

Weekly influenza overview

Week 11/2021 (15 March–21 March 2021)

- Influenza activity remained at interseasonal levels.
- Of the 1 256 specimens tested for influenza viruses in week 11/2021, from patients presenting with ILI or ARI symptoms to sentinel primary healthcare sites, one was positive for type A influenza virus.
- Influenza viruses were detected sporadically from non-sentinel sources (such as hospitals, schools, primary care facilities not involved in sentinel surveillance, or nursing homes and other institutions). Both influenza type A and type B viruses were detected.
- There were no hospitalized laboratory-confirmed influenza cases reported in week 11/2021.
- The influenza epidemic in the European Region has usually peaked and started to decline by this point in the year but, despite widespread and regular testing for influenza viruses, reported influenza activity has remained at a very low level throughout the season, likely due to the impact of the various public health and social measures implemented to reduce transmission of SARS-CoV-2.
- The COVID-19 pandemic had affected healthcare seeking behaviours, healthcare provision, and testing practices and capacities in countries and areas of the European Region, which negatively impacted on the collection of influenza epidemiologic and virologic data from March 2020. However, surveillance recovered over the course of the 2020-2021 season with a small decrease in the number of samples tested (~20%) but with a huge decrease (>99%) in the number of influenza infections detected, yielding a totally aberrant seasonal pattern with detections being at interseasonal levels.

Other news

The World Health Organization categorized COVID-19 as a pandemic on 11 March 2020. For more information about the situation in the WHO European Region visit:

- WHO website: <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019>
- ECDC website: <https://www.ecdc.europa.eu/en/novel-coronavirus-china>

Qualitative indicators

Of 36 Member States and areas reporting on intensity, 32 reported baseline (across the region), 3 reported low (Azerbaijan, Estonia, Slovakia) and 1 reported medium (Ukraine) intensity for week 11/2021 (Figure 1).

Of 36 countries and areas that reported on geographic spread, 32 reported no activity and 4 (Azerbaijan, Slovakia, Ukraine, and the United Kingdom (Scotland)) reported sporadic spread for week 11/2021 (Fig. 2).

Please note:

1. Assessment of the intensity of activity indicator includes consideration of ILI or ARI rates. These ILI or ARI rates might be driven by respiratory infections other than influenza, including SARS-CoV-2, leading to observed increases in the absence of influenza virus detections.
2. Assessment of intensity and geographic spread indicators includes consideration of sentinel and non-sentinel influenza virus detection data. Non-sentinel influenza virus detections, often higher, might translate into reporting of elevated geographic spread even in the absence of sentinel detections.

Fig. 1. Intensity in the European Region, week 11/2021

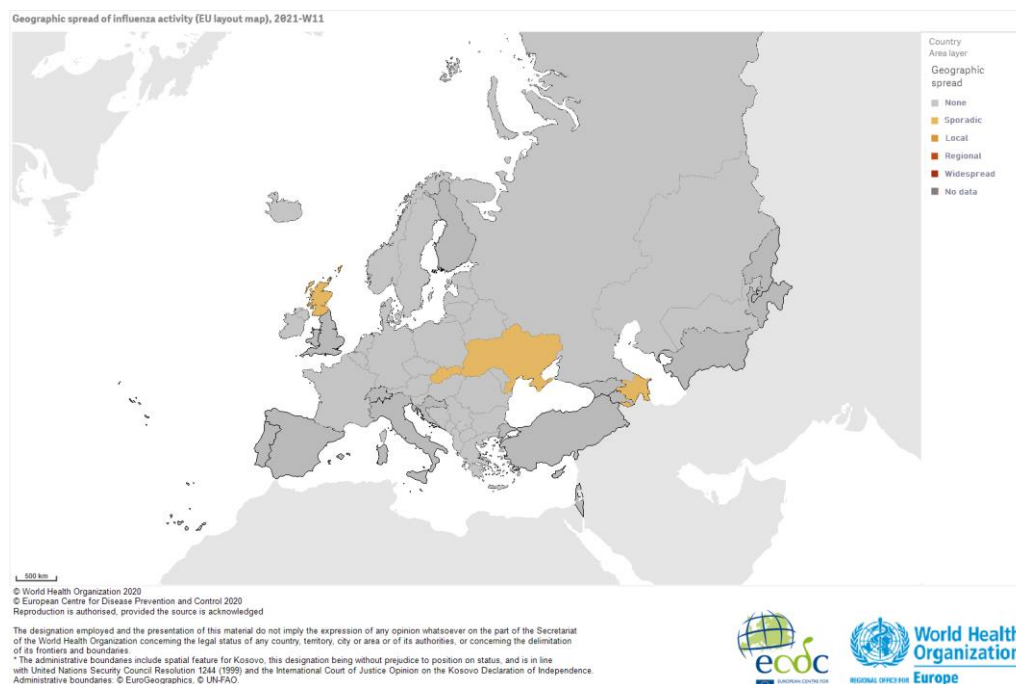
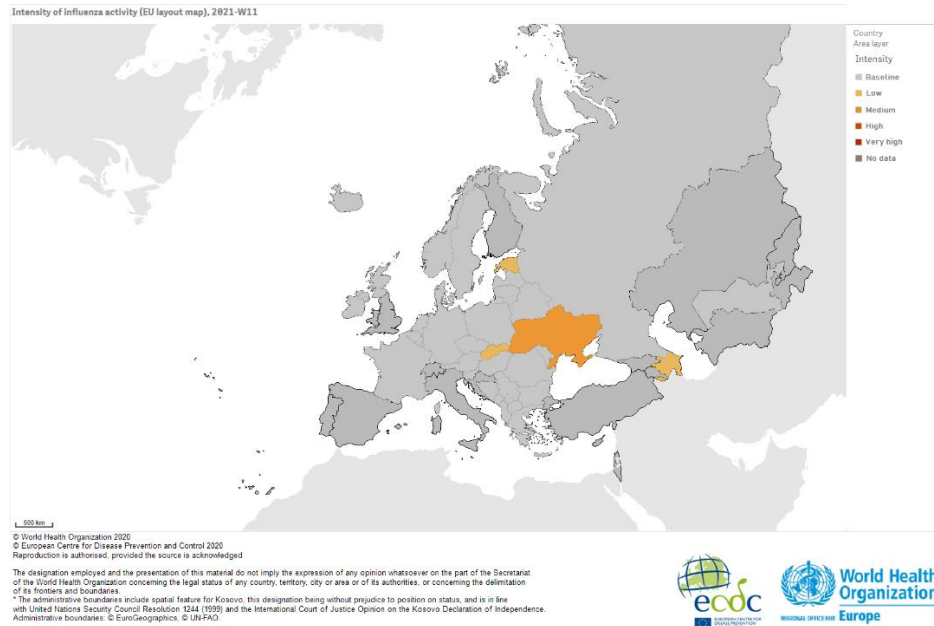


Fig. 2. Geographic spread in the European Region, week 11/2021



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

2020-2021 season overview

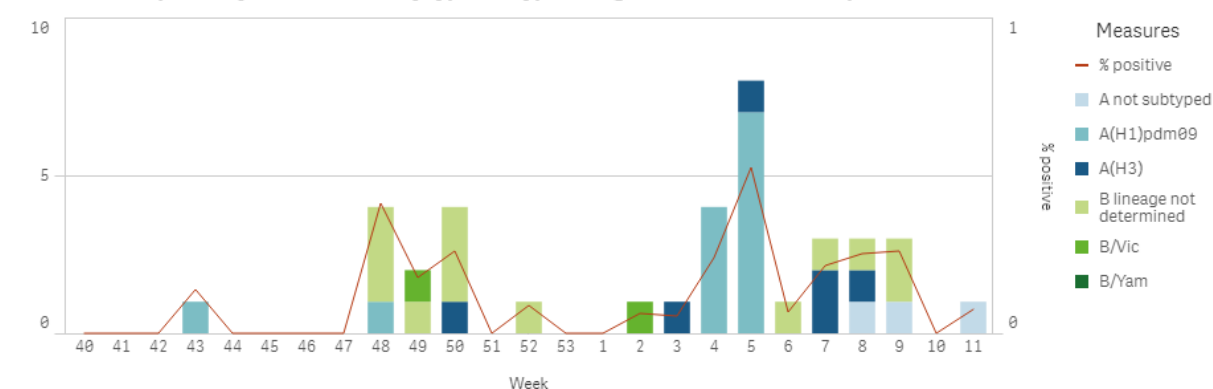
- For the Region as a whole, influenza activity has been at baseline level since the start of the season.
- In total, 727 specimens have tested positive for influenza viruses, 35 from sentinel sources and 692 from non-sentinel sources, with type A (both subtypes) and type B (both lineages) viruses being detected.
- Since the start of the season, few hospitalized laboratory-confirmed influenza cases have been reported: 11 from ICUs (all infected with type A viruses); 9 (all type A viruses) in wards outside ICUs; and 18 from severe acute respiratory infection (SARI)-based surveillance (17 infected with type A viruses and 1 with type B).

Influenza positivity

As of week 11/2021, for the European Region, influenza virus positivity in sentinel specimens remained below the epidemic threshold, which is set at 10% (Fig. 3.).

Fig. 3. Influenza virus detections in sentinel-source specimens by type and subtype, and week for weeks 40/2020-11/2021

Influenza virus positivity and detections by type, subtype/lineage and week - WHO Europe, season 2020/2021



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External data sources

Mortality monitoring: Overall pooled estimates for 26 countries or areas participating in the EuroMOMO project have now returned to normal levels following a period of substantial excess mortality observed in some countries. However, a few countries may still have some excess mortality.

Primary care data

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

For week 11/2021, 1 of 1 256 sentinel specimens tested for influenza viruses was positive for type A influenza virus (0.1%). Since the start of the season, of 29 468 sentinel-source specimens that have been tested for influenza viruses, 37 were positive (22 type A and 15 type B viruses) (Figure 3 and Table 1).

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

Table 1. Influenza virus detections in sentinel-source specimens by type and subtype for week 11/2021 and cumulatively for the influenza season 2020-2021

Virus type and subtype	Current Week (11)		Influenza Season 2020-2021	
	Number	% ^a	Number	% ^a
Influenza A	1	-	22	59.5
A(H1)pdm09	0	-	13	68.4
A(H3)	0	-	6	31.6
A not subtyped	1	-	3	-
Influenza B	0	-	15	40.5
B/Victoria lineage	0	-	2	100
B/Yamagata lineage	0	-	0	0
Unknown lineage	0	-	13	-
Total detections (total tested)	1 (1 256)	-	37 (29 468)	0.1

^a For 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.

External data sources

[Influenzanet](#) collects weekly data on symptoms in the general community from different participating countries across the EU/EEA. For week 11/2021, data reported from 8 countries representing between 511 and 50 343 active participants per country were included, for a total of 81 659 participants.

Activity is reported in classes of 5 per 1 000 participants.

ILI activity: Germany, Portugal and Switzerland have reported between 0 and 5 cases per 1 000 active participants, Denmark, France, Italy and UK have reported between 5 and 10 cases per 1 000 active participants. The Netherlands has reported between 15 and 20 cases per 1 000 active participants. Activity is low (below the first quartile of historical data for this week).

COVID-19 activity: Portugal has reported between 5 and 10 possible cases per 1 000 weekly participants, Denmark has reported between 15 and 20 possible cases per 1 000 weekly participants, France and Italy have reported between 25 and 30 possible cases per 1 000 weekly participants, UK has reported between 30 and 35 possible cases per 1 000 weekly participants, Switzerland has reported between 40 and 45 possible cases per 1 000 weekly participants and the Netherlands has reported between 65 and 70 possible cases per 1 000 weekly participants.

Hospital surveillance

A subset of countries and areas monitor severe disease related to influenza virus infection by surveillance of 1) hospitalized laboratory-confirmed influenza cases in ICUs or other wards, or 2) severe acute respiratory infection (SARI; mainly in the eastern part of the Region).

Laboratory-confirmed hospitalized cases

1.1) Hospitalized laboratory-confirmed influenza cases – ICUs

There were no reports of hospitalized laboratory-confirmed influenza cases in ICUs during week 11/2021.

Since the start of the season, there have been 11 hospitalized laboratory-confirmed influenza cases in ICUs (all infected with type A viruses; one was subtyped as A(H1)pdm09) reported by Ukraine (n = 2) and the UK (n = 9). Of two cases with known age, one was a patient in the 15-64 years age group and one was a patient in the 65 years and over age group. All cases were non-fatal.

1.2) Hospitalized laboratory-confirmed influenza cases – other wards

There were no reports of hospitalized laboratory-confirmed influenza cases in other wards during week 11/2021.

Since the start of the season, there have been 9 laboratory-confirmed influenza cases (all were type A viruses) in wards outside ICUs reported by Ukraine: 7 viruses were subtyped and all were A(H1)pdm09. Four cases were in children between 0-4 years old, 4 cases were in patients aged 15-64 years and one case was in a patient in the 65 years and over age group. All cases were non-fatal.

Severe acute respiratory infection (SARI)-based hospital surveillance

For week 11/2021, 1 479 SARI cases were reported by 12 countries or areas. Of 326 specimens tested for influenza viruses, one (0.3%) was positive (type A).

For the season to date, 13 countries and areas (Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kosovo (in accordance with UN Security Council resolution 1244 (1999)), Republic of Moldova, Russian Federation, Serbia, Ukraine and Uzbekistan) have reported 30 274 SARI cases and 9 471 were tested for influenza viruses. To date, 20 specimens have tested positive for influenza viruses: 12 from Ukraine (8 were A(H1)pdm09 viruses and 4 were type A, not subtyped), 7 from Armenia (all A(H3) subtype) and 1 from Azerbaijan (a B/Victoria lineage virus).

Virus characteristics

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

Non-sentinel virologic data

For week 11/2021, 4 of 29 667 non-sentinel specimens (from 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: 2 were type A and 2 were type B (Table 2). Table 2. Influenza virus detections in non-sentinel source specimens by type and subtype, week 11/2021 and cumulatively for the influenza season 2020-2021

Since the beginning of the season, 704 of 528 209 non-sentinel specimens tested positive for influenza viruses; 352 (50%) were type A and 352 (50%) type B. Of 67 subtyped A viruses, 29 (43.3%) were A(H1)pdm09 and 38 (56.7%) were A(H3). Of 352 type B viruses, only 10 were ascribed to a lineage: 8 B/Victoria and 2 B/Yamagata.

Table 2. Influenza virus detections in non-sentinel source specimens by type and subtype, week 11/2021 and cumulatively for the influenza season 2020-2021

Virus type and subtype	Current Week (11)		Influenza Season 2020-2021	
	Number	% ^a	Number	% ^a
Influenza A	2	50.0	352	50.0
A(H1)pdm09	0	-	29	43.3
A(H3)	0	-	38	56.7
A not subtyped	2	-	285	-
Influenza B	2	50.0	352	50.0
B/Victoria lineage	1	100.0	8	80.0
B/Yamagata lineage	0	-	2	20.0
Unknown lineage	1	-	342	-
Total detections (total tested)	4 (29 667)	-	704 (528 209)	-

^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 characterization

Since week 40/2020, 11 viruses have been characterized genetically:

- 5 type A: 4 influenza A(H3) with 2 attributed to the HA subgroup 3C.2a1b + T131K-A, represented by A/Slovenia/1637/2020, 1 attributed to the HA subgroup 3C.2a1b + T135K-A, represented by A/Denmark/3264/2019 and 1 attributed to the HA subgroup 3C.2a1b+T135K-B represented by A/Hong Kong/2671/2019; and 1 A(H1)pdm09 attributed to the group 6B.1A5A + 187V/A represented by A/Guangdong-Maonan/SWL1536/2019.
- 6 type B: 2 B(Vic)-lineage clade 1A(Δ3)B represented by B/Washington/02/2019 and 4 B(Vic) that were not assigned to any clade.

ECDC published the [February](#) virus characterisation report that describes the available data from circulating viruses collected after 31 August 2020. This and previously published influenza virus characterization reports are available on the [ECDC website](#).

Antiviral susceptibility of seasonal influenza viruses

Since the beginning of the season, 4 influenza viruses have been tested for susceptibility to neuraminidase inhibitors: 2 influenza A(H3) viruses and 2 influenza B/Victoria viruses for which sequence analysis indicated normal inhibition by both oseltamivir and zanamivir.

Vaccine

Available vaccines in Europe

<https://www.ecdc.europa.eu/en/seasonal-influenza/prevention-and-control/vaccines/types-of-seasonal-influenza-vaccine>

Vaccine composition

On 28 February 2020, WHO published recommendations for the components of influenza vaccines for use in the 2020–2021 northern hemisphere influenza season.

Egg-based vaccines should contain the following:

- an A/Guangdong-Maonan/SWL1536/2019 (H1N1)pdm09-like virus (Clade 6B.1A5A+187A);
- an A/Hong Kong/2671/2019 (H3N2)-like virus (Clade 3C.2a1b+T135K-B);
- a B/Washington/02/2019 (B/Victoria lineage)-like virus (Clade 1A(Δ 3)B); and
- a B/Phuket/3073/2013 (B/Yamagata lineage)-like virus (Clade 3).

Cell- or recombinant-based vaccines should contain the following:

- an A/Hawaii/70/2019 (H1N1)pdm09-like virus (Clade 6B.1A5A+187A);
- an A/Hong Kong/45/2019 (H3N2)-like virus (Clade 3C.2a1b+T135K-B);
- a B/Washington/02/2019 (B/Victoria lineage)-like virus (Clade 1A(Δ 3)B); and
- a B/Phuket/3073/2013 (B/Yamagata lineage)-like virus (Clade 3).

It was recommended that the influenza B virus component of **both trivalent vaccine types** for use in the 2020–2021 northern hemisphere influenza season should be a B/Washington/02/2019-like virus of the B/Victoria-lineage.

The [full report](#) and [Frequently Asked Questions](#) for the 28 February 2020 decision are available on the [WHO website](#).

On 25 September 2020, WHO published recommendations for the components of influenza vaccines for use in the 2021 southern hemisphere influenza season:

Egg-based Vaccines

- an A/Victoria/2570/2019 (H1N1)pdm09-like virus;
- an A/Hong Kong/2671/2019 (H3N2)-like virus;
- a B/Washington/02/2019 (B/Victoria lineage)-like virus; and
- a B/Phuket/3073/2013 (B/Yamagata lineage)-like virus.

Cell- or recombinant-based Vaccines

- an A/Wisconsin/588/2019 (H1N1)pdm09-like virus;
- an A/Hong Kong/45/2019 (H3N2)-like virus;
- a B/Washington/02/2019 (B/Victoria lineage)-like virus; and
- a B/Phuket/3073/2013 (B/Yamagata lineage)-like virus.

It was recommended that the influenza B virus component of **both trivalent vaccine types** for use in the 2021 southern hemisphere influenza season should be a B/Washington/02/2019-like virus of the B/Victoria-lineage. The full report is published [here](#).

On 26 February 2021, WHO published [recommendations](#) for the components of influenza vaccines for use in the 2021-2022 northern hemisphere influenza season:

Egg-based Vaccines

- an A/Victoria/2570/2019 (H1N1)pdm09-like virus;
- an A/Cambodia/e0826360/2020 (H3N2)-like virus;
- a B/Washington/02/2019 (B/Victoria lineage)-like virus; and
- a B/Phuket/3073/2013 (B/Yamagata lineage)-like virus.

Cell- or recombinant-based Vaccines

- an A/Wisconsin/588/2019 (H1N1)pdm09-like virus;
- an A/Cambodia/e0826360/2020 (H3N2)-like virus;
- a B/Washington/02/2019 (B/Victoria lineage)-like virus; and
- a B/Phuket/3073/2013 (B/Yamagata lineage)-like virus.

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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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