

# NSW Health Influenza Surveillance Report

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Week 27: 4 to 10 July 2016

## Summary:

- **The influenza season has started and activity continues to increase steadily, particularly in metropolitan Sydney.**
- **Admissions to critical care wards for pneumonia or influenza-like illness increased markedly.**
- **Influenza A(H3N2) and influenza A(H1N1) strains are circulating at similar levels.**

## In this reporting week:

- [Hospital Surveillance](#) – the rate of influenza like illness (ILI) presentations to selected emergency departments increased further above the seasonal threshold. Pneumonia and ILI admissions to critical care wards increased markedly.
- [Laboratory surveillance](#) – the proportion of respiratory samples positive for influenza was 12.2%, continuing its steady increase.
- [Community surveillance](#) – influenza notifications were increased, particularly in metropolitan Sydney local health districts (LHD). General Practice surveillance systems showed moderate levels of ILI activity, similar to the previous week. Four new influenza outbreaks were reported in residential care facilities.
- [Deaths](#) - The NSW Registry of Births, Deaths, and Marriages have recorded 12 deaths in association with influenza in 2016. The rate of deaths classified as “pneumonia and influenza” remained low.
- [National and international influenza surveillance](#) – influenza activity remains at low levels across Australia, with current influenza strains well matched to the 2016 influenza vaccines. Influenza activity is increasing in other regions in the Southern Hemisphere.

## About this report:

Health Protection NSW collects and analyses surveillance data on influenza and other respiratory viruses. Surveillance reports are produced weekly commencing in May, and continuing until the end of the influenza season. Monthly reports are produced throughout the rest of the year.

The influenza surveillance reports include data from a range of surveillance systems and sources concerned with Emergency Department illness surveillance, laboratory (virological) surveillance, and community illness surveillance. Pneumonia and influenza mortality data are also monitored and reported upon periodically.

For further information on influenza see the [NSW Health Influenza website](#).

# 1. Hospital Surveillance

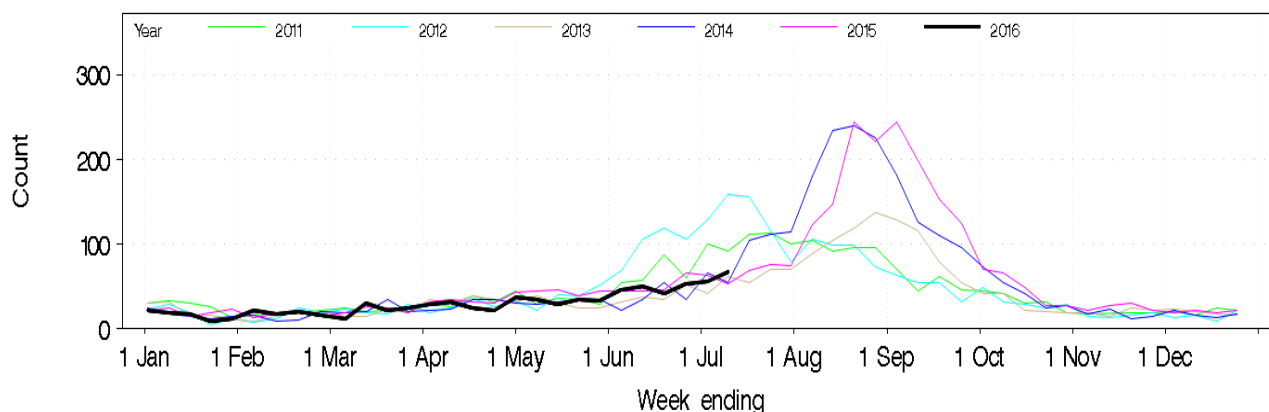
## NSW emergency department (ED) presentations for influenza-like illness (ILI) and other respiratory illnesses

Source: PHREDSS [1]

For the week ending 10 July 2016:

- ILI presentations [2] increased this week and are expected to continue to increase further over the coming weeks (Figure 1 and Table 1). There were no major variations in presentations by Local Health District.
- The index of increase for ILI presentations was 21.7 on 10 July, an increase on the previous week (16.6). The index of increase for ILI presentations crossed the threshold of 15 in the week ending 26 June, consistent with the start of the influenza season.
- The proportion of ILI presentations to all ED presentations remained relatively low at 1.7 per 1000 presentations, slightly higher than the previous week (1.4).
- ED presentations for pneumonia [3] increased but were within the usual range for this time of year (Figure 2).
- Pneumonia or ILI presentations which resulted in admission increased but were below the usual range for this time of year. However, presentations which resulted in admissions to critical care wards increased markedly and were above the usual range for this time of year, particularly at Fairfield Hospital (Figure 3 and Table 1).
- Bronchiolitis presentations decreased this week and were below the usual range for this time of year (Figure 4).
- The category combining all respiratory, fever and unspecified infection presentations increased and were within the usual range for this time of year (Table 1).

**Figure 1:** Total weekly counts of ED visits for influenza-like illness, all ages, from January – 10 July 2016 (black line), compared with each of the 5 previous years (coloured lines).



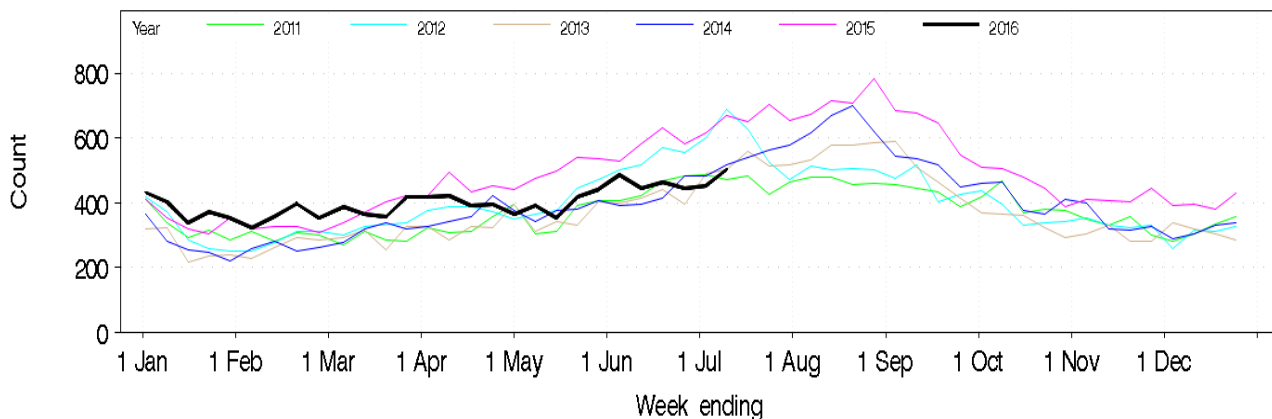
[1] NSW Health Public Health Rapid, Emergency Disease and Syndromic Surveillance system. Centre for Epidemiology and Evidence, NSW Ministry of Health. Comparisons are made with data for the preceding five years. Recent counts are subject to change. As of 31 March 2016, data from 60 NSW emergency departments are included representing approximately 82% of ED visits in the 2015-16 financial year. The coverage of rural EDs is lower than metropolitan EDs.

[2] Data shown represents unplanned presentations to hospital EDs.

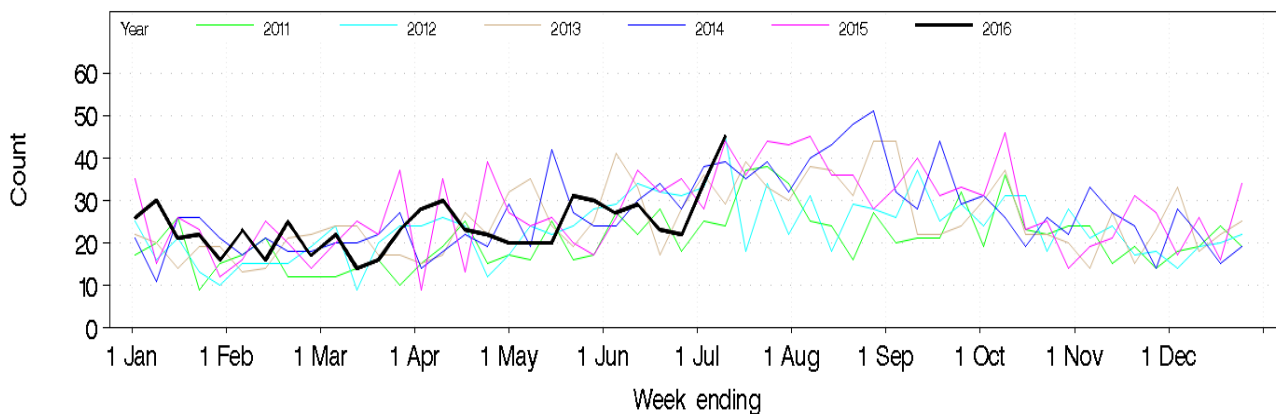
[3] The ED 'ILI' syndrome includes provisional diagnoses selected by a clinician of 'influenza-like illness' or 'influenza' (including 'pneumonia with influenza'), avian and other new influenza viruses.

[4] The ED 'Pneumonia' syndrome includes provisional diagnoses selected by a clinician of 'viral, bacterial, atypical or unspecified pneumonia', 'SARS', or 'legionnaire's disease'. It excludes the diagnosis 'pneumonia with influenza'.

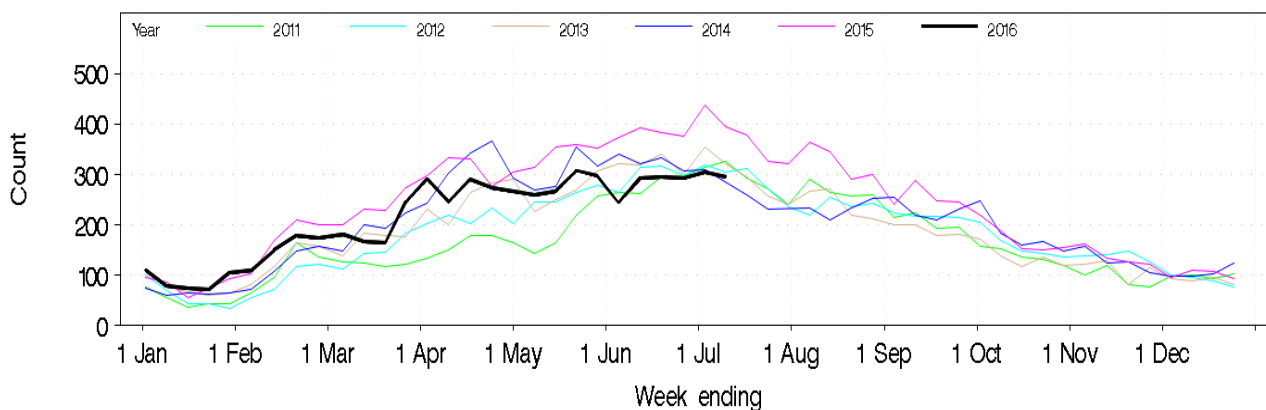
**Figure 2:** Total weekly counts of ED presentations for pneumonia, all ages, from January – 10 July 2016 (black line), compared with each of the 5 previous years (coloured lines).



**Figure 3:** Total weekly counts of ED presentations for pneumonia or influenza-like illness and admitted to a critical care ward, all ages, from January – 10 July 2016 (black line), compared with each of the 5 previous years (coloured lines).



**Figure 4:** Total weekly counts of ED presentations for bronchiolitis, from January – 10 July 2016 (black line), compared with the 5 previous years (coloured lines).



**Table 1:** Weekly ED and Ambulance Respiratory Activity Summary for the week ending 10 July 2016. Includes data from 60 NSW EDs and the NSW Ambulance Division. \*

Data source	Diagnosis or problem category	Trend since last week	Comparison with usual range for time of year*	Statistically significant age groups (if any)	Statistically significant local increase (if any)	Statistically significant severity indicators (if any)	Comment
ED presentations, 60 NSW hospitals	Influenza-like illness (ILI)	Increased	Usual				Daily index of increase = 21.7 (season commenced on 26 June 2016)
	Pneumonia	Increased	Usual				
	Pneumonia and ILI admissions	Increased	Usual				
	Pneumonia and ILI critical care admissions	Increased	Above		Fairfield Hospital		
	Asthma	Increased	Usual				
	Bronchiolitis	Decreased	Usual				Bronchiolitis is a disease of infants. Daily index of increase = 28.7
	Breathing problems	Increased	Above	0-4 years	Campbelltown Hospital The Children's Hospital at Westmead		
	All respiratory illness, fever and unspecified infections	Increased	Usual				

**\* Notes on Table 1:**

The usual range for the time of year is the range of weekly counts for the same week in the previous five years for ED presentations.

Key: Non-bold and green =usual range; Non-bold and orange= above usual range, but not significantly; Bold and red = statistically greater than usual range.

Counts are statistically significant if they are at least five standard deviations above the five-year mean for ED presentations; the ILI 'daily index of increase' is statistically significant above a threshold of 15; LHD = Local Health District.

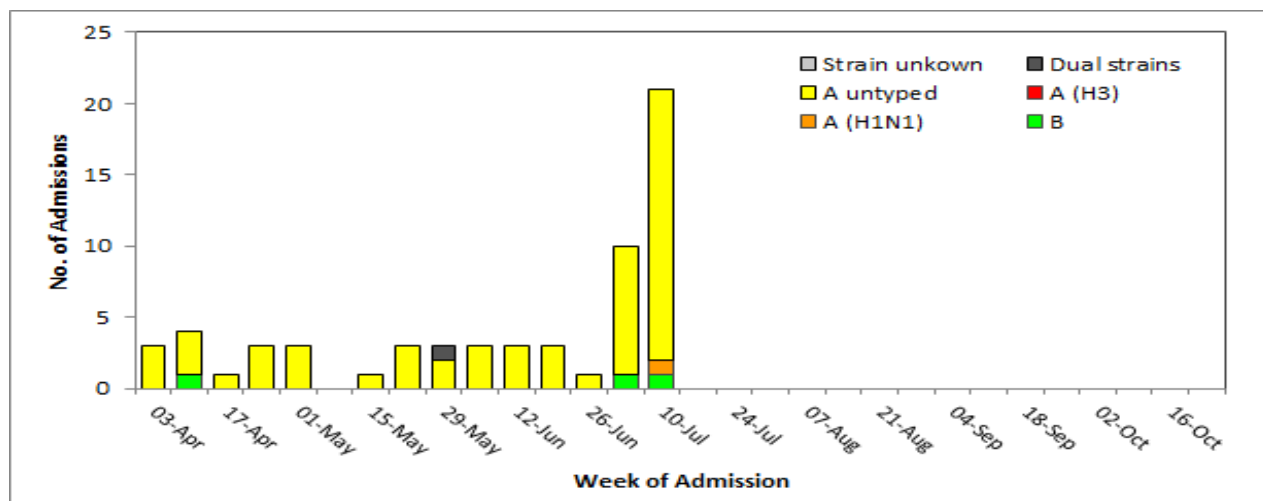
**FluCAN (The Influenza Complications Alert Network)**

In 2009, the [FluCAN](#) surveillance system was created to be a rapid alert system for severe respiratory illness requiring hospitalisation. Data is provided on patients admitted with influenza confirmed by polymerase chain reaction (PCR) testing.

In NSW, three hospitals participate in providing weekly FluCAN data: Westmead Hospital, John Hunter Hospital and the Children's Hospital at Westmead.

- During week 27 there were 21 influenza admissions in NSW sentinel hospitals (Figure 5).
- Since 1 April 2015, there have been 62 hospital admissions reported for influenza; 58 with influenza A, three with influenza B, and one with influenza A and B (Figure 5).
- Of these admissions, 25 were paediatric (<16 years of age) cases and 37 were in adults. One child was admitted to ICU/HDU.

**Figure 5:** FluCAN – weekly number of confirmed influenza hospital admissions in NSW, 10 April – 10 July 2016.



## 2. Laboratory Surveillance

For the week ending 10 July 2016 the number and proportion of respiratory specimens reported by NSW sentinel laboratories [4] which tested positive for influenza A or influenza B increased and is expected to increase further over the next few weeks.

A total of 5,522 tests for respiratory viruses were reported this week with 12.2% testing positive for influenza viruses, up from 7.2% in the previous week. Influenza A(H3N2) is the dominant circulating influenza strain circulating, although many influenza A strains are not further typed. Influenza B activity remains at low levels (Figure 6 and 7).

Influenza was the leading respiratory virus reported, with other viruses circulating at usual levels for this time of year (Table 2).

**Table 2:** Summary of testing for influenza and other respiratory viruses at NSW laboratories, 1 January to 10 July, 2016.

Month ending	Total Tests	TEST RESULTS															
		Influenza A						Influenza B		Adeno	Parainf 1, 2 & 3	RSV	Rhino	HMPV **	Entero		
		Total		H3N2		H1N1 pdm09		A (Not typed)								Total	
Total	(%)	Total	(%A)	Total	(%A)	Total	(%A)	Total	(%)								
31/01/2016	8079	270	(3.3%)	45	(16.7%)	114	(42.2%)	111	(41.1%)	38	(0.5%)	202	179	202	941	73	96
28/02/2016	9810	397	(4.0%)	54	(13.6%)	199	(50.1%)	144	(36.3%)	96	(1.0%)	208	244	323	1484	80	150
03/04/2016*	14699	555	(3.8%)	32	(5.8%)	271	(48.8%)	248	(44.7%)	138	(0.9%)	282	412	937	1862	68	188
01/05/2016	13614	457	(3.4%)	16	(3.5%)	268	(58.6%)	173	(37.9%)	152	(1.1%)	271	371	1189	1470	71	128
29/05/2016	15760	398	(2.5%)	57	(14.3%)	157	(39.4%)	184	(46.2%)	115	(0.7%)	350	358	1488	2211	111	138
03/07/2016*	22487	1065	(4.7%)	227	(21.3%)	269	(25.3%)	569	(53.4%)	167	(0.7%)	707	636	2626	2866	300	420
<b>Week ending</b>																	
10/07/2016	5522	627	(11.4%)	140	(22.3%)	126	(20.1%)	361	(57.6%)	45	(0.8%)	188	134	588	621	86	89

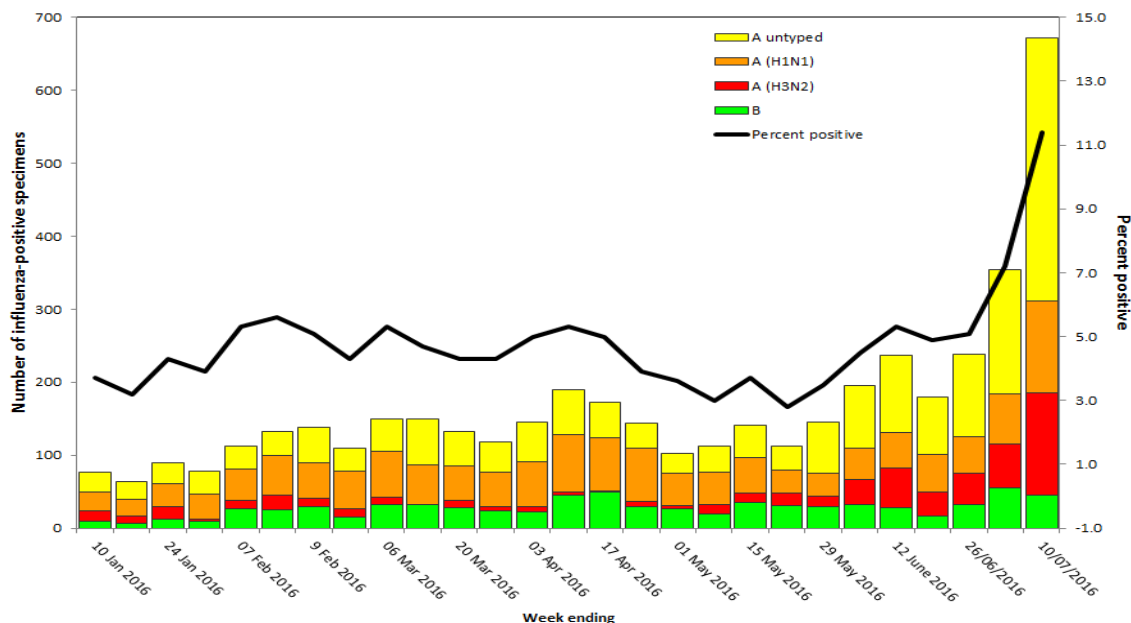
**Notes:** \* Five-week reporting period. \*\* Human metapneumovirus

[4]: Preliminary laboratory data is provided by participating sentinel laboratories on a weekly basis and are subject to change. Point-of-care test results have been included since August 2012 but serological diagnoses are not included.

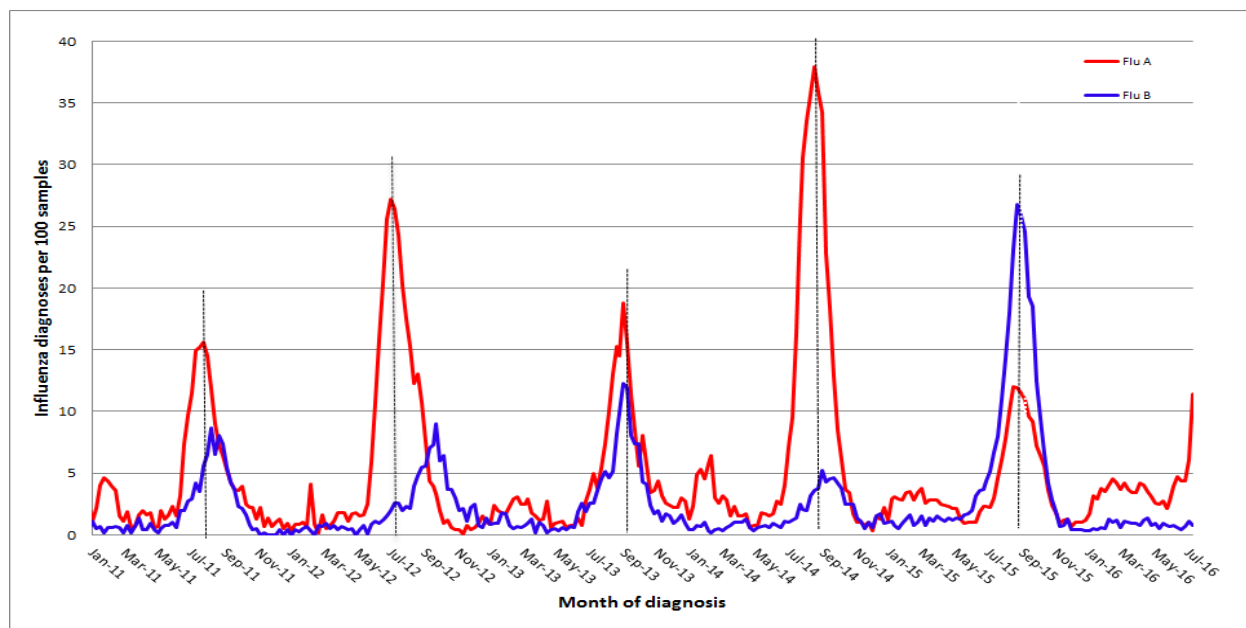
**Participating sentinel laboratories:** Preliminary laboratory data is provided by participating sentinel laboratories on a weekly basis and are subject to change. Point-of-care test results have been included since August 2012 but serological diagnoses are not included.

**Participating sentinel laboratories:** Pathology North (Hunter, Royal North Shore Hospital), Pathology West (Nepean, Westmead), South Eastern Area Laboratory Services, Sydney South West Pathology Service (Liverpool, Royal Prince Alfred Hospital), The Children’s Hospital at Westmead, Australian Clinical Labs, Douglas Hanly Moir Pathology, Laverty Pathology, Medlab, SydPath, VDRLab to June 2016.

**Figure 6:** Weekly influenza positive test results by type and sub-type reported by NSW sentinel laboratories, 1 January to 10 July 2016.



**Figure 7:** Percentage of laboratory tests positive for influenza A and influenza B by week, 1 January 2010 – 10 July 2016, New South Wales.



### 3. Community Surveillance

#### Influenza notifications by Local Health District (LHD)

In the week ending 10 July there were 520 notifications of influenza confirmed by polymerase chain reaction (PCR) testing, higher than the 289 notifications in the previous week.

Rates were highest in Western Sydney and Northern Sydney Local Health Districts (Table 3). Compared to the previous week, notifications increased only in the Greater Sydney Districts.

**Table 3:** Weekly notifications of laboratory-confirmed influenza by Local Health District.

Local Health District	Week ending 10 July 2016		Weekly average (previous 4 weeks)	
	Number of notifications	Rate per 100 000 population	Number of notifications	Rate per 100 000 population
Central Coast	3	0.89	3	0.74
Far West	0	0	4	13.12
Hunter New England	28	3.06	10	1.12
Illawarra Shoalhaven	4	0.99	5	1.24
Mid North Coast	3	1.38	6	2.53
Murrumbidgee	1	0.42	1	0.42
Nepean Blue Mountains	35	9.34	11	2.93
Northern NSW	11	3.66	6	1.83
Northern Sydney	109	12.02	48	5.29
South Eastern Sydney	74	8.19	38	4.15
South Western Sydney	70	7.25	31	3.18
Southern NSW	3	1.44	2	0.8
Sydney	45	7.16	20	3.14
Western NSW	7	2.52	5	1.8
Western Sydney	127	13.41	49	5.12

**Notes:** \* All data are preliminary and may change as more notifications are received. Excludes notifications based on serology.

### Influenza outbreaks in institutions

There were four new influenza (influenza A) outbreaks reported this week. All were in aged care facilities (Table 4).

In the year to date there have been 16 laboratory confirmed influenza outbreaks in institutions reported to NSW public health units (Table 4): 15 have been due to influenza A and one was combined influenza A and B outbreak. At least 187 residents were reported to have had ILI symptoms and 34 required hospitalisation. Sixteen deaths in residents linked to these outbreaks have been reported, all of whom were noted to have other significant co-morbidities.

People in older age-groups are at higher risk of infection from influenza A(H3N2) strains than from the influenza A(H1N1) strain. The influenza A(H3N2) strain predominated in 2012 and 2014. In 2015, influenza B was the predominant strain, and was also associated with an increase in influenza outbreaks in institutions, particularly residential aged care facilities (Table 4).

**Table 4:** Reported influenza outbreaks in NSW institutions, January 2010 to 10 July 2016.

Year	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016*
Number of outbreaks	2	4	39	12	120	103	16

**Notes:** \* Year to date.

### Electronic General Practice Surveillance (eGPS)

eGPS is a primary care influenza surveillance system involving sentinel general practices within three NSW Local Health Districts (LHD): Northern Sydney (NS), South Eastern Sydney (SES) and Illawarra Shoalhaven (IS). The system monitors patient consultations for influenza-like illness (ILI) as an indicator of influenza activity. Consultations for ILI are identified each week by an automatic search of electronic records for validated combinations of ILI terms rather than diagnosis codes.

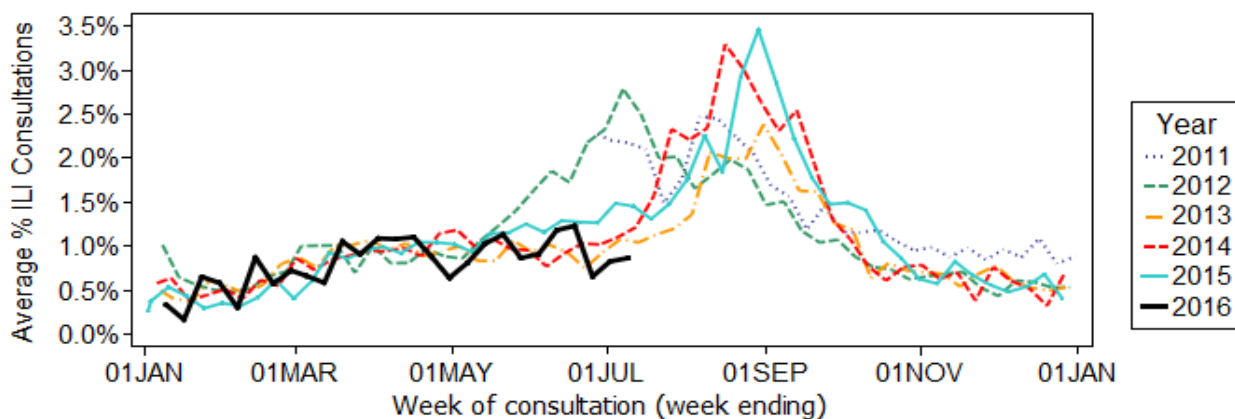


Data generated from eGPS should be interpreted with caution as they are not representative of all practices within the participating LHDs or across NSW.

In Week 27:

- There were five surveillance reports received from eGPS sentinel practices in NSW; no reports were received from South Eastern Sydney and Illawarra Shoalhaven this week.
- The average rate of ILI patient consultations decreased to 0.9% (range 0.0 – 1.5%), slightly higher than the previous week but below the usual range seen for this time of year (Figure 8).

**Figure 8.** Average rate of ILI presentations to sentinel general practices by week of consultation 2011-2016 (year to date).



### The Australian Sentinel Practices Research Network (ASPREN)

ASPREN is a network of sentinel general practitioners (GPs) run through the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners and the University of Adelaide which has collected de-identified information on influenza-like illness (ILI) and other conditions seen in general practice since 1991.

Participating GPs in the program report on the proportion of patients presenting with an ILI. The number of GPs participating on a weekly basis may vary.

In week 27 there were 22 ASPREN reports received from NSW GPs. The overall consultation rate for ILI was low at 1.9%, a decrease from the previous week (4.3%).

For further information please see the [ASPREN](#) website.

### FluTracking.net

FluTracking.net is an online health surveillance system to detect epidemics of influenza.

FluTracking is a project of the University of Newcastle, the Hunter New England Local Health District and the Hunter Medical Research Institute.

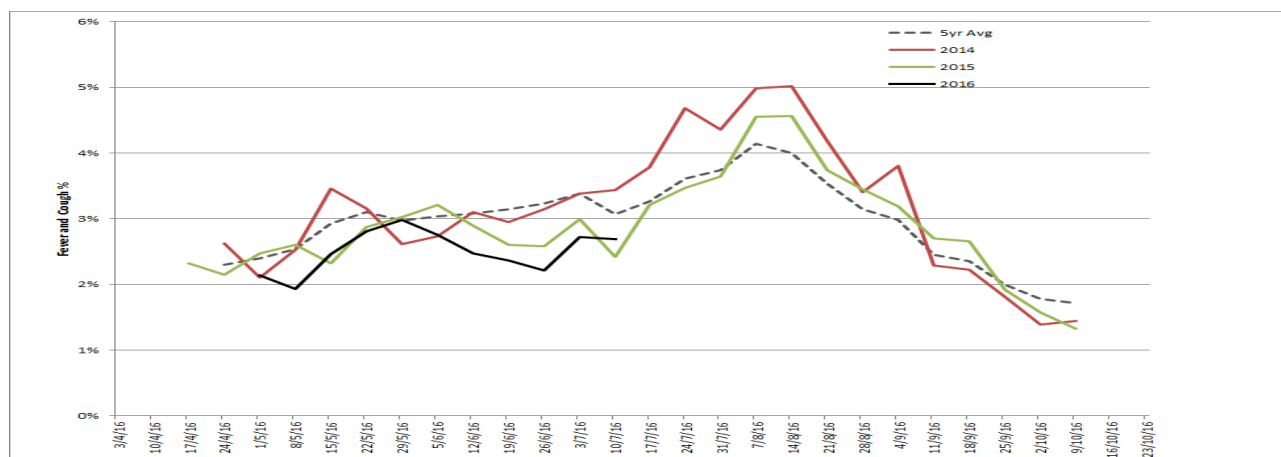
Participants complete a simple online weekly survey which is used to generate data on the rate of ILI symptoms in communities.

In week 27 FluTracking received reports for 7250 people in NSW with the following results:

- 2.7% of respondents reported fever and cough, the same as the previous week (Figure 9).
- 1.5 % of respondents reported fever, cough and absence from normal duties, similar to the previous week (data not shown).



**Figure 9:** FluTracking – weekly influenza-like illness reporting rate, NSW, 2011 – 2016.



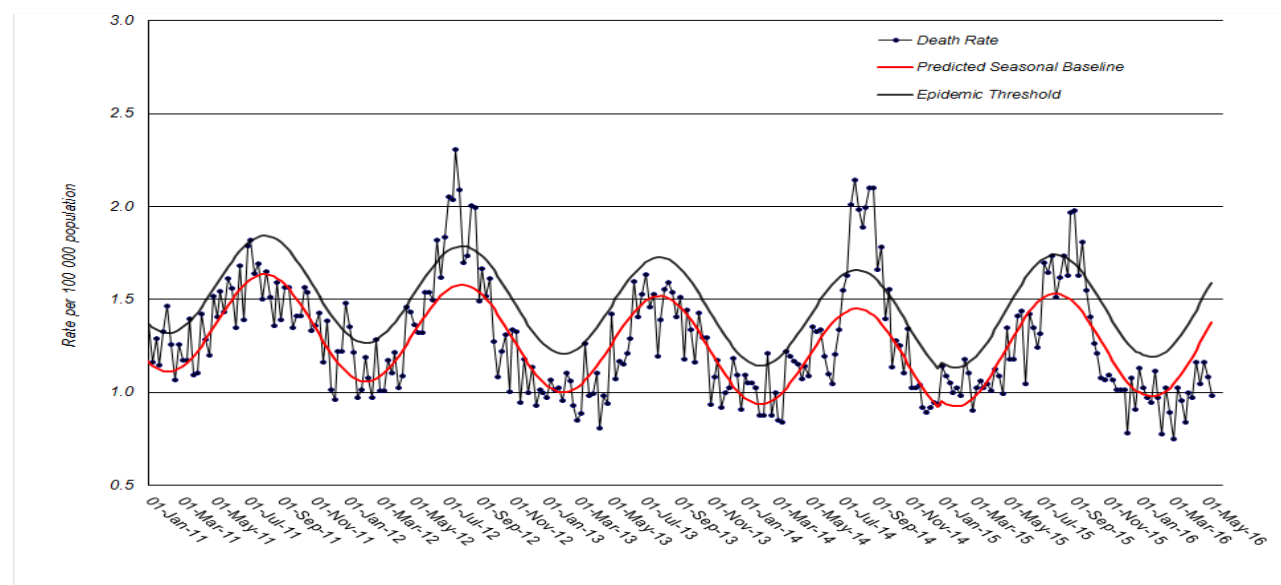
#### 4. Deaths with pneumonia or influenza reported on the death certificate

Deaths registration data is routinely reviewed for deaths attributed to pneumonia or influenza. Pneumonia has many causes; however an increase in the number of death certificates that mention pneumonia or influenza as a cause of death is an indicator of seasonal and pandemic influenza activity. The predicted seasonal baseline estimates the predicted rate of influenza or pneumonia deaths in the absence of influenza epidemics. If deaths exceed the epidemic threshold it may be an indication that influenza is circulating at higher than expected levels and/or is affecting more of the people in the community at greater risk of severe influenza complications.

In 2016 up to the week ending 24 June:

- 12 of 23,736 death certificates (0.05%) recorded influenza: deaths were in people aged over 65 years apart from one death in the 25-34 and two in the 55-64 years age groups.
- 2,056 of 23,736 death certificates (8.7%) mentioned pneumonia.
- There were 1.39 “pneumonia and influenza” deaths per 100,000 NSW population, which was below the epidemic threshold of 1.78 per 100 000 population (Figure 10).

**Figure 10:** Rate of deaths classified as “pneumonia and influenza” per 100,000 NSW population, 2011 – 13 May 2016.



Source: NSW Registry of Births, Deaths and Marriages.

**\* Notes on interpreting death data:**

- (1) The number of deaths mentioning “Pneumonia or influenza” is reported as a rate per 100,000 NSW populations. Using the NSW population provides a more stable and reliable denominator than deaths from all causes. This is because pneumonia and influenza are known to contribute to increases in deaths from non-respiratory illnesses, such as deaths due to ischaemic heart disease. As the number of these deaths will increase with rises in influenza activity, the actual effect of influenza on mortality rates will be obscured if all-cause mortality is used as the denominator. This limitation is avoided by using the NSW population, which is relatively constant throughout the year, as the denominator.
- (2) Deaths referred to a coroner during the reporting period may not be available for analysis. Deaths in younger people may be more likely to require a coronial inquest. Therefore influenza-related deaths in younger people may be under-represented in these data.
- (3) The interval between death and death data availability is usually at least 7 days, and so these data are several weeks behind reports from emergency departments and laboratories. In addition, previous weekly rates may also change due to longer delays in reporting some deaths.

## 5. National and International Influenza Surveillance

### National Influenza Surveillance

No new national influenza surveillance reports were issued this week. In the *Australian Surveillance Report No.2*, with data up to 24 June 2016, influenza activity remained at low levels across Australia with localised increases seen in some areas. Of note:

- Respiratory viruses other than influenza were more commonly causing influenza-like illness presentations to sentinel general practitioners, with RSV detected most frequently.
- There was no indication yet of the potential severity of the 2016 season.
- Seasonal influenza vaccines appeared to be a good match for circulating virus strains.

Follow the link for the [Australian Influenza Surveillance Reports](#) which provide the latest information on national influenza activity.

### Global Influenza Update

The latest [WHO global update on 11 July 2016](#) provides data up to 26 June. In temperate countries in the southern hemisphere, influenza activity increased steadily in the last weeks in South America and South Africa, but remained still low overall in most of Oceania. Influenza activity in the temperate zone of the northern hemisphere was back to inter-seasonal levels.

Follow the link for the [WHO influenza surveillance reports](#).

### Avian Influenza Update:

#### Human infections with avian influenza viruses

The most recent WHO risk assessment of human infections with avian influenza viruses (see [Influenza at the human-animal interface](#)) was published on 13 June 2016. This report provides updated information on human cases of infection with H5 and H7 clade viruses and outbreaks among animals.

The overall risk assessment for these viruses remains unchanged. Whenever avian influenza viruses are circulating in poultry, sporadic infections and small clusters of human cases are possible in people exposed to infected poultry or contaminated environments, therefore sporadic human cases would not be unexpected.

For H7N9, WHO has noted current evidence suggests that this virus has not acquired the ability of sustained transmission among humans but it is possible that limited human-to-human transmission may have occurred where there was unprotected close contact with symptomatic human cases.

Other sources of information on avian influenza and the risk of human infection include:

- US CDC [Avian influenza](#)

- European CDC (ECDC) [Avian influenza](#)
- Public Health Agency of Canada [Avian influenza H7N9](#).

## 6. Composition of 2016 Australian influenza vaccines

The National Immunisation Program (NIP) uses quadrivalent influenza vaccines in 2016 for the first time. The four strains chosen are based on the recommendations of the WHO Consultation on the Composition of Influenza Vaccines for the 2016 Southern Hemisphere. Following the Consultation, WHO announced its recommendations for the composition of trivalent and quadrivalent vaccines for use in the 2016 influenza season (southern hemisphere winter).

For trivalent vaccines:

- an A/California/7/2009 (H1N1)pdm09-like virus;
- an A/Hong Kong/4801/2014 (H3N2)-like virus;
- a B/Brisbane/60/2008-like virus (Victoria lineage).

For quadrivalent vaccines it was recommended that a second influenza B virus be added:

- a B/Phuket/3073/2013-like virus (Yamagata lineage).

Of note, the trivalent vaccine recommendations included strain changes for both the A(H3N2) and B components. The recommended A(H1N1) strain has remained unchanged since 2010. More details about the most recent influenza vaccine recommendations can be found at:

[http://www.who.int/influenza/vaccines/virus/recommendations/2016\\_south/en/](http://www.who.int/influenza/vaccines/virus/recommendations/2016_south/en/).

The WHO consultation on the composition of influenza vaccines for the Northern Hemisphere 2016-2017 was held in February 2016. The recommended composition was unchanged from the composition recommended for the 216 Southern Hemisphere vaccines (above). For information about the Northern Hemisphere vaccine recommendations can be found at:

[http://www.who.int/influenza/vaccines/virus/recommendations/2016\\_17\\_north/en/](http://www.who.int/influenza/vaccines/virus/recommendations/2016_17_north/en/)