Influenza Activity Steadily Declines

During week 8 (February 18 to 24, 2018), most influenza surveillance indicators continued to decline. Influenza activity remained at seasonal levels in most regions following several weeks of above expected rates.

Influenza positivity at the BCCDC Public Health Laboratory continued to decline, falling to below 30% in week 8 from a peak of more than 50% in week 52. Influenza B has predominated among influenza detections (57%) this week with type B positivity declining to 16% in week 8. Influenza A(H3N2) remains the dominant subtype among influenza A detections but with co-detection of A(H1N1)pdm09.

Since our last bulletin, 9 new lab-confirmed outbreaks were reported, all from long-term care facilities (LTCFs). Of the 9 outbreaks, 6 had influenza B detected and 3 had influenza A detected of which one had subtype information available and was A(H3N2). No school ILI outbreaks were reported.

Additional 2017-18 mid-season reports of influenza vaccine effectiveness (VE) for the northern hemisphere have been published from Europe and Hong Kong. Links to the papers and a summary of findings are provided on page 11. Findings are consistent with earlier reports from Canada and the United States indicating low VE against A(H3N2), higher against influenza B.
British Columbia

Sentinel Physicians

The proportion of patients with influenza-like illness (ILI), among those presenting to sentinel sites, was below average for the second consecutive week, continuing a downward trend since week 2. Rates are subject to change as reporting becomes more complete. To date, 62% of sentinel sites have reported data for week 8.

Percent of patient visits to sentinel physicians due to influenza-like illness (ILI) compared to historical average, British Columbia, 2017-18

BC Children’s Hospital Emergency Room

In week 8, the proportion of visits to BC Children’s Hospital Emergency Room (ER) attributed to ILI remained within expected levels for this period.

Percent of patients presenting to BC Children’s Hospital ER attributed to influenza-like illness (ILI), British Columbia, 2017-18

Source: BCCH Admitting, Discharge, Transfer database (ADT). Data includes records with a triage chief complaint of “flu” or “influenza” or “fever/cough.”

* 5-year historical average for 2017-18 season based on 2012-13 to 2016-17 seasons; CI=confidence interval.
Medical Services Plan

In week 8, BC Medical Services Plan (MSP) general practitioner claims for influenza illness (II), as a proportion of all submitted MSP claims continued to decline and remained at expected seasonal levels in most regions of the province following several weeks of elevated activity. In week 8, rates for the province overall and IHA, FHA, VIHA and NHA were at expected levels for this time of year, while rates in VCHA showed a slight incline to above the 10-year maximum for this time of year, following several weeks of steady decline.

Service claims submitted to MSP for influenza illness (II)* as a proportion of all submitted general practitioner service claims, British Columbia, 2017-18

* Influenza illness is tracked as the percentage of all submitted MSP general practitioner claims with ICD-9 code 487 (influenza).

Data for the period August 1, 2009 to July 31, 2010 have been excluded from the 10-year median calculation due to atypical seasonality during the 2009/2010 H1N1 pandemic year. MSP data beginning August 1, 2017 corresponds to sentinel ILI week 31; data are current to February 27, 2018.

Data provided by Population Health Surveillance and Epidemiology, BC Ministry of Health Services.
Laboratory Reports

BCCDC Public Health Laboratory

In week 8, 465 patients were tested for respiratory viruses at the BCCDC Public Health Laboratory (PHL). Of these, 133 (29%) tested positive for influenza; 57 (43%) had influenza A detected [29 A(H3N2), 21 A(H1N1)pdm09 and 7 subtype pending] and 76 (57%) had influenza B detected. Influenza positivity at the BCCDC PHL declined to below 30% in week 8 from a peak of more than 50% in week 52. Influenza B comprised more than half of all influenza detections in week 8 with influenza B positivity rates declining from a peak of >20% in weeks 52-5 to 16% in week 8. Based on national surveillance reports, B(Yamagata) is the predominant influenza B lineage circulating in BC and elsewhere in Canada this season. Influenza A(H3N2) remains the dominant subtype among influenza A detections but with co-detection of A(H1N1)pdm09.

Cumulatively during the 2017-18 season (since week 40, starting October 1, 2017), 2830 (32%) patients tested positive for influenza at the BCCDC PHL, including 1433 (51%) with influenza A [1073 A(H3N2), 300 A(H1N1)pdm09, 60 subtype pending], 1386 (49%) with influenza B and 11 patients with both influenza A [nine with A(H3N2) and two with A(H1N1)pdm09] and B detected.

More than half (59%) of A(H3N2) cases have been detected among elderly adults ≥65 years old, with 8% <20 years old, 17% 20-49 years old, and 15% 50-64 years old. Conversely, 39% of influenza B cases have been detected among elderly adults ≥65 years old, with 17% <20 years old, 25% 20-49 years old, and 19% 50-64 years old. Among A(H1N1)pdm09 cases, only 17% have been detected among elderly adults ≥65 years old, with 28% <20 years old, 38% 20-49 years old, and 17% 50-64 years old.

Coronavirus and RSV were the most commonly detected non-influenza respiratory virus during this period. RSV detections have been less frequent than in the 2016-17 season; 7% of patients tested positive for RSV in week 8 this season compared to 19% in the 2016-17 season during the same period.

Source: BCCDC Public Health Laboratory (PHDRW); Data are current to February 28, 2018.
Cumulative number (since week 40) of influenza detections by type subtype and age group,  
BCCDC Public Health Laboratory, 2017-18

Age distribution of influenza detections (cumulative since week 40),  
BCCDC Public Health Laboratory, 2017-18

Source: BCCDC Public Health Laboratory (PHDRW); Data are current to February 28, 2018; figure includes cumulative influenza detections for specimens collected from weeks 40-8.
BC Children’s and Women’s Health Centre Laboratory
In week 8, 118 tests for influenza viruses were conducted at the BC Children’s and Women’s Health Centre (CWHC) laboratory. Of these, 8 (7%) were positive for influenza A and 7 (6%) were positive for influenza B. Respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) was the most commonly detected respiratory viruses during this period, with 26% positivity in week 8. In contrast to observations from the BCCDC PHL, RSV positivity from this week was greater than week 8 in the 2016-17 season where RSV positivity was 12%.

Influenza and other virus detections among respiratory specimens submitted to BC Children’s and Women’s Health Centre Laboratory, 2017-18

* Positive rates were calculated using aggregate data. The denominators for each rate represent the total number of tests; multiple tests may be performed for a single specimen and/or patient.
Influenza-like Illness (ILI) Outbreaks
Since our last bulletin, 9 new lab-confirmed outbreaks were reported; all were from long-term care facilities (LTCFs). Of the 9 newly reported outbreaks, 1 had onset in week 6 in VIHA, 1 had onset in week 7 in VIHA, 6 had onset in week 8 (4 in FHA, 2 in IHA) and 1 had onset in week 9 in FHA. Of the 9 outbreaks, 6 had influenza B detected and 3 had influenza A detected; the 1 influenza A outbreak that had subtype information available was A(H3N2). No school ILI outbreaks were reported.

Consistent with other surveillance indicators, the number of influenza outbreak reports per week has declined following a peak in week 1 although some delay in reporting should be taken into account. The majority of outbreaks reported in recent weeks have been due to influenza B.

Cumulatively during the 2017-18 season (since week 37, starting September 10, 2017), 144 lab-confirmed influenza outbreaks have been reported, including 49 with influenza A detected [24 A(H3N2) and 25 subtype unknown], 84 with influenza B, 3 with influenza A (H3N2) and influenza B, and 8 with influenza A (unspecified subtype) and influenza B; of these, 135 were reported in LTCFs and 9 were reported from an acute care facility. No influenza A outbreaks have been subtyped as A(H1N1)pdm09 so far this season. Additionally, 27 school ILI outbreaks have occurred without etiologic agent identified.

So far during this season of mixed A(H3N2) and influenza B co-circulation, the number of long term care facility outbreaks reported since week 40 (n=133) is lower than the tally for the same period during recent A(H3N2) dominant epidemics in 2014-15 (n=155) and 2016-17 (n=166) but higher than during recent A(H1N1)pdm09 dominant epidemics in 2013-14 (n=7) and 2015-16 (n=19), bearing in mind variation in the timing of seasonal epidemics that may influence final end-of-season comparisons.

Number of influenza-like illness (ILI) outbreaks reported, British Columbia 2017-18

* School-based ILI outbreak defined as >10% absenteeism on any day, most likely due to ILI.
† Facility-based influenza outbreaks defined as 2 or more ILI cases within 7-day period, with at least one laboratory-confirmed case of influenza.
Updated Antiviral Guidelines
The Association of Medical Microbiology and Infectious Disease Canada (AMMI Canada) have released updated guidance on the use of antiviral drugs given potential low vaccine effectiveness for the 2017-18 influenza season. These guidelines are available at: https://www.ammi.ca/Update/79.ENG.pdf.
**National**

**FluWatch (week 7, February 11 to 17, 2018)**

Overall, influenza activity in Canada remains at peak levels. Influenza activity is decreasing in some parts of the country but at the national level, the decline in activity has been slow. In week 7, detections of influenza B were greater than those of influenza A. To date this season, the majority of laboratory-confirmed cases, hospitalizations and deaths with influenza have been among adults 65 years of age and older. Details are available at: [www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/flu-influenza/influenza-surveillance/weekly-influenza-reports.html](http://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/flu-influenza/influenza-surveillance/weekly-influenza-reports.html).

**National Microbiology Laboratory (NML): Strain Characterization**

From September 1, 2017 to March 1, 2018, the National Microbiology Laboratory (NML) received 1,917 influenza viruses from Canadian laboratories for antigenic characterization.

**Influenza A(H3N2):** Of the 981 influenza A(H3N2) viruses, only 218 (22%) had sufficient haemagglutination titre for antigenic characterization by haemagglutination inhibition (HI) assay. Of the 218 viruses characterized by HI assay, 189 (87%) were considered antigenically similar to a cell culture-propagated A/Hong Kong/4801/2014-like virus, the WHO-recommended A(H3N2) component for the 2017-18 northern hemisphere influenza vaccine, while 29 (13%) viruses (all belonging to genetic clade 3C.3a) showed reduced titre with ferret antisera raised against cell culture-propagated A/Hong Kong/4801/2014. Of the 199 out of 218 viruses that were antigenically characterized with available sequencing information, 153 belonged to genetic clade 3C.2a, 17 belonged to subclade 3C.2a1 and 29 belonged to clade 3C.3a; sequencing is pending for the 19 remaining isolates. Of the 763 viruses genetically characterized, 679 (89%) were reported to belong to genetic clade 3C.2a, which includes the A/Hong Kong/4801/2014 vaccine strain, while 82 (11%) belonged to subclade 3C.2a1 and 2 belonged to clade 3C.3a.

**Influenza A(H1N1)pdm09:** All of the 98 A(H1N1)pdm09 viruses characterized were antigenically similar to an A/Michigan/45/2015-like virus, the WHO-recommended influenza A(H1N1) component for the 2017-18 northern hemisphere influenza vaccine.

**Influenza B:** Of the 838 influenza B viruses characterized, 36 (4%) belonged to the B(Victoria) lineage and 802 (96%) belonged to the B(Yamagata) lineage. Among the 36 B(Victoria) viruses, 8 (22%) were characterized as antigenically similar to a B/Brisbane/60/2008(Victoria)-like virus, the WHO-recommended influenza B component for the 2017-18 northern hemisphere trivalent influenza vaccine, while 28 (78%) viruses showed reduced titre with ferret antisera produced against cell-propagated B/Brisbane/60/2008. Sequence analysis showed that the 28 viruses that showed reduced titre had a two-amino acid deletion in the hemagglutinin (HA) gene. Among the 802 B(Yamagata) viruses, all were antigenically similar to a B/Phuket/3073/2013(Yamagata lineage)-like virus, the WHO-recommended influenza B component for the 2017-18 northern hemisphere quadrivalent influenza vaccine containing two influenza B strains.

**National Microbiology Laboratory (NML): Antiviral Resistance**

From September 1, 2017 to March 1, 2018, the NML received influenza viruses from Canadian laboratories for drug susceptibility testing.

**Amantadine:** Of the 1061 influenza A viruses [969 A(H3N2) and 92 A(H1N1)pdm09] tested against amantadine, all were resistant except two A(H3N2) viruses which were sensitive.

**Oseltamivir:** Of the 852 influenza viruses [419 A(H3N2), 78 A(H1N1)pdm09, and 355 B] tested against oseltamivir, all were sensitive except one A(H1N1)pdm09 virus with a H275Y mutation which was resistant.

**Zanamivir:** Of the 848 influenza viruses [415 A(H3N2), 78 A(H1N1)pdm09, and 355 B] tested against zanamivir, all were sensitive except one B virus which was resistant.
**Mid-season 2017-18 Vaccine Effectiveness Estimates**

**Canada**

On February 1, 2018, Canadian researchers published the first estimates of mid-season influenza vaccine effectiveness (VE) for the 2017-18 season. Adjusted VE against A(H3N2) was low at 17% (95%CI: -14 to 40%). Higher adjusted VE was observed for influenza B at 55% (95%CI: 38 to 68%), despite prominent use of lineage-mismatched B(Victoria) trivalent vaccine in most regions. The full report is available as an open-access publication from *EuroSurveillance*: http://www.eurosurveillance.org/content/10.2807/1560-7917.ES.2018.23.5.18-00035

**United States**

On February 15, 2018, the US CDC published interim estimates of influenza vaccine effectiveness (VE) for the 2017-18 season. Adjusted VE against A(H3N2) was 25% (95% CI: 13 to 36%), comparable to Canadian estimates with both suggesting low protection against the dominant circulating strain. Adjusted VE against influenza B was 42% (95% CI: 25 to 56%), somewhat lower than previous Canadian findings despite the more prominent use of quadrivalent vaccines. The full report is available from *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report (MMWR)*: https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/67/wr/mm6706a2.htm?s_cid=mm6706a2_e

**Spain (Navarre)**

On February 15, 2018, Spanish researchers published interim estimates of influenza vaccine effectiveness (VE) for the 2017-18 season. The adjusted VE against influenza B, predominantly B(Yamagata), was 52% (95% CI: 12 to 74%) in the outpatient setting. This finding suggests moderate, cross-lineage protection against influenza B. The full report is available from *Eurosurveillance*: https://www.eurosurveillance.org/content/10.2807/1560-7917.ES.2018.23.7.18-00057

**Hong Kong**

On February 22, 2018, Hong Kong researchers published interim estimates of influenza vaccine effectiveness (VE) among hospitalized children for the 2017-18 season. The 2017-18 season in Hong Kong has been characterized by influenza B(Yamagata) activity. VE among children aged 6 months to 17 years of age was 65% (95% CI: 40 to 80) for influenza B. Differences in study design, patient populations and other epidemiological factors, as well as the use of predominantly quadrivalent influenza vaccine, which includes the B(Yamagata) lineage virus, should be taken into account in comparing these findings to other studies. The full report is available from *Eurosurveillance*: https://www.eurosurveillance.org/content/10.2807/1560-7917.ES.2018.23.8.18-00062

**Europe (I-MOVE Group)**

On March 1, 2018, European researchers from the I-MOVE multicentre case-control study published interim estimates of influenza vaccine effectiveness (VE) for the 2017-18 season. The 2017-18 season in I-MOVE countries has been characterised by predominant circulation of influenza B, with a greater proportion of A(H1N1)pdm09 than A(H3N2) among influenza A detections.

Adjusted VE against A(H3N2) was -16% (95% CI: -96 to 31) for all ages suggesting no protection, and consistent with Canadian findings of low VE. Despite predominant use of trivalent influenza vaccine containing lineage-mismatched influenza B(Victoria) antigen, adjusted VE against influenza B, that was predominantly B(Yamagata), was 39% (95% CI: 19 to 54) for all ages and 49% (95% CI: 19 to 67) when restricted to mismatched B(Yamagata) specimens. This finding suggests moderate, cross-lineage protection against influenza B, which has been observed previously for influenza B and is also consistent with Canadian findings. The full report is available from *Eurosurveillance*: https://www.eurosurveillance.org/content/10.2807/1560-7917.ES.2018.23.9.18-00086
USA (week 7, February 11 to 17, 2018)
During week 7, overall influenza activity remained elevated in the United States. The most frequently identified influenza virus subtype reported by public health laboratories during week 7 was influenza A(H3N2). The percentage of respiratory specimens testing positive for influenza in clinical laboratories remained elevated. The proportion of deaths attributed to pneumonia and influenza (P&I) was above the system-specific epidemic threshold in the National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS) Mortality Surveillance System. Thirteen influenza-associated pediatric deaths were reported. A cumulative rate of 74.5 laboratory-confirmed influenza-associated hospitalizations per 100,000 population was reported. The proportion of outpatient visits for influenza-like illness (ILI) was 6.4%, which is above the national baseline of 2.2%. The geographic spread of influenza in Puerto Rico and 48 states was reported as widespread; the District of Columbia, Guam and two states reported local activity; and the U.S. Virgin Islands reported no activity. Details are available at: www.cdc.gov/flu/weekly/.

WHO
There have been no WHO influenza updates since our last bulletin. Previous updates are available at: www.who.int/influenza/surveillance_monitoring/updates/en/.
WHO Recommendations for Influenza Vaccines

WHO Recommendations for 2017-18 Northern Hemisphere Influenza Vaccine

On March 2, 2017, the WHO announced the recommended strain components for the 2017-18 northern hemisphere influenza vaccine:

- an A/Michigan/45/2015 (H1N1)pdm09-like virus;†
- an A/Hong Kong/4801/2014 (H3N2)-like virus;
- a B/Brisbane/60/2008 (Victoria-lineage)-like virus;
- a B/Phuket/3073/2013 (Yamagata-lineage)-like virus (quadrivalent vaccines only).

* These recommended strains are the same as those recommended for the 2017 southern hemisphere vaccine and represent a change for one of the four components used for the 2016-17 northern hemisphere vaccine.
† Recommended strain represents a change from an A/California/7/2009-like virus, which had been retained as the A(H1N1)pdm09 component since the 2009 pandemic, to an A/Michigan/45/2015-like virus belonging to the phylogenetic subclade 6B.1.


WHO Recommendations for the 2018-19 Northern Hemisphere Influenza Vaccine

On February 22, 2018, the WHO announced recommended strain components for the 2018-19 northern hemisphere influenza vaccine:

- an A/Michigan/45/2015 (H1N1)pdm09-like virus;†
- an A/Singapore/INFIMH-16-0019/2016 (H3N2)-like virus;‡
- a B/Colorado/06/2017-like (Victoria-lineage) virus.§
- a B/Phuket/3073/2013-like (Yamagata-lineage) virus (quadrivalent vaccines only).§

* Recommended strains represent a change for two of the four components used for the 2017-18 northern hemisphere vaccines. Recommended strains are similar to the 2018 southern hemisphere vaccine with the exception of the B/Colorado/06/2017-like virus which replaces the B/Brisbane/60/2008-like virus as the B(Victoria-lineage) virus component.
† Recommended strain is the same as recommended for the 2017-18 northern hemisphere and 2018 southern hemisphere vaccines. The A/Michigan/45/2015-like virus belongs to the phylogenetic subclade 6B.1.
‡ Recommended strain for the A(H3N2) component represents a phylogenetic clade-level change from a clade 3C.2a virus to a clade 3C.2a1 virus.
§ Recommended strain for the influenza B component represents a change for the B(Victoria)-lineage component compared to the 2017-18 northern hemisphere and 2018 southern hemisphere vaccines from a B/Brisbane/60/2008-like virus, which had been retained since the 2009-10 season, to a B/Colorado/06/2017-like virus, belonging to the clade 1A antigenic drift variant with a two-amino acid deletion at positions 162-163. The B(Yamagata)-lineage component, B/Phuket/3073/2013-like virus, recommended for quadrivalent vaccine remains unchanged from the 2017-18 northern hemisphere vaccine.

Additional Information

Explanatory Note:
The surveillance period for the 2017-18 influenza season is defined starting in week 40. Weeks 36-39 of the 2016-17 season are shown on graphs for comparison purposes.

List of Acronyms:

ACF: Acute Care Facility  
Al: Avian influenza  
FHA: Fraser Health Authority  
HBoV: Human bocavirus  
HMPV: Human metapneumovirus  
HSDA: Health Service Delivery Area  
IHA: Interior Health Authority  
ILI: Influenza-Like Illness  
LTCF: Long-Term Care Facility  
MSP: BC Medical Services Plan  
NHA: Northern Health Authority  
NML: National Microbiological Laboratory  
A(H1N1)pdm09: Pandemic H1N1 influenza (2009)  
RSV: Respiratory syncytial virus  
VCHA: Vancouver Coastal Health Authority  
VIHA: Vancouver Island Health Authority  
WHO: World Health Organization

Current AMMI Canada Guidelines on the Use of Antiviral Drugs for Influenza:  
www.ammi.ca/Update/79.ENG.pdf

Web Sites:

BCCDC Emerging Respiratory Pathogen Updates:  
www.bccdc.ca/health-professionals/data-reports/emerging-respiratory-virus-updates

Influenza Web Sites

USA Weekly Surveillance Reports: www.cdc.gov/flu/weekly/  
Joint ECDC – WHO/Europe weekly influenza update (Flu News Europe): flunewseurope.org  
WHO – Weekly Epidemiological Record: www.who.int/wer/en/  
WHO Collaborating Centre for Reference and Research on Influenza (Australia): www.influenzacentre.org/  
Australian Influenza Report:  

Avian Influenza Web Sites

World Organization for Animal Health: www.oie.int/eng/en_index.htm

Contact Us:

Tel: (604) 707-2510  
Fax: (604) 707-2516  
Email: InfluenzaFieldEpi@bccdc.ca

Communicable Disease Prevention and Control Services (CDPACS)  
BC Centre for Disease Control  
655 West 12th Ave, Vancouver BC V5Z 4R4

Online: www.bccdc.ca/health-professionals/data-reports/influenza-surveillance-reports
Influenza-Like Illness (ILI) Outbreak Summary Report Form

Please complete and email to ilioutbreak@bccdc.ca

Note: This form is for provincial surveillance purposes.
Please notify your local health unit per local guidelines/requirements.

ILI: Acute onset of respiratory illness with fever and cough and with one or more of the following: sore throat, arthralgia, myalgia, or prostration which could be due to influenza virus. In children under 5, gastrointestinal symptoms may also be present. In patients under 5 or 65 and older, fever may not be prominent.

Schools and work site outbreak: greater than 10% absenteeism on any day, most likely due to ILI.
Residential institutions (facilities) outbreak: two or more cases of ILI within a seven-day period.

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