



This report is published on the PHE [website](#). For further information on the surveillance systems mentioned in this report, please visit the [Hospital Norovirus Outbreak Reporting System website](#).

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## Summary

The next weekly report will be published on 09 April 2020.

**At present it is not possible to ascertain the impact of the current COVID-19 pandemic on testing of enteric viruses and reporting of these results to PHE, therefore the recent decline in reporting should be interpreted with caution.**

For national surveillance to be effective, it is essential that laboratories refer representative proportions of positive norovirus and rotavirus samples from gastroenteritis outbreaks to the national reference laboratory (Enteric Virus Unit, PHE Colindale).

No single surveillance system fully captures national changes in norovirus activity, therefore this report presents data from three systems which collectively describe recent trends.

### Norovirus – routine laboratory reporting (SGSS)

- Norovirus activity during week 12 was lower than activity in week 11. Overall activity for this two week period was 40 per cent lower than the five season average for the same period (2014/15 to 2018/19). However, the cumulative number of laboratory reports to week 12 (5549 laboratory reports) was 13 per cent higher than the five season average of the same period (4893 laboratory reports).

### Norovirus – Hospital Norovirus Outbreak Reporting System (HNORS)

- During weeks 11 and 12 of 2020, reports of suspected and confirmed outbreaks of norovirus in hospitals in England (3 outbreaks) were lower than the five season average (34 outbreaks) for this two week period (2014/15 to 2018/19). Overall the number of reported outbreaks during the 2019/20 season (weeks 27 to 12) remains lower (266 outbreaks) than the average number for the same period in the previous five seasons (386 outbreaks).

### Rotavirus – routine laboratory reporting (SGSS)

- Since week 27, 2019, there have been 932 laboratory reports of rotavirus in England and Wales. This is 44 per cent lower than the average for 2014/15 to 2018/19 (1661) (the period after vaccine was introduced).

**Data sources**

- Outbreaks of norovirus in hospitals are derived from the Hospital norovirus outbreak reporting system (HNORS).
- Frontline laboratory reports of positive norovirus and rotavirus samples are provided by the Second Generation Surveillance System (SGSS).
- Reports of outbreaks of diarrhoea and vomiting in prisons and other places of detention are provided by the Health and Justice Team, Public Health England.
- Norovirus genotype and GII.4 strain characterisation and other virology data are provided by the Virus Reference Department (VRD) from a national sentinel norovirus typing surveillance programme.

**Interpretation of trends**

- In order to capture the winter peak of activity in one season, for reporting purposes, the norovirus and rotavirus season runs from week 27 in year 1 to week 26 in year 2, i.e. week 27 2018 to week 26 2019, July to June.
- Norovirus activity varies from season-to-season; therefore it is most appropriate to use the 5 season average for comparison with the current season. Due to this variability between norovirus seasons, it is not possible to predict how the current season will progress.
- Norovirus is predominantly a winter pathogen; however, norovirus infections occur in the summer months.
- Data included in this report are provisional and are extracted from live reporting systems therefore numbers may fluctuate. Laboratory testing and reporting practices are known to vary. Data from laboratory reporting and HNORS are subject to a reporting delay and the number reported in the most recent weeks is likely to rise further as laboratory reports are received. Due to these reporting delays, data pertaining to the most recent two weeks are not included.
- Following the introduction of the rotavirus vaccine into the routine childhood immunisation schedule in July 2013, the total number of laboratory-confirmed rotavirus infections each season has remained low compared to the pre-vaccine period.

**Hospital Norovirus Outbreak Reporting System (HNORS)**

- Hospital norovirus outbreak reporting scheme (HNORS) data are for England only. Reporting to HNORS is voluntary and variations may reflect differences in ascertainment or reporting differences by region.
- Not all outbreaks reported to HNORS result in whole ward closure, some closures are restricted to bays only.

- It is important to note that not all suspected cases are tested for norovirus. Where there is an outbreak, a sample of individuals will be tested.
- Between May and October 2019 HNORS was temporarily offline; the reliance on manual data collation may have resulted in a reduction in reporting during this period.

### **Frontline laboratory reporting (SGSS)**

- Laboratory data are for England and Wales, as reported to Public Health England by laboratories in England and Wales, and are specimens taken from faeces and the lower gastrointestinal tract only. Reporting may be subject to differences in regional ascertainment. Reporting region is based on case's area of residence.
- Most laboratory tests in use do not distinguish vaccine from wild-type rotavirus. In the post-vaccine period, further characterisation of laboratory-confirmed rotavirus infections and considering broader testing of cases among eligible infants for other enteric pathogens are increasingly important to avoid over-attributing rotavirus as a cause of diarrhoea in young children.
- For rotavirus, comparison is made with the 10 season average for the period 2003/04 to 2012/13 prior to the vaccine introduction and the 5 season average for the period 2013/14 to 2017/18 post vaccine introduction.

### **Norovirus genotype and GII.4 strain characterisation (VRD data)**

- Virus genotype and GII.4 strain characterisation data from the reference laboratory are subject to a reporting delay, and the numbers reported in any week may rise further as specimens are referred and additional characterisation data become available.

## Hospital Norovirus Outbreak Reporting System (HNORS) and laboratory reports (SGSS)-England [\[Back to top\]](#)

In weeks 11 and 12, 2020 (09/03/2020 to 22/03/2020 inclusive) there were three outbreaks of suspected norovirus reported to HNORS in England, all of which led to a ward/bay closure or restrictions to admissions and all of which of which were laboratory confirmed as norovirus.

During weeks 11 and 12 of 2020, reports of suspected and confirmed outbreaks of norovirus in hospitals in England (3 outbreaks) were lower than the five season average (34 outbreaks) for this two week period (2014/15 to 2018/19).

This season (since week 27, 2019) there have been 266 outbreaks reported, 251 of which (94 per cent) resulted in ward/bay closures and 205 of which (77 per cent) were laboratory confirmed as norovirus.

Overall reports of suspected and confirmed outbreaks of norovirus in hospitals in England this season (266 outbreaks) are currently at lower levels than the same period in the previous five seasons (386 outbreaks, 2014/15 to 2018/19).

**Table 1: Reports of suspected and confirmed norovirus outbreaks in hospitals (HNORS) and laboratory reports to PHE in England - weeks 11 and 12, 2020 (09/03/2020 to 22/03/2020)**

Public Health England Region	HNORS			Laboratory reports (SGSS)*
	Outbreaks	Outbreaks resulting in ward/bay closure	Laboratory confirmed outbreaks	
East of England				23
East Midlands				31
London				18
North East	1	1	1	47
North West				17
South East				16
South West	2	2	2	25
West Midlands				27
Yorkshire and the Humber				33
<b>Total</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>237</b>

\* By case's area of residence

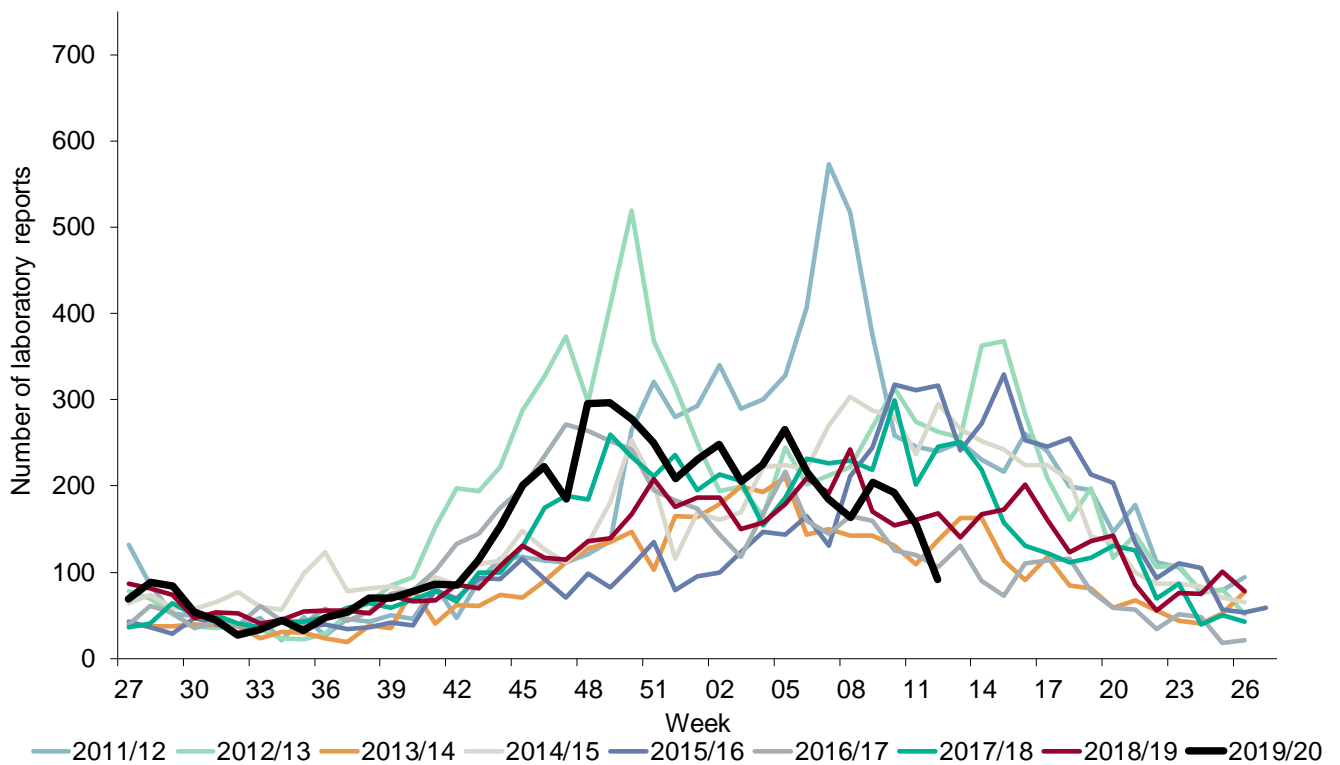
## Norovirus Laboratory Reporting (SGSS) - England and Wales [\[Back to top\]](#)

The number of laboratory reports of norovirus in England and Wales, as reported to Public Health England, in this season (week 27, 2019 to week 12, 2020) is 5549. This is 13 per cent higher than the average number for the same period in the previous 5 seasons from season 2014/15 to season 2018/19 (4893).

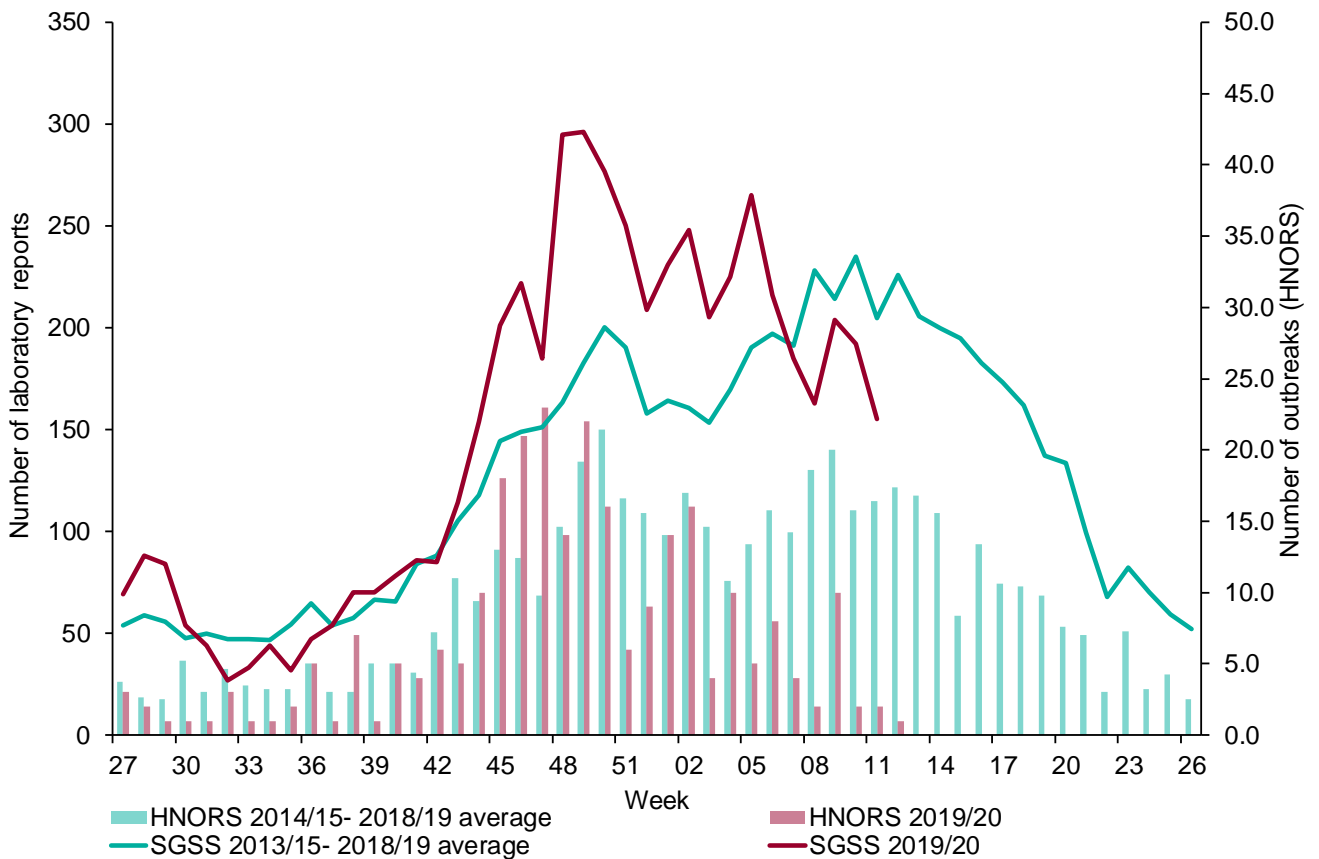
Norovirus activity during week 12 was lower than activity in week 11. Overall activity for this two week period (247 laboratory reports) was 40 per cent lower than the five season average (418 laboratory reports) for the same period (2014/15 to 2018/19).

Norovirus activity varies from season to season and no two seasons are the same. The emergence of novel strains of norovirus may result in shifts in seasonality (Allen et al, 2014).

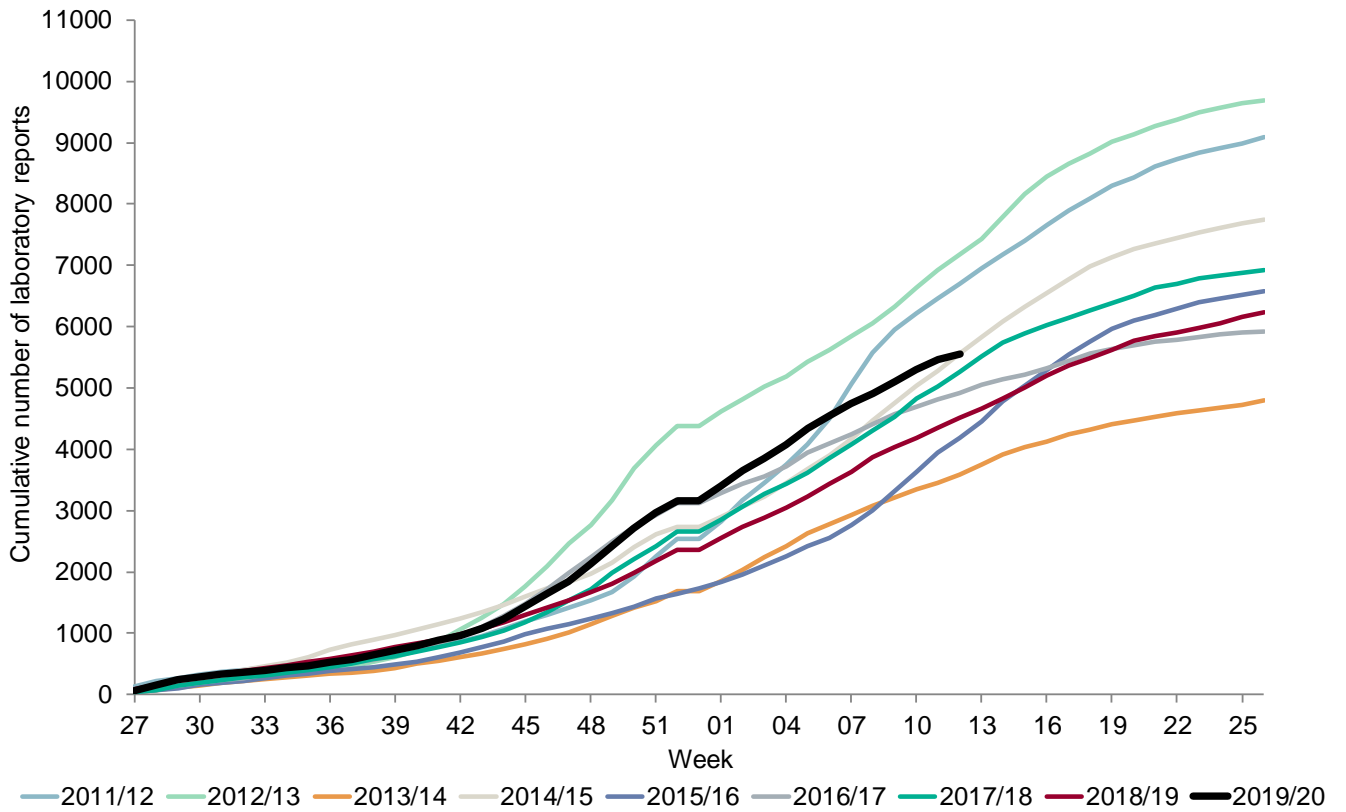
**Figure 1: Seasonal comparison of laboratory reports of norovirus 2011/12-2019/20 (England and Wales)**



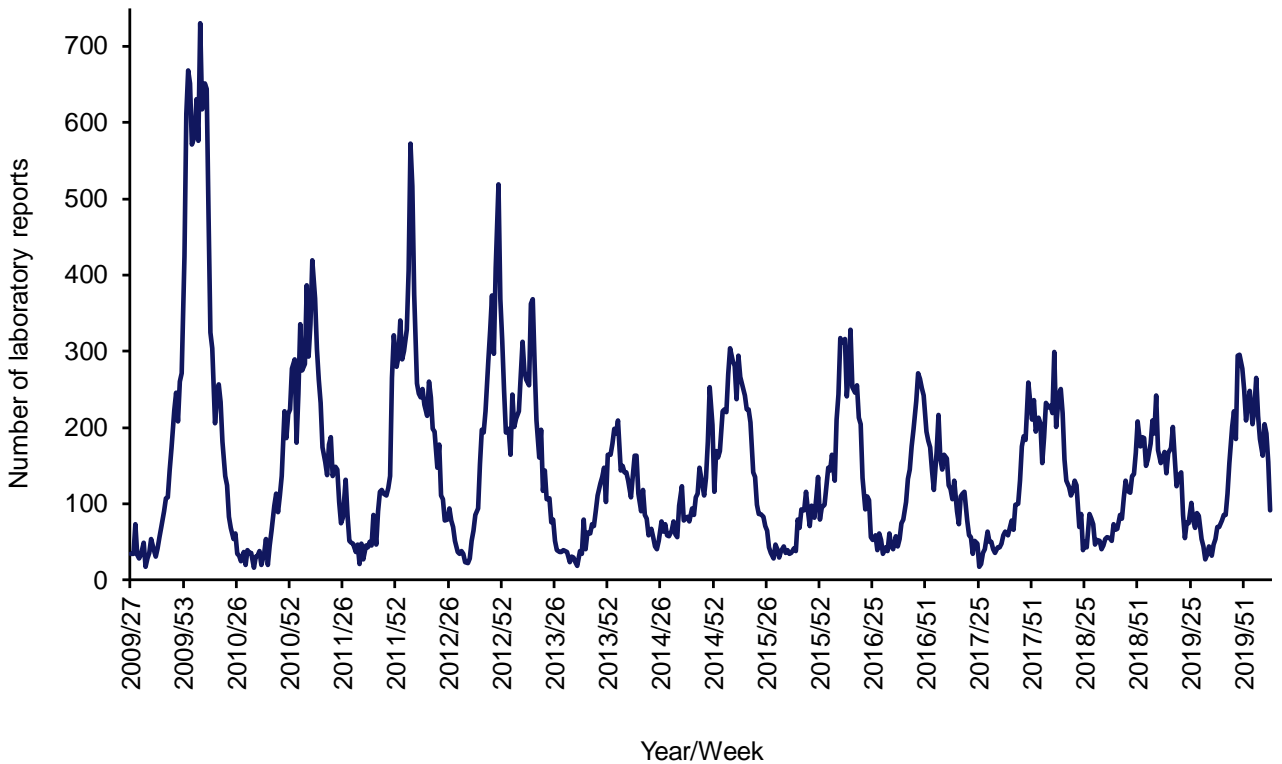
**Figure 2: Laboratory (England and Wales) and hospital outbreak reports (England) by week of occurrence 2019/20 compared to the five season average (2014/15-2018/19)**



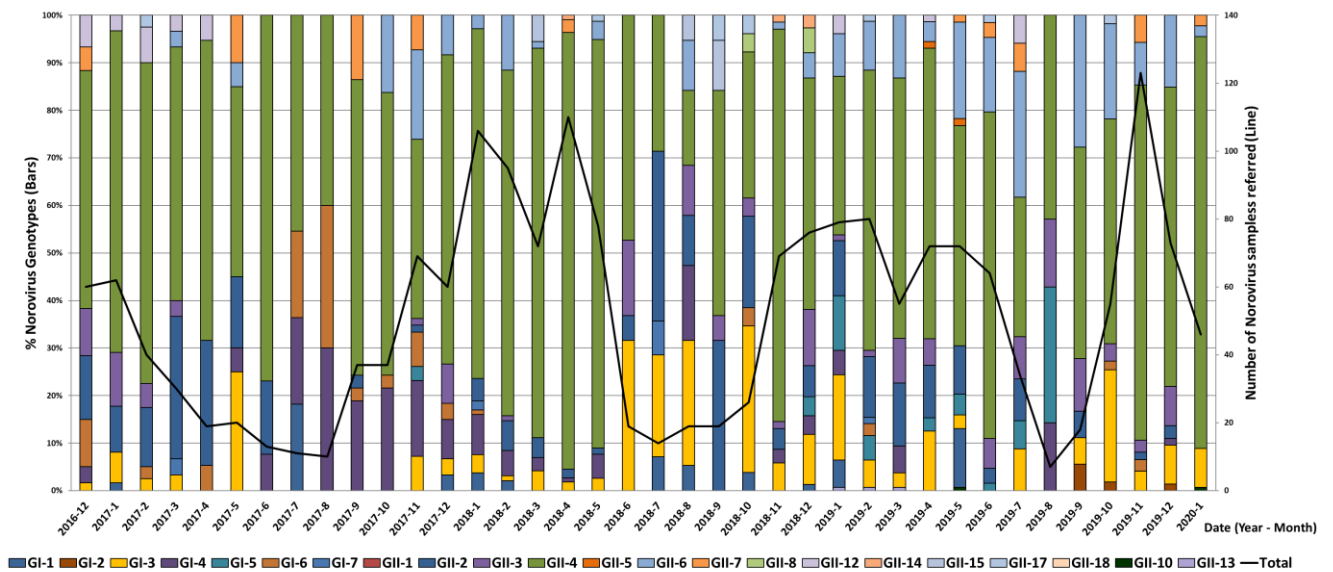
**Figure 3: Cumulative number of laboratory reports of norovirus by season 2011/12-2019/20 (England and Wales)**



**Figure 4: Laboratory reports of norovirus by week 2009-2020 (England and Wales)**

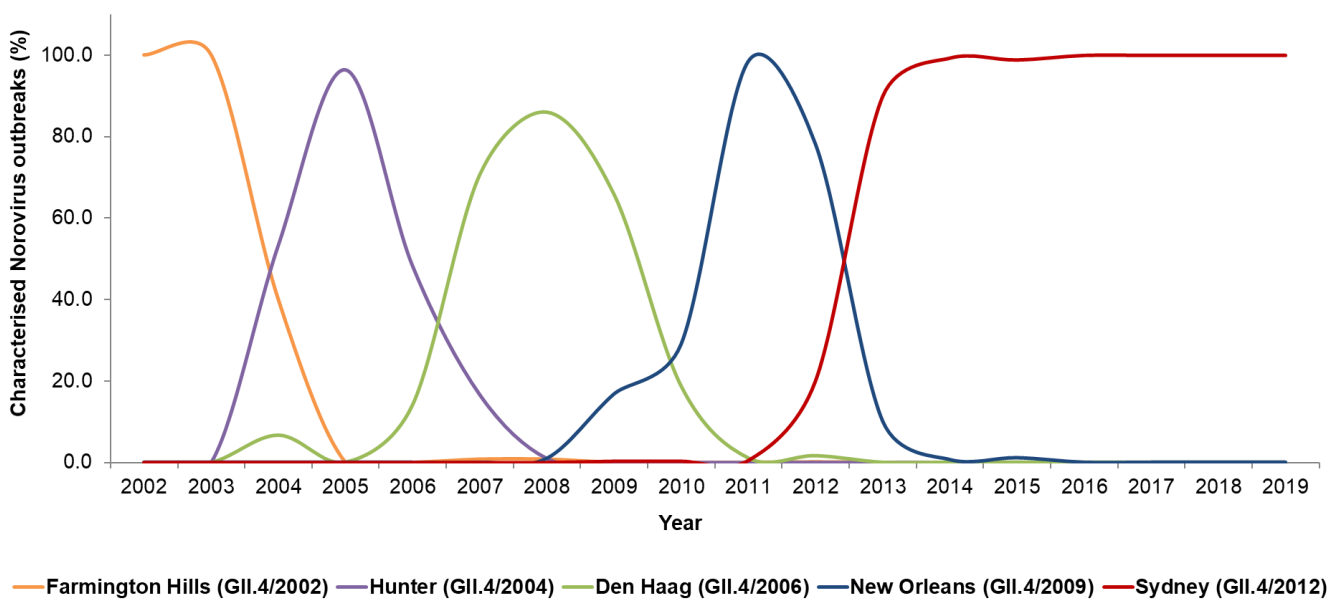


**Figure 5: Norovirus-confirmed outbreaks (all settings, by month) referred to VRD (England and Wales), 2016-2020**



- Noroviruses of the genocluster genogroup II-genotype 4 (GII.4) were the most frequently detected in England and Wales during 2019, accounting for 55.5% of characterised samples.
- GII.4 Noroviruses are the most commonly detected since 2015.
- GII.4 Noroviruses Sydney2012-like variant are the most frequently detected norovirus genotype worldwide since 2014.

**Figure 6: GII-4 norovirus strains detected by year 2001-2019 (England and Wales)**



- The Virus Reference Department monitors the genetic diversity of noroviruses belonging to the dominant GII.4 genotype that circulate in England and Wales.

- Since 2001, there have been five major GII.4 strains circulating in England and Wales (and worldwide), which have successively replaced one another. Replacement events are associated with antigenic drift in the virus (Allen et al 2008, 2009, Zakikhany et al 2012).
- Since the winter of 2012/13, the GII.4 strain Norovirus/GII.4/Sydney/2012 has been dominant worldwide, including in England and Wales (Allen, Adams, et al 2014).

### **Activity in prisons and other places of detention (Health and Justice Team) – England** **[Back to top]**

No outbreaks of diarrhoea and vomiting were reported in prisons during weeks 11 and 12, 2020.

For guidance on the management of outbreaks in prisons see:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/multi-agency-contingency-plan-for-disease-outbreaks-in-prisons>

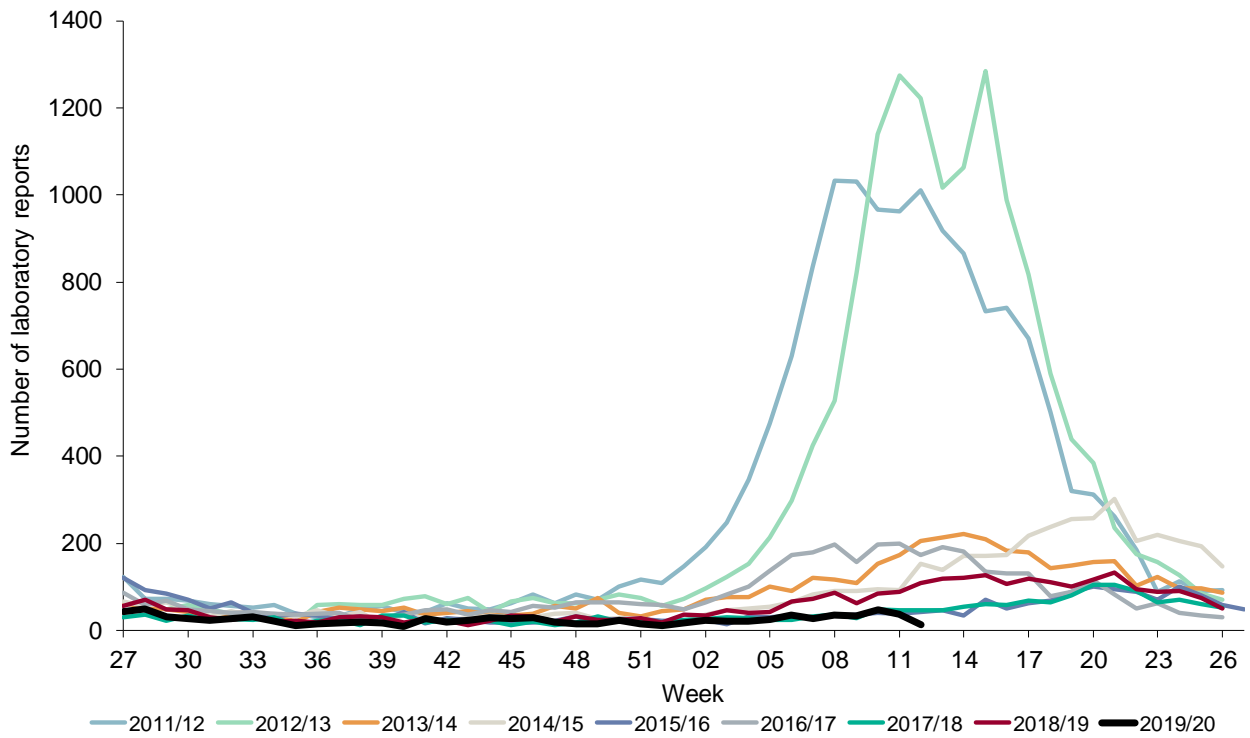
### **Rotavirus Laboratory Reporting (SGSS) - England and Wales** **[Back to top]**

The number of laboratory reports of rotavirus in England and Wales as reported to Public Health England, in this season (week 27, 2019 to week 12, 2020) is 947. This is 46 per cent lower than the five season average (post-vaccine) for the same period in the seasons 2014/15 to 2018/19 (1766).

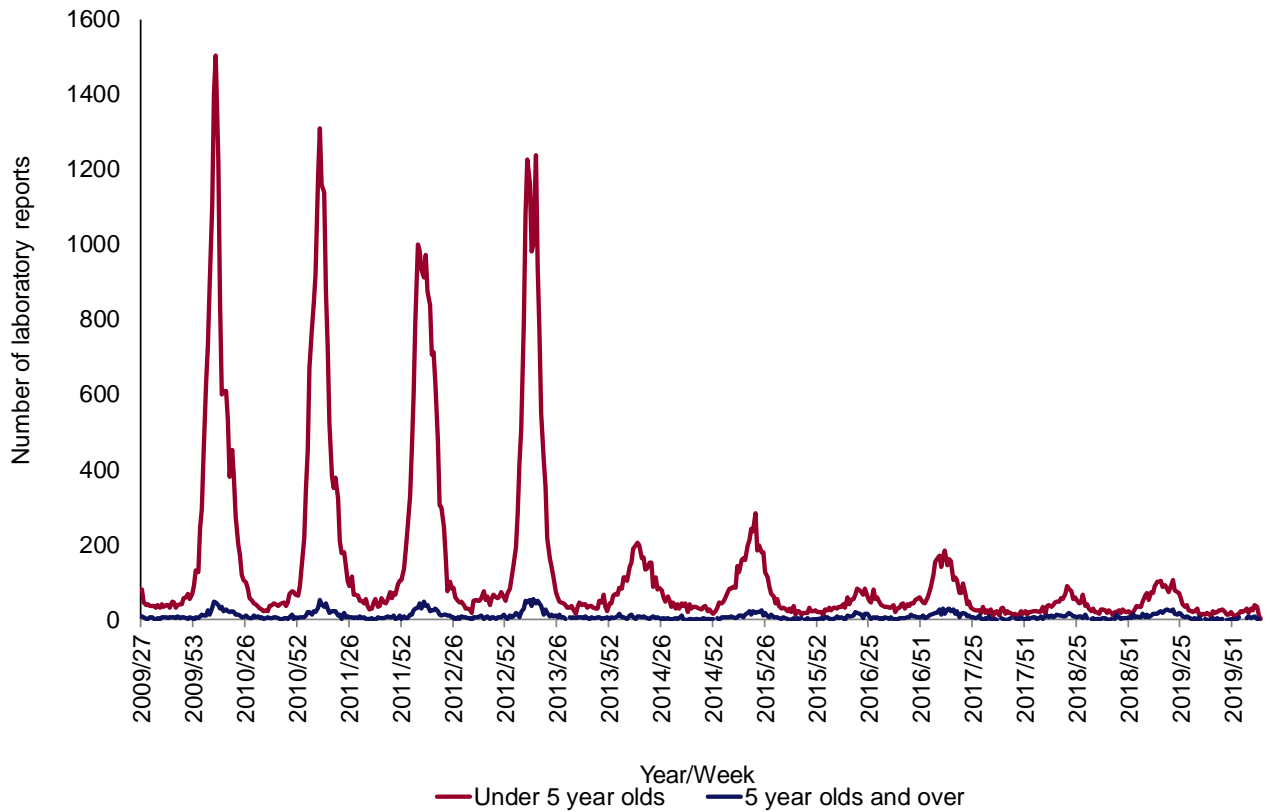
Rotavirus particularly contributes to reported diarrhoea and vomiting illness in children aged under five however in the first season following the introduction of the rotavirus vaccine in July 2013, a 77 per cent decline in laboratory-confirmed rotavirus infections in infants was observed (Atchison et al, 2016). The total number of laboratory-confirmed rotavirus infections each season has since remained low compared to the pre-vaccine period.



**Figure 7: Seasonal comparison of laboratory reports of rotavirus by week 2011/12-2019/20 (England and Wales)**



**Figure 8: Laboratory reports of rotavirus by week and age group 2009-2020 (England and Wales)**



## Acknowledgements

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This report was prepared by the Tuberculosis; Acute Respiratory; Gastrointestinal; Emerging/Zoonotic Infections; and Travel and Migrant Health Division (T.A.R.G.E.T.), Public Health England. We are grateful to all who provided data for this report including infection control staff in hospitals who take the time to contribute data to HNORS, the Virus Reference Department, Public Health England and the Health and Justice Team, Public Health England.

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