

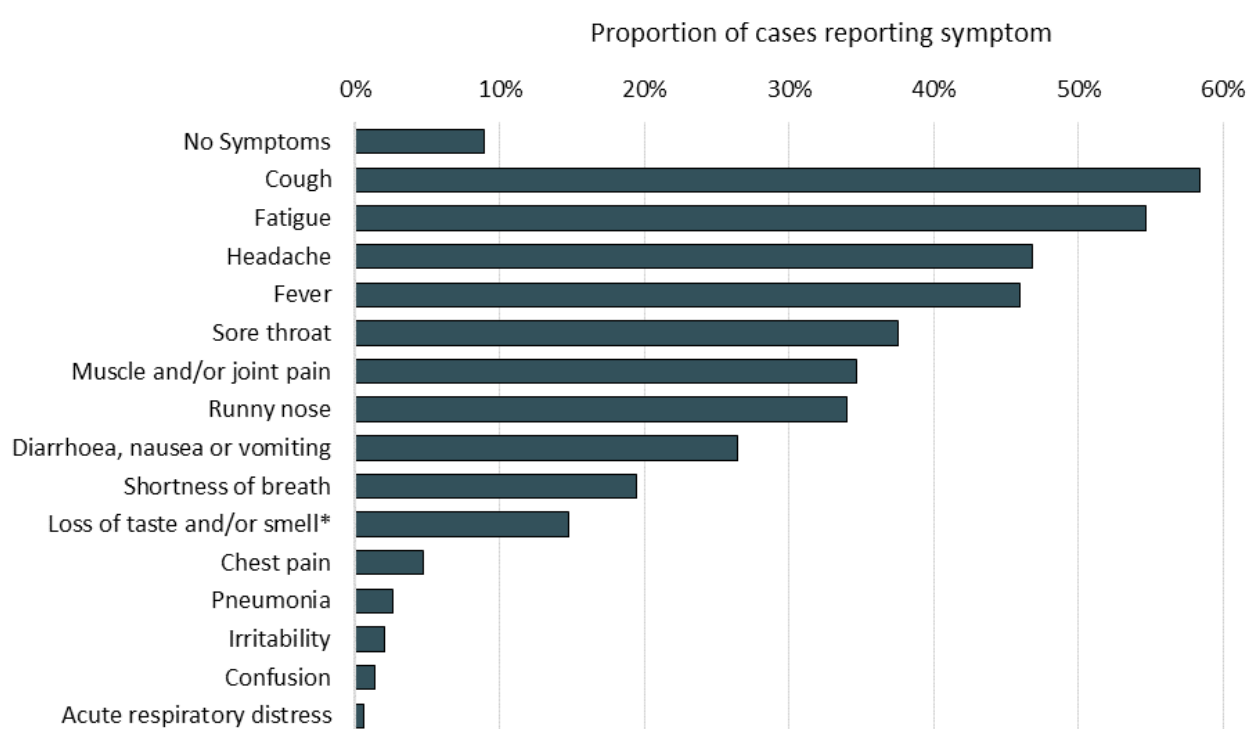
IN FOCUS

SYMPTOM PROFILE FOR COVID-19 IN NSW

Reporting period: 1 January to 29 August 2020

During the initial case interview the newly confirmed COVID-19 case is asked whether they are currently experiencing any symptoms. Since January 2020, 3,468 of the 3,855 (90%) confirmed COVID-19 cases have reported at least one symptom. There were 46 (1.2%) records which had no information on symptoms recorded.

Proportion of COVID-19 cases reporting symptom at initial case interview, as at 29 August 2020



* Loss of taste and smell was added to the standardised collection form from 9 May 2020 and may be under counted.

Interpretation: The symptoms reported by COVID-19 cases in NSW are consistent with a mild respiratory infection in the majority of cases. The principal symptoms reported in cases were cough (58%), fatigue (55%), headache (47%), fever (39%) and sore throat (37%).

More severe respiratory symptoms at diagnosis, including pneumonia, shortness of breath and/or acute respiratory disease (ARD) were reported in 20% of cases and in 56% of fatal cases.

Difference in symptom profile by age group

Differences in reported symptoms may be influenced by a range of variables including age of the case and the surveillance strategies used. Many children may have their parent or guardian conduct the interview on their behalf and may not be able to articulate the range of symptoms they are currently experiencing.

Proportion of COVID-19 cases reporting symptom at initial case interview by age group, as at 29 August 2020

| Symptoms | Age group at event | | | | | | | | |
|-----------------------------------|--------------------|------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-----|
| | 0-4 | 5-11 | 12-17 | 18-29 | 30-49 | 50-59 | 60-69 | 70-79 | 80+ |
| No symptoms reported at interview | 30% | 29% | 13% | 9% | 9% | 7% | 7% | 7% | 11% |
| Cough | 38% | 29% | 44% | 55% | 54% | 65% | 66% | 67% | 66% |
| Fatigue | 16% | 17% | 36% | 52% | 55% | 61% | 63% | 60% | 42% |
| Headache | 8% | 30% | 43% | 50% | 50% | 52% | 49% | 39% | 17% |
| Fever | 32% | 22% | 34% | 43% | 48% | 51% | 51% | 45% | 37% |
| Sore throat | 8% | 24% | 41% | 42% | 37% | 42% | 37% | 33% | 21% |
| Muscle and/or joint pain | 4% | 5% | 15% | 30% | 40% | 41% | 41% | 32% | 17% |
| Runny nose | 34% | 37% | 43% | 40% | 34% | 32% | 31% | 29% | 19% |
| Diarrhoea, nausea or vomiting | 26% | 16% | 15% | 23% | 25% | 29% | 33% | 32% | 24% |
| Shortness of breath | 2% | 3% | 12% | 17% | 19% | 22% | 21% | 23% | 26% |
| Loss of taste and/or smell* | 0% | 3% | 18% | 20% | 17% | 14% | 13% | 6% | 3% |
| Chest pain | 0% | 0% | 3% | 4% | 5% | 5% | 5% | 6% | 3% |
| Pneumonia | 0% | 0% | 0% | 1% | 2% | 2% | 5% | 7% | 6% |
| Irritability | 8% | 3% | 1% | 1% | 2% | 2% | 2% | 3% | 3% |
| Confusion | 2% | 0% | 1% | 1% | 1% | 0% | 2% | 3% | 5% |
| Acute respiratory distress | 0% | 0% | 0% | 0% | 0% | 0% | 1% | 3% | 2% |

*Loss of taste and smell was added to the standardised collection form from 9 May 2020 and may be under counted.

Interpretation: The symptom profile among adults was very consistent across ages 18–79. The more severe respiratory symptoms, such as shortness of breath, pneumonia and acute respiratory distress, were more prevalent in older people. Young children were more likely to report no symptoms at interview.

The main symptoms reported at diagnosis for each age group are:

- Young children (0–4 years) — cough (38%), runny nose (34%), fever (32%) and diarrhoea and/or nausea and vomiting (26%).
- Primary school-aged children (5–11) — runny nose (37%), headache (30%), cough (29%), sore throat (24%) and fever (22%).
- High school-aged children (12–17) — cough (44%), headache (43%), runny nose (43%), sore throat (41%) and fatigue (36%).
- Adults between 18 and 79 had the same top five symptoms of cough, fatigue, headache, fever and sore throat, sometimes in varying order.
- Older adults (80+) —cough (66%), fatigue (42%), fever (37%), shortness of breath (26%) and diarrhoea and/or nausea and vomiting (24%).

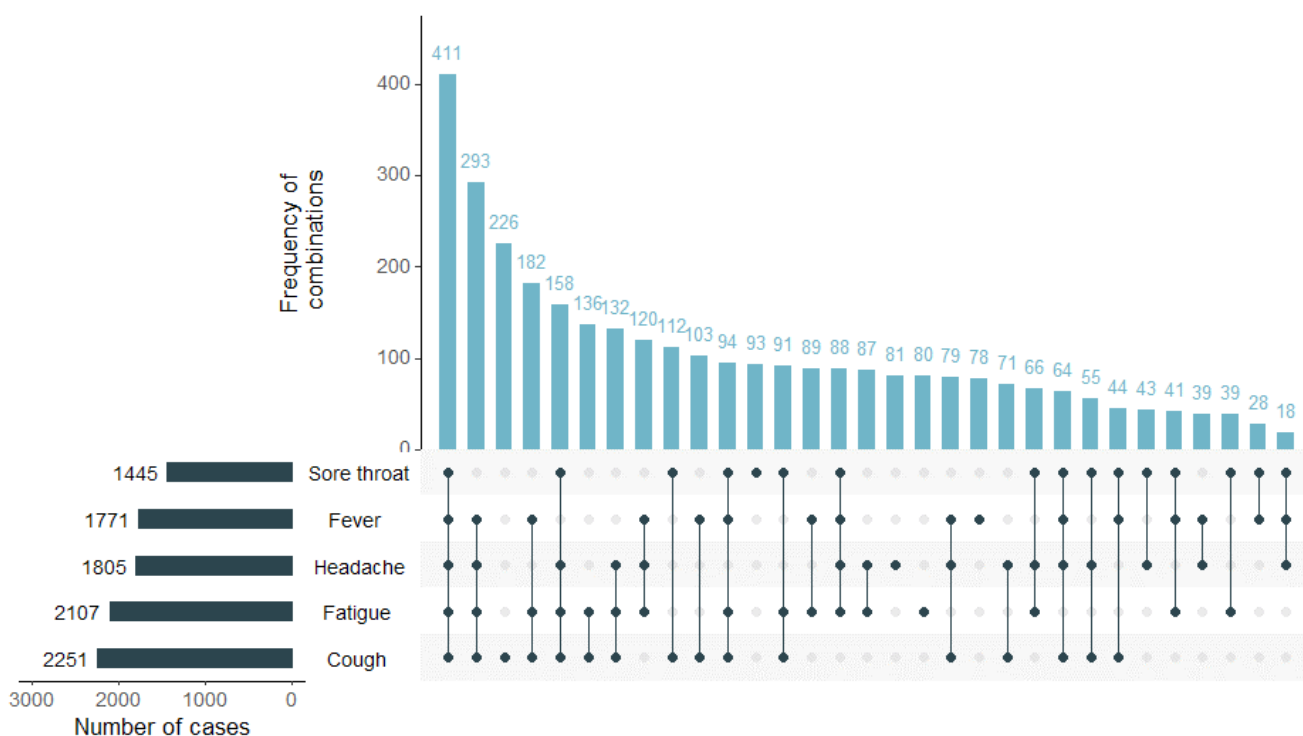
Reporting period: 1 January to 29 August 2020

Multiple symptoms

A typical symptom profile of a COVID-19 case includes the reporting of multiple symptoms.

The figure below shows the variation in combinations of symptoms observed in reported cases for the five most frequently observed symptoms (cough, fatigue, headache, fever and sore throat). The horizontal bars on the left show the number of cases reporting that symptom, either individually or in combination. The black circles and lines indicate particular combinations of the five symptoms, with the vertical green bars showing how many cases reported that combination.

Combinations of COVID-19 symptoms in confirmed cases as at 29 August 2020



Interpretation: The combination of the top five symptoms occurred more often than any other combination; 411 cases recorded all five at diagnosis. Cough is the most common symptom to be reported without any other symptom (283 cases), followed by sore throat (93 cases). Fatigue, headache and fever are more likely to be reported in combination with another symptom rather than individually.