

Summary

Week 18/2019 (29 April–5 May 2019)

- For week 18/2019, all countries reporting ILI or ARI thresholds reported activity at baseline levels, indicating that the influenza season is coming to an end in Europe.
- Few countries reported influenza detections. From 105 sentinel specimens tested there were only 4 detections.
- For week 18/2019, the specimens (n=78) from patients with severe acute respiratory infection (SARI) that were tested for influenza viruses gave 6.4% positivity and 80% of all viruses detected were type A.
- Pooled data from 23 Member States and areas reporting to the [EuroMOMO](#) project indicated that all-cause mortality remained at levels expected for this time of year.

2018–2019 season overview

- Influenza activity in the European Region, based on sentinel sampling, reached a positivity rate of 10% in week 49/2018, exceeded 50% between weeks 3/2019 and 7/2019, peaked in week 5/2019, and dropped below 10% in week 17/2019 where it remains.
- Both influenza A virus subtypes have circulated, with co-circulation in some countries, while others reported dominance of either A(H1N1)pdm09 or A(H3N2) viruses.
- Among hospitalized influenza virus-infected patients admitted to ICU wards, 99% were infected with type A viruses, with 67% of those subtyped being A(H1N1)pdm09. Among influenza virus-infected patients admitted to other wards, 99% were infected with type A viruses, with 55% of those subtyped being A(H1N1)pdm09.
- Of the patient specimens from SARI surveillance that tested positive for an influenza virus, 99% were type A viruses, with 79% of those subtyped being A(H1N1)pdm09.
- A summary of regional activity from October 2018 to February 2019 was published in Eurosurveillance and can be found [here](#).
- Current influenza vaccines tend to work better against influenza A(H1N1)pdm09 and influenza B viruses than against influenza A(H3N2) viruses. For more detail, see the [Vaccine effectiveness](#) section.
- WHO has published [recommendations](#) for the composition of influenza vaccines to be used in the 2019–2020 northern hemisphere season. The recommendation states that

both type B lineage viruses should remain unchanged, while the A(H1N1)pdm09 and A(H3N2) viruses should be updated.

- The vast majority of circulating viruses in the European Region were susceptible to neuraminidase inhibitors supporting use of antiviral treatment according to national guidelines.

Primary care data

Syndromic surveillance data

For week 18/2019, of the 32 Member States reporting influenza-like illness (ILI) thresholds, none reported ILI activity above baseline levels.

Of the 18 Member States reporting acute respiratory infection (ARI) thresholds, none reported activity above baseline levels.

Influenza activity

For week 18/2019, of 42 Member States and areas reporting on intensity, 24 reported baseline and 18 reported low intensity (Fig. 1).

Of 42 Member States and areas reporting on geographic spread, 13 reported no activity, 23 reported sporadic, 1 reported local, 4 reported regional and 1 reported widespread activity (Fig. 2).

Fig. 1. Intensity in the European Region, week 18/2019

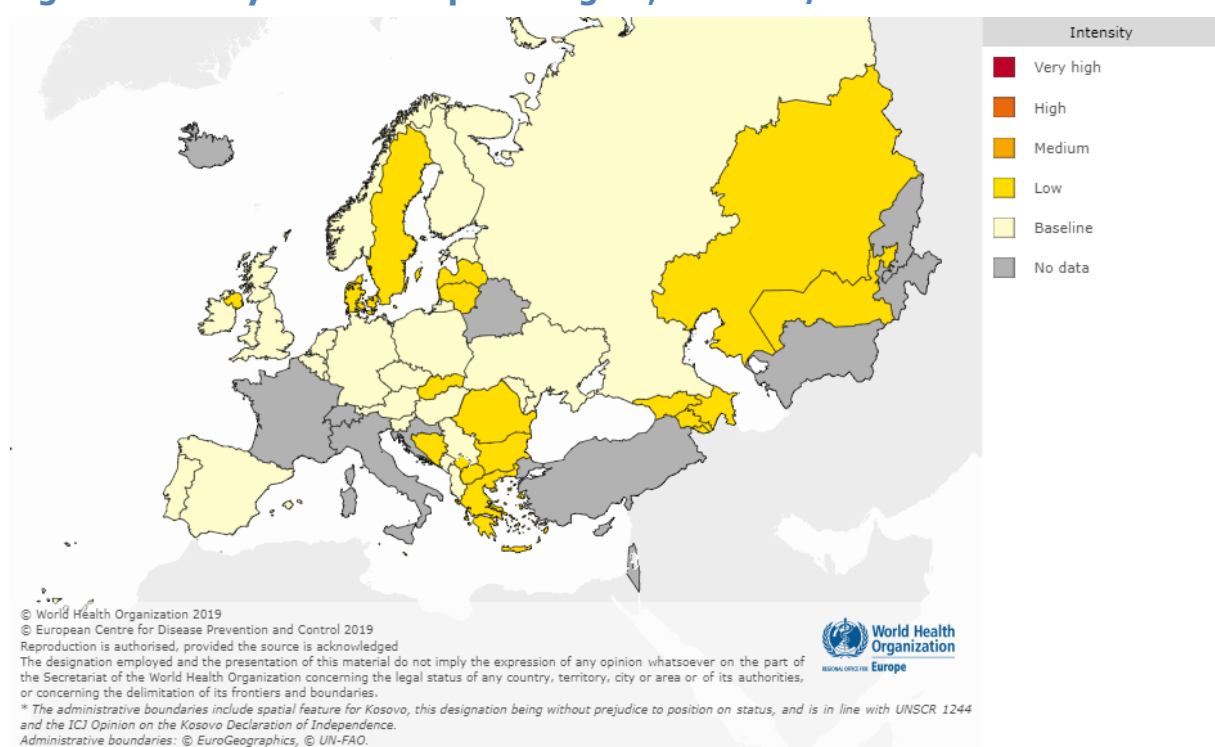
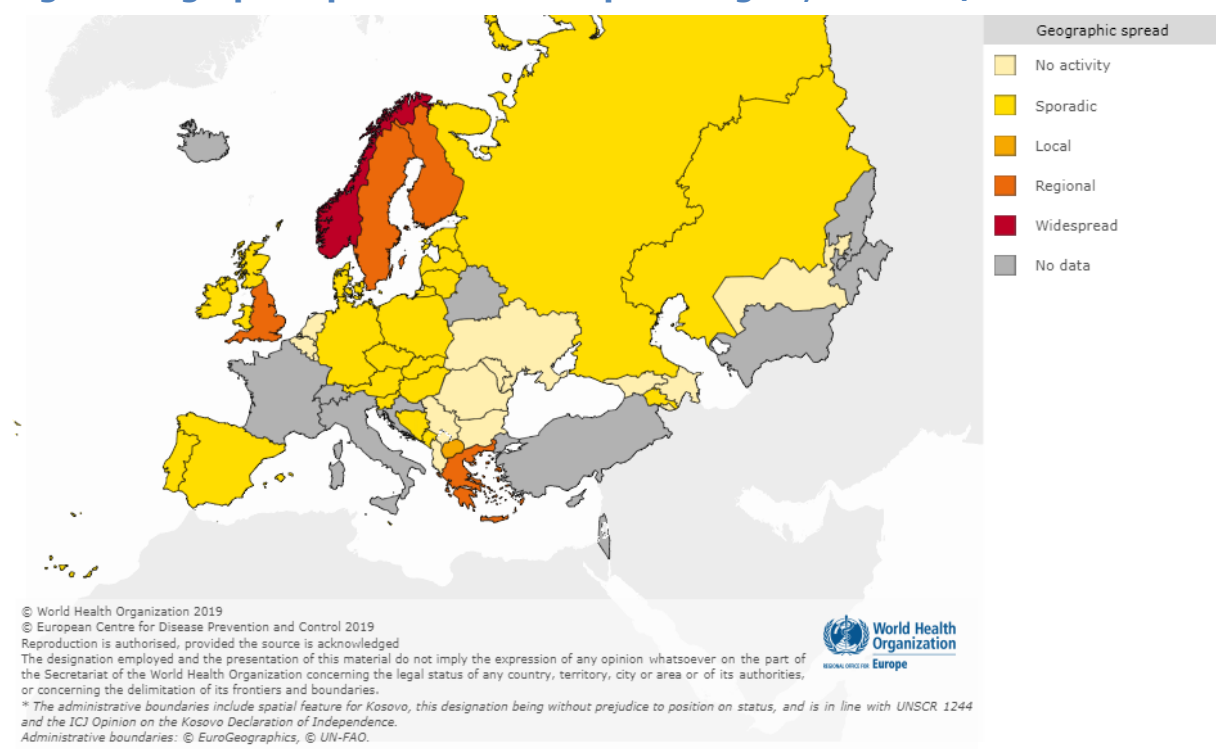


Fig. 2. Geographic spread in the European Region, week 18/2019



For interactive maps of influenza intensity and geographic spread, see the [Flu News Europe website](#).

Viruses detected in sentinel-source specimens (ILI and ARI)

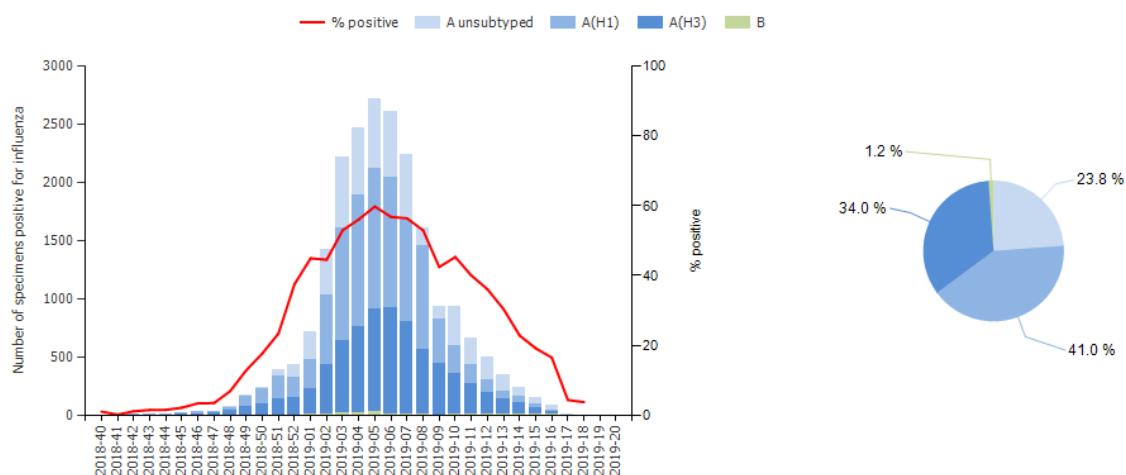
For week 18/2019, 4 (4%) of 105 sentinel specimens tested positive for an influenza virus; 3 were type A and 1 was type B. All 3 influenza type A viruses were A(H3N2) (Fig. 3 and Table 1).

Of 3 Member States or areas across the region that each tested at least 10 sentinel specimens in week 18/2019, none reported influenza virus detection rates above 10%.

For the season to date, almost all influenza viruses detected were type A (99%) with type B accounting for only 1% of detections. Of subtyped A viruses, 55% were A(H1N1)pdm09 and 45% were A(H3N2). Of 63 influenza type B viruses ascribed to a lineage, 83% were B/Yamagata (75% of type B viruses were reported without a lineage) (Fig. 3 and Table 1).

Details of the distribution of viruses detected in non-sentinel-source specimens can be found in the [Virus characteristics](#) section.

Fig. 3. Influenza virus detections in sentinel-source specimens by type and subtype, by week and cumulatively ^a



^a Pie chart shows cumulative data for this period.

Table 1. Influenza virus detections in sentinel-source specimens by type and subtype, week 18/2019 and cumulatively

Virus type and subtype	Current Week		Season 2018–2019	
	Number	% ^a	Number	% ^a
Influenza A	3	75	21 043	98.8
A(H1N1)pdm09	0	0	8 739	54.7
A(H3N2)	3	100	7 233	45.3
A not subtyped	0	-	5 071	-
Influenza B	1	25	247	1.2
B/Victoria lineage	0	-	11	17.5
B/Yamagata lineage	0	-	52	82.5
Unknown lineage	1	-	184	-
Total detections (total tested)	4 (105)	3.8	21 290 (53 013)	40.2

^aFor influenza type percentage calculations, the denominator is total detections; for subtype and lineage, it is total influenza A subtyped and total influenza B lineage determined, respectively; for total detections, it is total tested.

Severity

A subset of Member States and areas monitors severe disease related to influenza virus infection by surveillance of 1) hospitalized laboratory-confirmed influenza cases in ICUs (12 Member States or areas), or other wards (8 Member States or areas), or 2) severe acute respiratory infection (SARI; 17 Member States or areas).

1.1) Hospitalized laboratory-confirmed influenza cases – ICUs

Of the laboratory-confirmed influenza cases reported in ICUs for week 18/2019 (n=17), most were influenza type A viruses (n=15, 88%), with only two influenza type B viruses detected. Most detections (n=15) were reported by the United Kingdom.

Since week 40/2018, almost all viruses detected were influenza type A (n=7 214, 99%). Only 1% were type B (n=62). Of 3 237 subtyped influenza A viruses, 67% were A(H1N1)pdm09 and 33% were A(H3N2). No influenza B viruses were ascribed to a lineage. Of 4 044 cases with known age, 47% were at least 65 years old, 45% were 15-64 years old, and 6% were under 5 years old.

1.2) Hospitalized laboratory-confirmed influenza cases – other wards

Among laboratory-confirmed influenza cases reported in wards other than ICUs for week 18/2019 (n=11), all were influenza type A viruses. Most detections were reported by Ireland.

Since week 40/2018, almost all viruses detected have been influenza type A (n=9 832, 99%). Only 1% were type B (n=76). Of 4 000 subtyped influenza A viruses, 55% were A(H1N1)pdm09 and 45% were A(H3N2). Of 2 influenza B viruses ascribed to a lineage, 1 was B/Yamagata and 1 was B/Victoria. Of 9 908 cases with known age, 46% were at least 65 years old, 32% were 15-64 years old, and 15% were under 5 years old.

2. SARI surveillance

For week 18/2019, 788 SARI cases were reported by 11 Member States or areas. Of these cases, 78 specimens were tested for influenza viruses and 5 (6.4%) tested positive. 4 were influenza type A viruses and one was an influenza type B virus.

Of 40 997 SARI cases reported since week 40/2018, 40 902 had a recorded age and, of these, 58% were 0-4 years old and 24% were 15-64 years old. For SARI cases testing positive for influenza virus since week 40/2018 (n=2 837), type A viruses have been predominating (99%). Of the 2 534 influenza type A infected cases for which subtyping was performed, 79% were infected by A(H1N1)pdm09 viruses and 21% were infected by A(H3N2) viruses. 1 type B virus ascribed to a lineage was B/Yamagata.

Mortality monitoring

For week 18/2019, the [EuroMOMO](#) project received data from 23 countries or areas that were included in pooled analyses. The pooled estimates indicated that all-cause mortality was within expected ranges.

Virus characteristics

Details of the distribution of viruses detected in sentinel-source specimens can be found in the [Primary care data](#) section.

Viruses detected in non-sentinel source specimens

For week 18/2019, 623 specimens from non-sentinel sources (such as hospitals, schools, primary care facilities not involved in sentinel surveillance, or nursing homes and other institutions) tested positive for an influenza virus; 93% were type A and 7 % were type B. Of 91 A viruses subtyped, 22% were A(H1N1)pdm09 and 78% were A(H3N2) (Table 2).

For the season to date, the vast majority of viruses detected have been influenza type A (99%). Of A viruses subtyped, 58% were A(H1N1)pdm09 and 42% were A(H3N2). Of 61 influenza type B viruses ascribed to a lineage, 46% were B/Yamagata (97% of type B viruses were reported without a lineage) (Table 2).

Table 2. Influenza virus detections in non-sentinel source specimens by type and subtype, week 18/2019 and cumulatively

Virus type and subtype	Current Week		Season 2018–2019	
	Number	% ^a	Number	% ^a
Influenza A	577	92.6	180 487	99.0
A(H1N1)pdm09	20	22.0	35 117	58.4
A(H3N2)	71	78.0	24 983	41.6
A not subtyped	486	-	120 387	-
Influenza B	46	7.4	1 807	1.0
B/Victoria lineage	0	-	33	54.1
B/Yamagata lineage	0	-	28	45.9
Unknown lineage	46	-	1 746	-
Total detections (total tested)	623 (8 812)	-	182 294 (774 629)	-

^a For type percentage calculations, the denominator is total detections; for subtype and lineage, it is total influenza A subtyped and total influenza B lineage determined, respectively; as not all countries have a true non-sentinel testing denominator, no percentage calculations for total tested are shown.

Genetic and antigenic characterization

Genetic characterization of influenza viruses is routinely performed to understand how similar currently circulating influenza viruses are to the viruses used in influenza vaccines for an ongoing season.

Since week 40/2018, genetic characterizations of 3 772 viruses have been reported by the network laboratories.

Of the genetically characterized viruses, 1 800 were A(H1)pdm09 viruses belonging to the A/Michigan/45/2015 (6B.1) clade with a further 3 attributed to a subgroup not listed; 1 917 were A(H3) viruses, with 1 272 belonging to the A/Alsace/1746/2018 (3C.2a1b) subgroup, 68

to the A/Switzerland/8060/2017 (3C.2a2) subclade, 33 to the A/Cote d'Ivoire/544/2016 (3C.2a3) subclade, 57 to the A/Singapore-16-0019/2016 (3C.2a1) subclade, 9 to the A/Greece/4/2017 (3C.2a1a) subgroup, 5 to the A/Hong Kong/4801/2014 (3C.2a) clade, 466 to the A/England/538/2018 (3C.3a) clade and 7 attributed to a subgroup not listed.

Of the 52 genetically characterized influenza B viruses, 27 were B/Yamagata viruses belonging to the B/Phuket/3073/2013 clade (clade 3). All 25 B/Victoria viruses characterized belonged to clade 1A (represented by B/Brisbane/60/2008); but of these, 5 fell in a subclade with a two amino acid deletion in HA (1A.Δ2; represented by B/Colorado/06/2017) and 15 fell in a subclade with a three amino acid deletion in HA (1A.Δ3; represented by B/Hong Kong/269/2017) (Table 3).

Table 3. Viruses attributed to genetic groups, cumulative for weeks 40/2018–18/2019

Phylogenetic group	Number of viruses
A(H1)pdm09 group 6B.1 representative A/Michigan/45/2015 ^a	1 800
A(H1)pdm09 attributed to recognised group in the guidance but not listed here	3
A(H3) clade 3C.2a1b representative A/Alsace/1746/2018 subgroup	1 272
A(H3) clade 3C.2a2 representative A/Switzerland/8060/2017 subgroup ^b	68
A(H3) clade 3C.2a3 representative A/Cote d'Ivoire/544/2016 subgroup	33
A(H3) clade 3C.3a representative A/England/538/2018 subgroup	466
A(H3) clade 3c.2a1 representative A/Singapore/INFIMH-16-0019/2016 subgroup ^d	57
A(H3) clade 3c.2a representative A/Hong Kong/4801/2014 subgroup	5
A(H3) attributed to recognized group in current guidance but not listed here	7
A(H3) clade 3C.2a1a representative A/Greece/4/2017 subgroup	9
B(Vic)-lineage clade 1A representative B/Brisbane/60/2008	5
B(Vic)-lineage clade 1A representative B/Colorado/06/2017 ^a	5
B(Vic)-lineage clade 1A representative B/Hong Kong/269/2017	15
B(Yam)-lineage clade representative B/Phuket/3073/2013 ^c	27

^a Vaccine component for 2018–2019 northern hemisphere and 2019 southern hemisphere seasons.

^b Vaccine component for 2019 southern hemisphere season.

^c Vaccine component of quadrivalent vaccines for use in 2018–2019 northern hemisphere and 2019 southern hemisphere seasons.

^d Vaccine component for 2018-2019 northern hemisphere season

A [report](#) detailing influenza virus characterization data conducted in March 2019 by the WHO Collaborating Centre, London (the Francis Crick Institute), on influenza positive specimens received from European Union/European Economic Area countries was published by the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control. A summary is given below.

A(H1N1)pdm09 viruses

The vast majority (103/105) of A(H1N1)pdm09 viruses characterized were antigenically similar to the vaccine virus for use in the 2018–2019 northern hemisphere (A/Michigan/45/2015, clade 6B.1) and all fell in subclade 6B.1A. Within this subclade, there has been increasing genetic diversity of the HA genes with several emerging genetic

subgroups. Of the 304 test viruses characterized genetically, 273 carried the HA1 amino acid substitution of S183P.

A(H3N2) viruses

Antigenic characterization of A(H3N2) viruses remains technically difficult. Since the previous report published in February 2019, only 46 A(H3N2) viruses have had a sufficient HA titre to allow antigenic characterization by haemagglutination inhibition (HI) assay. By HI assay, all viruses belonging to subgroups within clades 3C.2a and 3C.3a were poorly recognized by antisera raised against egg-propagated A/Singapore/INFIMH-16-0019/2016, the current vaccine virus.

B/Victoria viruses

Only 1 B/Victoria lineage virus has been tested by HI since the February 2019 report. This virus was antigenically similar to a virus of Asian origin with a three amino acid deletion in HA1 (Δ 162-164, 1A. Δ 3).

B/Yamagata viruses

Only 3 B/Yamagata lineage viruses have been characterized antigenically since the February report. All 3 had HA genes that fell into clade 3 and encoded 2 HA amino acid substitutions not present in the virus recommended for inclusion in quadrivalent vaccines for the current and subsequent northern hemisphere influenza seasons, B/Phuket/3073/2013. However, all 3 remained antigenically similar to the vaccine virus.

Vaccine composition

The recommended composition of the trivalent influenza vaccine for the current northern hemisphere 2018–2019 season included an A/Michigan/45/2015 (H1N1)pdm09-like virus, an A/Singapore/INFIMH-16-0019/2016 (H3N2)-like virus and a B/Colorado/06/2017-like virus (B/Victoria lineage). For quadrivalent vaccines, a B/Phuket/3073/2013-like virus (B/Yamagata lineage) was recommended. The full report can be found [here](#).

On 21 February 2019, WHO published recommendations for the components of influenza vaccines for use in the 2019–2020 northern hemisphere influenza season, and on 21 March it was finalized. Vaccines should contain the following

- an A/Brisbane/02/2018 (H1N1)pdm09-like virus;
- an A/Kansas/14/2017 (H3N2)-like virus;
- a B/Colorado/06/2017-like virus (B/Victoria/2/87 lineage); and
- a B/Phuket/3073/2013-like virus (B/Yamagata/16/88 lineage).

It is recommended that the influenza B virus component of trivalent vaccines for use in the 2019–2020 northern hemisphere influenza season be a B/Colorado/06/2017-like virus of the B/Victoria/2/87-lineage.

The full report and “Frequently Asked Questions” are available for the 21 February decision and the 21 March addendum on the [WHO website](#).

Vaccine effectiveness

Current influenza vaccines tend to work better against influenza A(H1N1)pdm09 and influenza B viruses than against influenza A(H3N2) viruses. Early data suggest that vaccines are moderately effective, with estimates varying depending on the population studied and the proportions of circulating influenza A virus subtypes. See data from [a European study \(6 countries\)](#), [Canada](#), [Finland](#), [Hong Kong \(China\)](#), [Sweden](#), and the [United States of America](#).

Antiviral susceptibility testing

Neuraminidase inhibitor susceptibility was assessed for 2 528 viruses with collection dates since week 40/2018 [1 495 A(H1N1)pdm09, 1 004 A(H3N2), and 29 type B]. 8 A(H1N1)pdm09 viruses carried amino acid substitution H275Y in NA indicative of highly reduced inhibition (HRI) by oseltamivir and 3 of them were confirmed by phenotypic testing. 1 type B virus showed evidence of reduced inhibition (RI) by oseltamivir and zanamivir.

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Maps and commentary do not represent a statement on the legal or border status of the countries and territories shown.

All data are up to date on the day of publication. Past this date, however, published data should not be used for longitudinal comparisons, as countries retrospectively update their databases.

The WHO Regional Office for Europe is responsible for the accuracy of the Russian translation.

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