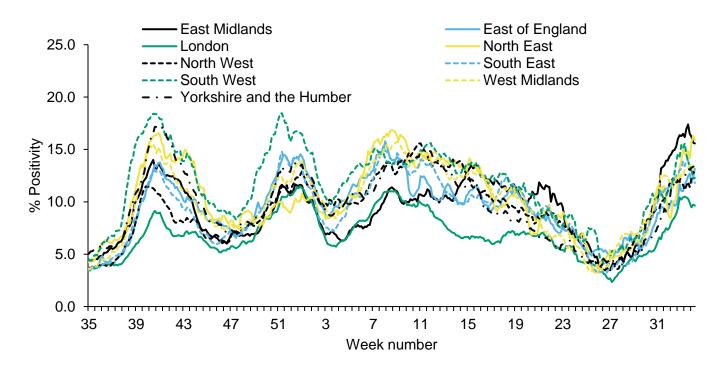
#### Age



## Figure 2: Seven-day rolling average PCR positivity (%) of confirmed COVID-19 cases tested under Pillar 1 by age group

#### Geography

Figure 3: Seven-day rolling average PCR positivity (%) of confirmed COVID-19 cases tested under Pillar 1 by UKHSA centres



## Respiratory DataMart system (England)

In week 34, data is based on reporting from 14 out of the 16 sentinel laboratories.

In week 34, 4,288 respiratory specimens reported through the Respiratory DataMart System were tested for SARS-CoV-2. 417 samples were positive for SARS-CoV-2 with an overall positivity of 9.7%, which increased compared to the previous week. The highest positivity was seen in adults older than 65 years of age at 13.4%.

In week 34, 2,741 respiratory specimens reported through the Respiratory DataMart System were tested for influenza. 23 samples tested positive for influenza; 14 influenza A(not subtyped), three influenza A(H3N2) and six were influenza B (Figure 4). Overall, influenza positivity remained low and stable at 0.8% in week 34 compared to 0.6% in the previous week.

Adenovirus positivity remained low at 2.9%, with the highest positivity in children under 5 years old at 6.0%.

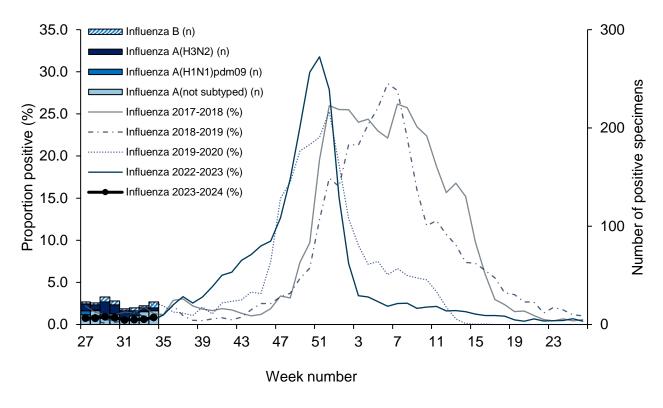
Human metapneumovirus (hMPV) positivity remained low at 0.3%, with the highest positivity in children under 5 years old at 1.1%.

Parainfluenza positivity remained low at 2.1%, with the highest positivity in children under 5 years old at 3.5%.

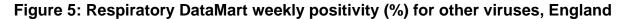
Rhinovirus positivity decreased slightly to 10.1% overall, with the highest positivity in children under 5 years old at 22.7%.

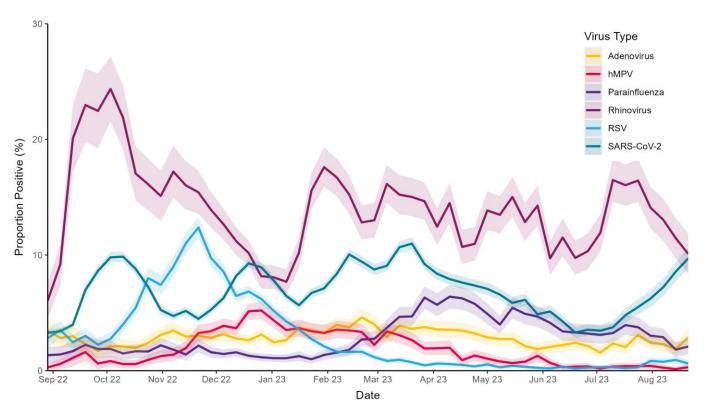
The overall positivity for RSV remained low at 0.6%, with the highest positivity in those aged under 5 years old at 3.5%.

## Figure 4: Respiratory DataMart samples positive for influenza and weekly positivity (%) for influenza, England



Please note data from seasons 2020-21 and 2021-22 has been removed as there was low activity throughout.





## **Community surveillance**

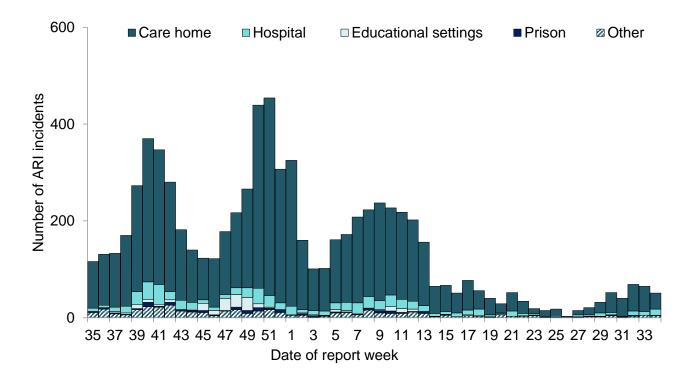
#### Acute respiratory infection incidents

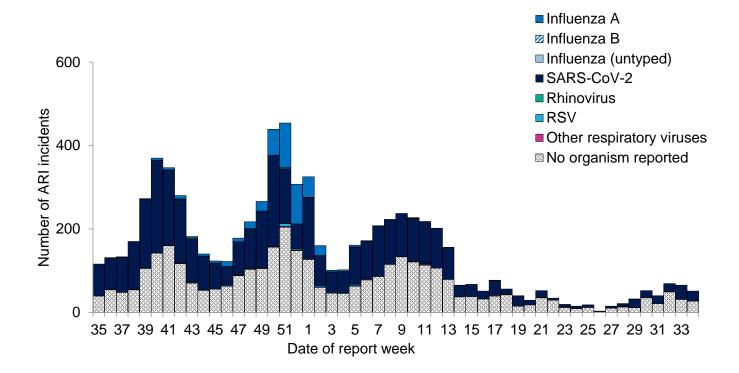
Here we present data on acute respiratory infection (ARI) incidents in different settings that are reported to UKHSA Health Protection Teams (HPTs).

85 new ARI incidents have been reported in week 34 in the UK:

- 52 incidents were from care homes, where 25 had at least one linked case that tested positive for SARS-CoV-2 and one for influenza A(not subtyped)
- 22 incidents were from hospitals, where 15 had at least one linked case that tested positive for SARS-CoV-2
- Two incidents were from prisons, where one had at least one linked case that tested positive for SARS-CoV-2
- Nine incidents were from other settings, where six had at least one linked case that tested positive for SARS-CoV-2

#### Figure 6: Number of acute respiratory infection (ARI) incidents by setting, England





## Figure 7: Number of acute respiratory infection (ARI) incidents in all settings by virus type, England

### Syndromic surveillance

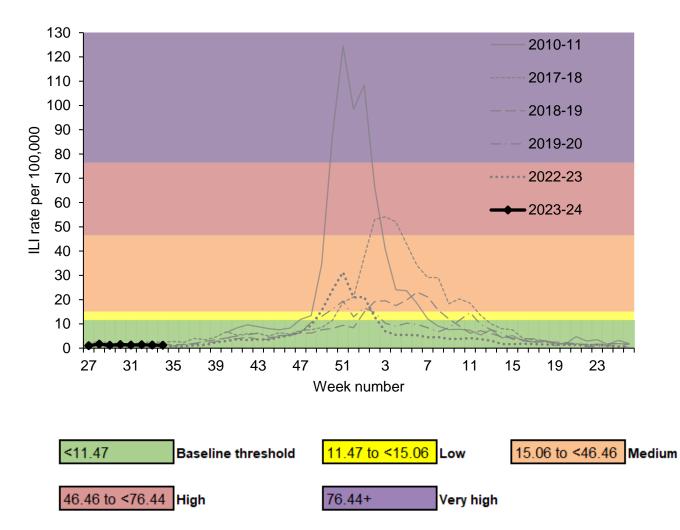
During week 34, NHS 111 calls for cold or flu and cough remained stable nationally. GP in hours consultation rates for influenza-like illness were stable and similar to baseline levels. Emergency department attendances (ED) for influenza-like illness remained stable nationally and similar to baseline levels. ED attendances for acute respiratory and acute bronchiolitis overall decreased in the most recent week. ED for covid-19-like illness increased nationally across all age groups, but most notably in those aged over 65 years.

For further information on syndromic surveillance please see the <u>Syndromic Surveillance</u>: <u>weekly summaries</u>.

## **Primary care surveillance**

### **RCGP Clinical Indicators (England)**

The weekly influenza-like-illness (ILI) consultation rate through the RCGP surveillance remained stable at 1.2 per 100,000 registered population in participating GP practices in week 34 compared to 1.3 per 100,000 in the previous week. This is within baseline activity levels (less than 11.47 per 100,000) (Figure 8).



#### Figure 8: RCGP influenza-like illness (ILI) consultation rates, all ages, England

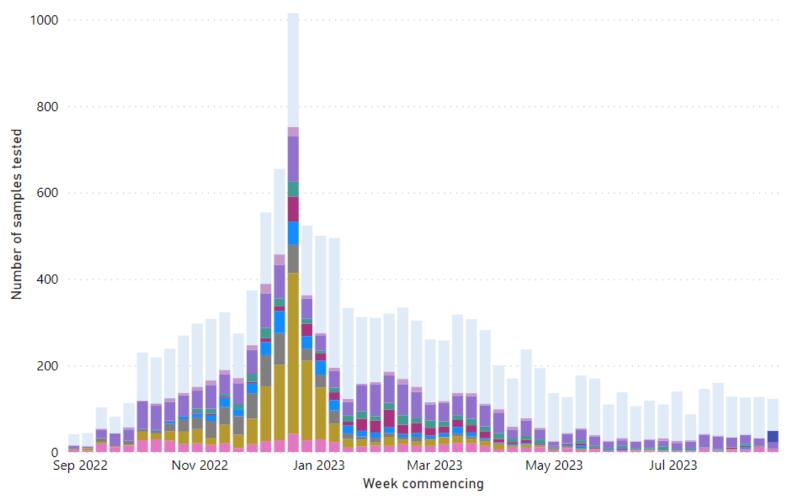
Please note data from seasons 2020-21 and 2021-22 has been removed as there was low activity throughout.

### RCGP sentinel swabbing scheme in England

Based on the date samples were received in the reference laboratory, in week 34 2023 (week commencing 23 August 2023) 123 samples were tested through the GP sentinel swabbing scheme in England, of which 22 samples tested positive (Figure 9). Among all positive samples, 63.6% were positive for rhinovirus, 27.3% for SARS-CoV-2, 4.6% for adenovirus, 4.6% for other coronavirus (Figure 10).

Based on the date samples were taken, positivity for SARS-CoV-2 was 8.1%, positivity for RSV was 0.0% and positivity for influenza was 0.0% in week 34 (Figure 11). Data for the most recent week will be updated retrospectively. Positivity (%) is not calculated when the total number tested based on sample date is less than 20 (Figure 11).

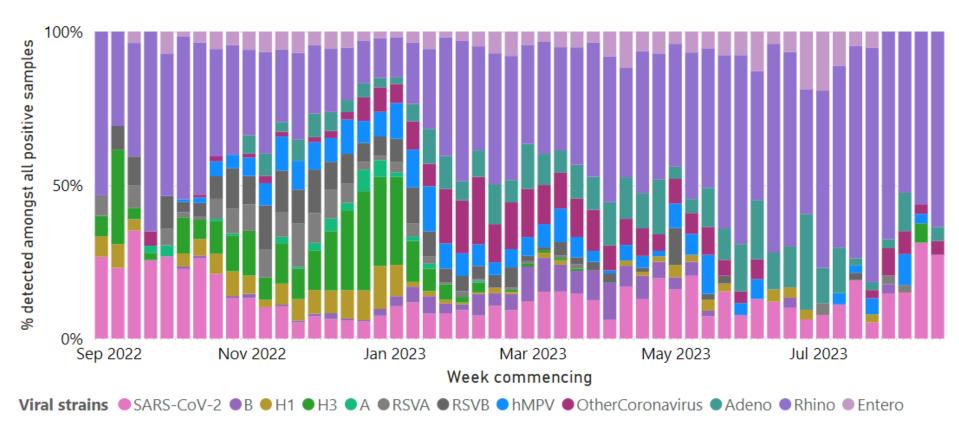




Viruses 
SARS-CoV-2 
Influenza 
RSV 
NONe detected (negatives)

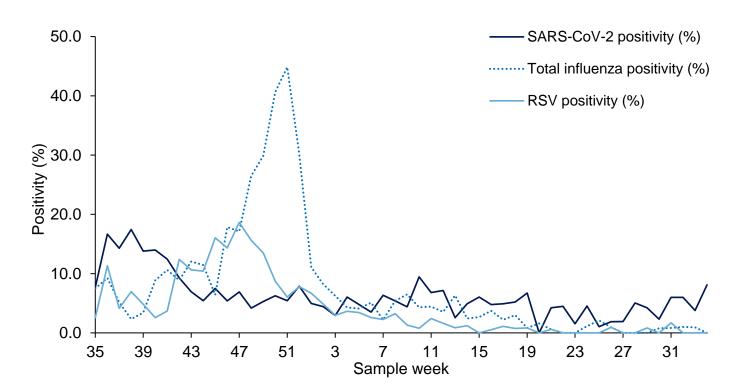
Unknown category corresponds to samples with no result yet.

Source: RCGP Research and Surveillance Centre sentinel primary care practices (RCGP Virology Dashboard)



## Figure 10: Proportion of detections of SARS-CoV-2, influenza, and other respiratory viral strains amongst virologically positive respiratory surveillance samples in England by week, GP sentinel swabbing scheme

Source: RCGP Research and Surveillance Centre sentinel primary care practices (RCGP Virology Dashboard)



## Figure 11: Weekly positivity (%) for COVID-19, influenza and RSV in England by week, GP sentinel swabbing

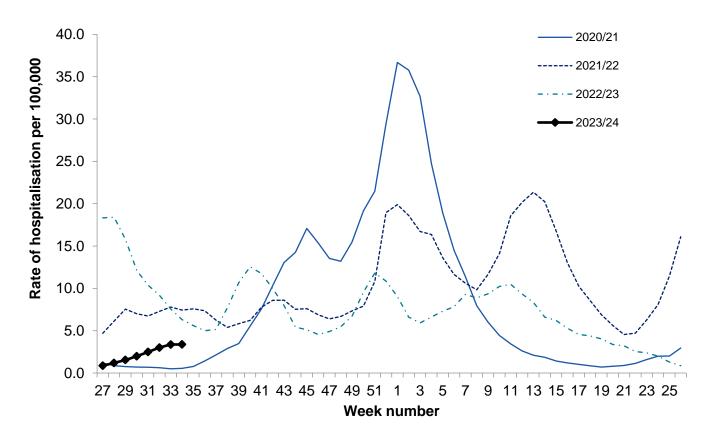
## **Secondary care surveillance**

#### Hospitalisations, SARI Watch

In week 34 (ending 27 August 2023), the overall weekly hospital admission rate for COVID-19 remained stable at 3.37 per 100,000 compared to 3.36 per 100,000 in the previous week. The rate had been increasing since week 28 2023.

By UKHSA centre, the highest hospital admission rate for COVID-19 was observed in the South West. By age group, the highest hospital admission rate for confirmed COVID-19 continues to be in those aged 85 years old and over.

# Figure 12: Weekly overall COVID-19 hospital admission rates per 100,000 trust catchment population, SARI Watch, England



\* COVID-19 hospital admission rate based on 82 NHS trusts for week 34

\* SARI Watch data is provisional and subject to retrospective updates

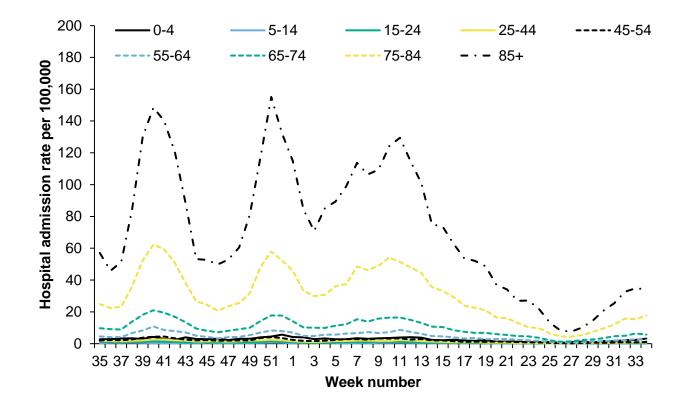


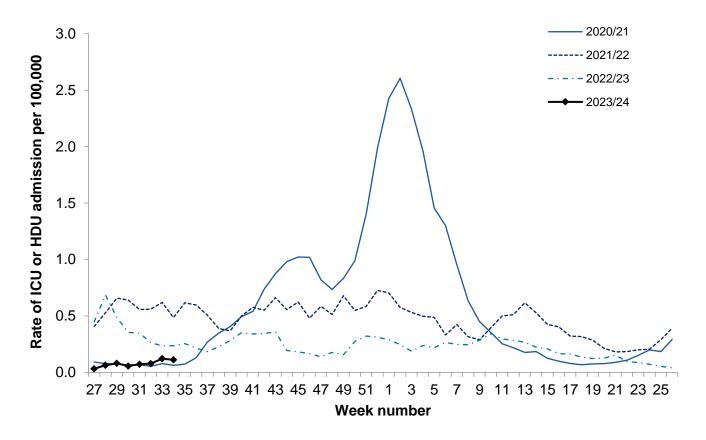
Figure 13: Weekly hospital admission rate by age group for new COVID-19 positive cases

### ICU or HDU admissions, SARI Watch

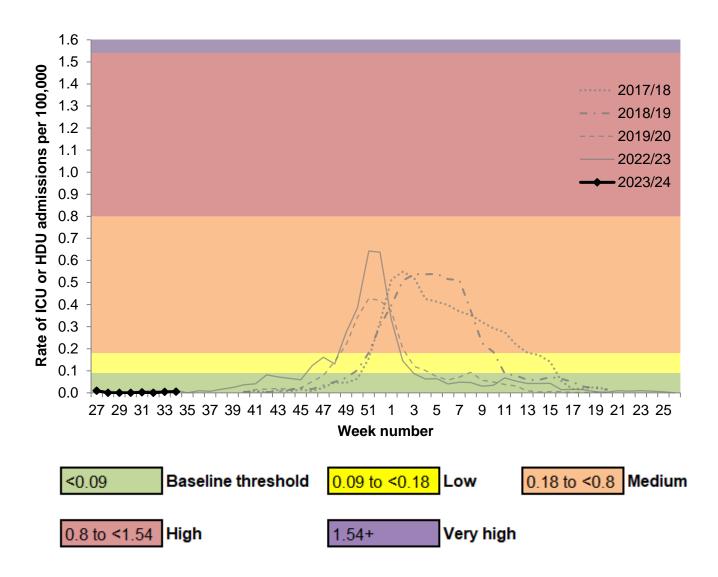
In week 34 (ending 27 August 2023), the overall weekly ICU or HDU admission rate for COVID-19 remained stabled at low levels at 0.11 per 100,000, compared to 0.12 per 100,000 in the previous week. Note that ICU or HDU admission rates may represent a lag from admission to hospital to an ICU or HDU ward.

In weeks 33 and 34 there were four admissions to reported ICU or HDU admissions for influenza, two each week.

## Figure 14: Weekly overall COVID-19 ICU or HDU admission rates per 100,000 trust catchment population, SARI Watch, England

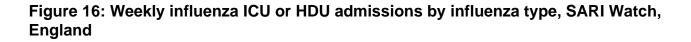


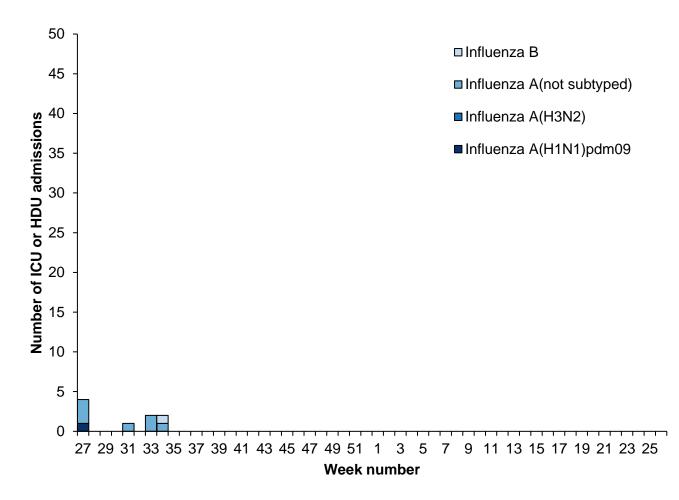
- \* COVID-19 ICU or HDU admission rate based on 71 NHS trusts for week 34
- \* SARI Watch data is provisional and subject to retrospective updates



## Figure 15: Weekly overall influenza ICU or HDU admission rates per 100,000 trust catchment population with MEM thresholds, SARI Watch, England

Please note data from seasons 2020/21 and 2021/22 has been removed as there was low activity throughout.





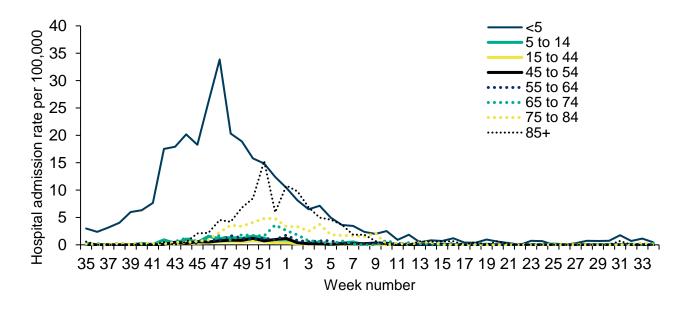
### ECMO, SARI Watch

There were two new ECMO admissions reported in weeks 33 and 34 from the 7 Severe Respiratory Failure (SRF) centres in the UK. One of the admissions was for a suspected acute respiratory infection.

### **RSV** admissions, SARI Watch

Data on hospitalisations, including ICU or HDU admissions, with respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) are shown below. RSV SARI Watch surveillance is sentinel.

## Figure 17: Weekly hospitalisation (including ICU or HDU) admission rates by age group for new RSV cases reported through SARI Watch, England



\* SARI Watch data is provisional

\* Please note that rates are based on the number of hospitalised cases divided by the Trust catchment population, multiplied by 100,000

## **Mortality surveillance**

### COVID-19 deaths

For further information on COVID-19 related deaths in England please see the <u>COVID-19 dashboard for death</u>.

#### Daily excess all-cause mortality (England)

For further information on excess all-cause mortality in England please see the <u>Fingertips excess mortality in England report</u>, which uses ONS death registration data and the <u>all-cause mortality surveillance report</u>, which uses the EuroMOMO model to measure excess deaths.

# Microbiological surveillance

### SARS-CoV-2 variants

UKHSA conducts genomic surveillance of SARS-CoV-2 variants.

This section provides an overview of new and current circulating variants in England.

Detailed surveillance of particular variants of concerns can be found in recent <u>technical</u> <u>briefings</u>.

Information on whole genome sequencing coverage can be found in the accompanying slide set.

Since 29 May 2023, there has been an average 312 confirmed sequenced cases per week. Due to the small absolute numbers of confirmed sequenced cases, changes in variant proportions appear more pronounced in Figure 18.

The prevalence of different UKHSA-designated variants amongst sequenced episodes is presented in Figure 18.

Variants may include many sub-lineages that have not been individually designated e.g. XBB.1.9.2 within XBB (V-22OCT-02). As a result, prevalence of that variant appears to be increasing as a whole, masking the effect of one or more growing sublineages. Once a sublineage meets required thresholds to be declared a variant, it will be designated as a variant and prevalence of this sublineage in positive cases will then be identifiable in the data.

As of 29 August 2023, 2 UK sequences have been classified as V-23AUG-01 (BA.2.86). The variant V-23AUG-01 does not appear in Figure 1 or Table 1 as it does not meet the criteria of at least 10 variant cases in the last 365 days. Additional information on BA.2.86 can be found in the most recent UKHSA <u>SARS-CoV-2 genome sequence prevalence and growth rate update</u>.

To account for sequencing delays, we report the proportion of variants from sequenced episodes between 7 August 2023 and 13 August 2023. Of those sequenced in this period, 23.7% were classified as EG.5.1 (V-23JUL-01), 36.9% as XBB.1.16 (V-23APR-01), 5.1% as XBB.1.5 (V-23JAN-01), 30.9% as XBB (V-22OCT-02), 2.4% as CH.1.1 (V-22DEC-01), 0.2% as BQ.1 (V-22OCT-01), and 0.4% as BA.5 (V-22APR-04).

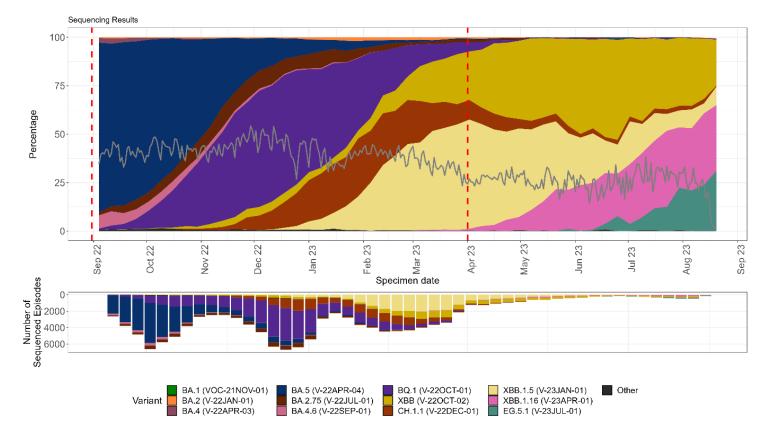


Figure 18: Prevalence of SARS-CoV-2 variants amongst available sequences episodes for England from 29 August 2022 to 20 August 2023

The grey line indicates proportion of cases sequenced.

The vertical dashed lines (red) denote changes in policies:

- Line 1: End of August 2022 denotes the change in asymptomatic testing
- Line 2: April 2023 denotes changes in PCR testing in social care and hospital settings

Note: Recombinants such as XD are not specified but are largely within the 'Other' group currently as numbers are too small.

## **COVID-19 vaccination**

#### COVID-19 vaccine uptake in England

The 2023 spring booster campaign has been completed and there will be no further updates to this section from week 28 until <u>initiation of the 2023 autumn booster campaign</u>.

By the end of week 26 2023 (week ending 2 July 2023), 71.1% (3,856,204 out of 5,423,074) of all people aged over 75 years old who are living and resident in England had been vaccinated with a Spring 2023 booster dose since 3 April 2023.

By the end of week 26 2023 (week ending 2 July 2023), 41.2% (915,421 out of 2,223,120) of all people aged 5 years and over who are immunosuppressed and living and resident in England had been vaccinated with a Spring 2023 booster dose since 3 April 20

# International update

## Global COVID-19 update

For further information on the global COVID-19 situation please see the <u>World Health</u> <u>Organization (WHO) COVID-19 situation reports</u>.

### Global influenza update

Updated 21 August 2023 (based on data up to 6 August 2023) (WHO website).

Globally, influenza detections remained low, with activity in many countries in the southern hemisphere now decreasing after having peaked in recent weeks.

In Oceania, influenza activity decreased, with influenza A viruses predominant.

In South Africa, influenza activity of predominately influenza A(H3N2) viruses remained below the seasonal threshold after peaking in early June.

In temperate South America, influenza detections continued to decrease with A(H1N1)pdm09 viruses most frequently detected followed by B viruses. Severe acute respiratory infections (SARI) activity declined in most countries.

In the Caribbean countries, influenza activity remained low overall.

In the Central American countries, influenza activity decreased overall with A(H1N1)pdm09 most frequently detected followed by B/Victoria lineage viruses.

In the tropical countries of South America, overall influenza activity was low with detections of predominantly A(H1N1)pdm09 and B viruses.

In tropical Africa, influenza detections remained low in reporting countries with influenza A(H1N1)pdm09 viruses predominantly detected.

In Southern Asia, influenza activity remained low overall except in Bangladesh where influenza detections were elevated.

In South-East Asia, influenza activity remained elevated overall, with continued reporting of predominantly A(H1N1)pdm09 and A(H3N2) virus detections.

In the temperate zones of the northern hemisphere, influenza activity was reported at low levels or below seasonal threshold in most reporting countries. Detections were predominantly influenza A(H1N1)pdm09 followed by influenza B and influenza A(H3N2) viruses.

The WHO GISRS laboratories tested more than 208,169 specimens during that time period. 5261 were positive for influenza viruses, of which 3,827 (72.7%) were typed as influenza A and 1,434 (27.3%) as influenza B. Of the sub-typed influenza A viruses, 1,015 (37.6%) were influenza A(H1N1)pdm09 and 1,686 (62.4%) were influenza A(H3N2). Of the type B viruses for which lineage was determined, all (480) belonged to the B/Victoria lineage.

#### Influenza in Australia

Updated 25 August 2023 (based on data up to fortnight ending 20 August 2023) (<u>Australian</u> <u>Government website</u>).

Australia monitors influenza through a number of complementary systems. The Australian government advises caution in the interpretation of data reported from various influenza surveillance systems due to the effects of COVID-19, particularly when making inter-season comparisons. Caution should also be applied in assessing the implications of influenza activity in Australia to the UK. It is not possible to reliably predict the course of the 2023 southern hemisphere influenza season or the implications for the following 2023 to 2024 northern hemisphere season, such as the timing, activity and impact of the 2023 to 2024 influenza season in the UK. Australia is one of many countries from which flu may arrive in the UK, including other countries which are more populous and or have more frequent inbound travel. Australia's influenza activity reflects its specific epidemiological circumstance and has no bearing on the local persistence of influenza in the UK in our inter-seasonal period.

Influenza-like-illness (ILI) activity in the community reported to FluTracking has continued to be stable in the last fortnight, while ILI presentations to ASPREN sentinel general practitioners (GPs) have decreased. In the year-to-date (1 January to 20 August 2023), there have been 211,491 notifications reported to the National Notifiable Diseases Surveillance System (NNDSS) in Australia, of which 14,287 notifications had a diagnosis date this fortnight.

Clinical severity for the season to date, as measured through the proportion of patients admitted directly to ICU, and deaths associated with influenza, is low. In the year-to-date, of the 211,491 notifications of laboratory-confirmed influenza, 214 influenza-associated deaths have been notified to the NNDSS. Since seasonal surveillance commenced in April 2023, there have been 2,787 sentinel hospital admissions, of which 190 (7%) were admitted directly to ICU.

In the year-to-date, 59% of notifications of laboratory-confirmed influenza reported to the NNDSS were influenza A, of which 95% were influenza A(unsubtyped); 4% were influenza A(H1N1); and 0.54% were influenza A(H3N2). Influenza B accounted for 39% of notifications; influenza A&B accounted for 0.31% of notifications; and 2% of influenza notifications were untyped.

Of the 2,678 samples referred to the WHOCC in the year-to-date, 98% of influenza A(H1N1) isolates, 84% of influenza A(H3N2) isolates, and 99% of influenza B/Victoria isolates characterised were antigenically similar to the corresponding vaccine components.

For further information on influenza in Australia, please see the <u>Australian Influenza</u> <u>Surveillance Report and Activity Updates</u>.

## Other respiratory viruses

#### Avian influenza and other zoonotic influenza

#### Latest WHO update on 14 July 2023

From 1 June to 14 July 2023, one human case of infection with an influenza A(H1N1) variant virus, two human cases with positive influenza A(H5N1) detections, one human case of infection with an influenza A(H5N6) virus, and one human case of infection with an influenza A(H9N2) virus were reported officially.

The overall public health risk from currently known influenza viruses at the human-animal interface has not changed, and the likelihood of sustained human-to-human transmission of these viruses remains low. Human infections with viruses of animal origin are expected at the human-animal interface wherever these viruses circulate in animals.

UKHSA has detected influenza A(H5) virus in two poultry workers, following the introduction of an asymptomatic testing programme for people who have been in contact with infected birds. See the <u>UKHSA press release 16 May 2023</u> for more information.

#### Latest UKHSA avian influenza technical briefing 14 July 2023

Since the last technical briefing, 2 cases of influenza A(H5N1) clade 2.3.4.4b have been reported from England.

See also the <u>WHO Disease Outbreak News Reports</u> for more information.

#### Middle East respiratory syndrome coronavirus (MERS-CoV)

On 10 July 2023, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), <u>notified WHO of a case of Middle</u> <u>East Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus (MERS-CoV)</u> in a 28-year-old male from AI Ain city in Abu Dhabi. Since July 2013, when the UAE reported the first case of MERS-CoV, 94 confirmed cases (including this new case) and 12 deaths have been reported.

From April 2012 to July 2023, a total of 2,605 laboratory-confirmed cases of MERS-CoV and 936 associated deaths were reported globally to WHO under the International Health Regulations (IHR 2005). <u>WHO publishes monthly updates.</u>

Between 29 December 2021 and 31 October 2022, four laboratory-confirmed cases of MERS-CoV were reported to WHO by the Ministry of Health of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. No deaths were reported (<u>WHO website</u>).

On 28 April 2022, the National IHR Focal point of Oman notified WHO of one case of MERS-CoV in Oman (<u>WHO website</u>).

Between 22 March and 3 April 2022, the National IHR Focal Point of Qatar reported 2 laboratory-confirmed cases of Middle East respiratory syndrome coronavirus (MERS-CoV) infection to the WHO (<u>WHO website</u>).

A total of 5 cases of Middle East respiratory syndrome coronavirus, MERS-CoV, (3 imported and 2 linked cases) have been confirmed in the UK through ongoing surveillance since September 2012.

<u>Further information on management and guidance of possible cases</u> is available online. The latest <u>ECDC MERS-CoV risk assessment</u> highlights that risk of widespread transmission of MERS-CoV remains very low.

# **Related links**

Previous national COVID-19 reports Previous weekly influenza reports Annual influenza reports COVID-19 vaccine surveillance reports Previous COVID-19 vaccine surveillance reports Public Health England (PHE) monitoring of the effectiveness of COVID-19 vaccination Investigation of SARS-CoV-2 variants of concern: technical briefings Sources of surveillance data for influenza, COVID-19 and other respiratory viruses

UKHSA has delegated authority, on behalf of the Secretary of State, to process Patient Confidential Data under Regulation 3 The Health Service (Control of Patient Information) Regulations 2002

Regulation 3 makes provision for the processing of patient information for the recognition, control and prevention of communicable disease and other risks to public health.

# About the UK Health Security Agency

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Published: 31 August 2023



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