

## Weekly influenza overview

### Week 06/2021 (08 February–14 February 2021)

- Influenza activity remained at interseasonal levels.
- Of 1 268 specimens tested for influenza in week 06/2021, from patients presenting with ILI or ARI symptoms to sentinel primary healthcare sites, none were positive for an 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 for week 06/2021.
- The influenza epidemic in the European Region has usually reached its peak by this point in the year but, despite widespread and regular testing for influenza, reported influenza activity still remains at a very low level, 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 has affected healthcare seeking behaviours, healthcare provision, and testing practices and capacities in countries and areas of the European Region, which have negatively impacted on the reporting of influenza epidemiologic and virologic data during the 2020-2021 season. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the influenza data we present will need to be interpreted with caution, notably in terms of seasonal patterns.

### 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 countries and areas that reported on the intensity of activity indicator, 34 reported baseline levels, and 2 (Azerbaijan and Slovakia) reported low intensity for week 06/2021 (Fig. 1).

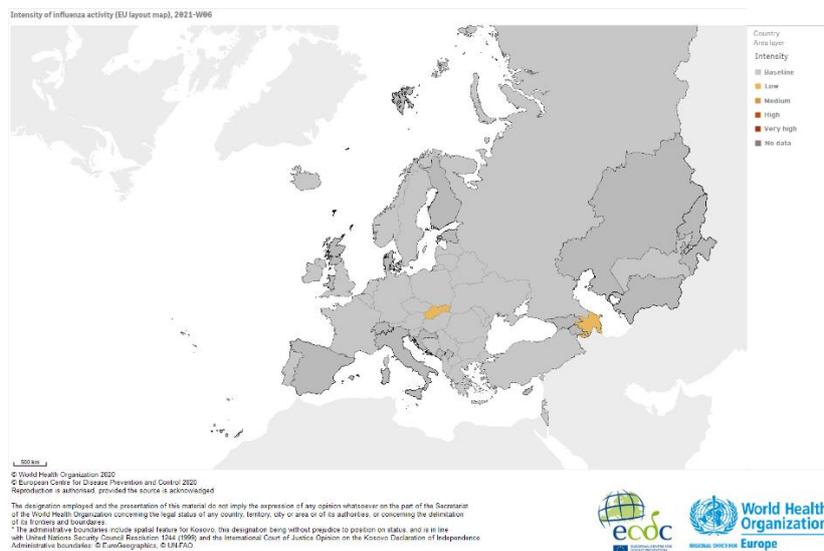
Of 37 countries and areas that reported on geographic spread, 32 reported no activity and 5

(Azerbaijan, Portugal, Slovakia, Ukraine and United Kingdom (England)) reported sporadic spread for week 06/2021 (Fig. 2).

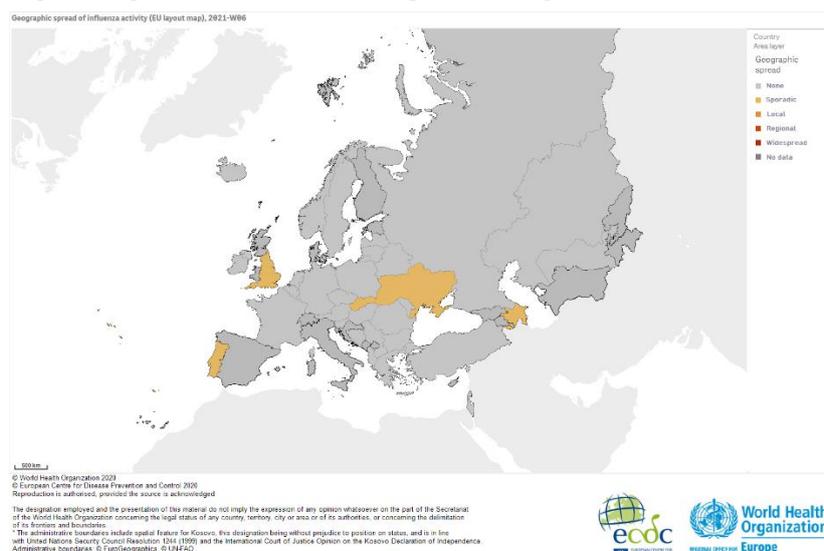
**Please note:**

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 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 06/2021**



**Fig. 2. Geographic spread in the European Region, week 06/2021**



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

## 2020–2021 season overview

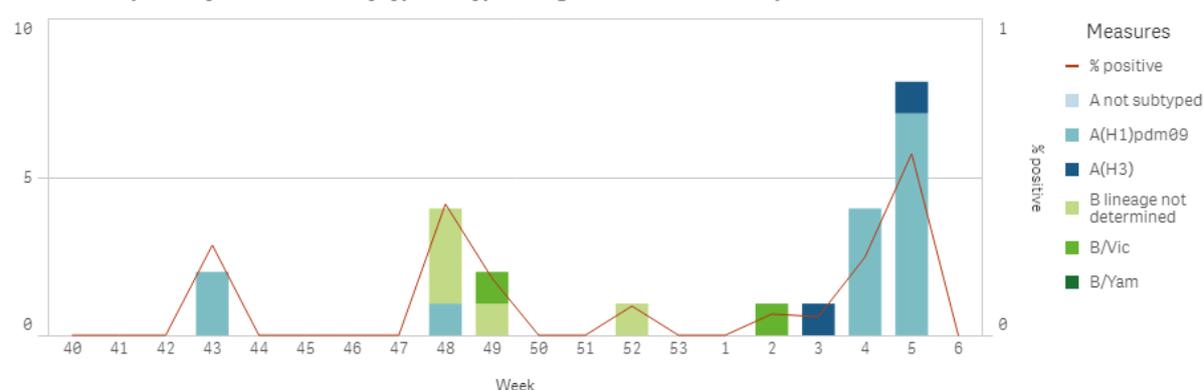
- For the Region as a whole, influenza activity has been at baseline level since the start of the season.
- In total, 644 specimens have tested positive for influenza viruses, 23 from sentinel sources and 621 from non-sentinel sources, with type A (both subtypes) and type B (both lineages) viruses being 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 (8 type A viruses and 1 type B) in wards outside ICUs with 1 fatality; and 10 from severe acute respiratory infection (SARI)-based surveillance (3 infected with type B viruses and 7 with type A).
- WHO has published [recommendations](#) for the composition of influenza vaccines to be used in the 2020–2021 northern hemisphere season.

## Influenza positivity

As of week 06/2021, 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 40/2020–06/2021**

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



© World Health Organization 2020.  
© European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control 2020.  
Reproduction is authorised, provided the source is acknowledged.



## External data sources

**Mortality monitoring:** Overall pooled estimates of all-cause mortality for 25 countries or areas participating in the [EuroMOMO](#) project showed a substantial increase in excess all-cause mortality.

This excess mortality was driven by a very substantial excess mortality in a few countries and areas, while others saw normal mortality levels.

Increased excess all-cause mortality was seen primarily among persons aged 45 years and older.

## Primary care data

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

For week 06/2021, none of 1 268 sentinel specimens tested for influenza viruses were positive. Since the start of the season, of 22 611 sentinel-source specimens that have been tested for influenza viruses, 23 were positive 16 type A and 7 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 06/2021 and cumulatively for the influenza season 2020-2021**

Virus type and subtype	Current Week (06)		Influenza Season 2020-2021	
	Number	% <sup>a</sup>	Number	% <sup>a</sup>
<b>Influenza A</b>	<b>0</b>	-	<b>16</b>	<b>69.6</b>
A(H1)pdm09	0	-	14	87.5
A(H3)	0	-	2	12.5
A not subtyped	0	-	0	-
<b>Influenza B</b>	<b>0</b>	-	<b>7</b>	<b>30.4</b>
B/Victoria lineage	0	-	2	100.0
B/Yamagata lineage	0	-	0	-
Unknown lineage	0	-	5	-
<b>Total detections (total tested)</b>	<b>0 (1 268)</b>	-	<b>23 (22 611)</b>	<b>&lt;1</b>

<sup>a</sup> 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 06/2021, data reported from 8 countries representing between 513 and 12 773 active participants were included, for a total of 38 826 participants.

**ILI activity:** Germany, Italy, Portugal, Switzerland, the Netherlands, and UK have reported between 0 and 5 cases per 1 000 active participants and Denmark and France have reported between 5 and 10 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, UK has reported between 15 and 20 possible cases per 1 000 weekly participants, Italy and Switzerland have reported between 20 and 25 possible cases per 1 000 weekly participants, France has reported between 25 and 30 possible cases per 1 000 weekly

participants and the Netherlands has reported between 50 and 55 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

No hospitalized laboratory-confirmed influenza cases in ICUs were reported for week 06/2021.

Since the start of the season, there have been 11 hospitalized laboratory-confirmed influenza cases in ICUs (all infected with type A viruses) reported by Ukraine (n = 2) and the UK (n = 9). At the time of the latest reports all cases were non-fatal.

#### 1.2) Hospitalized laboratory-confirmed influenza cases – other wards

There were no new laboratory-confirmed influenza cases in wards outside ICUs reported for week 06/2021.

Since the start of the season, there have been 9 laboratory-confirmed influenza cases (8 type A viruses and 1 type B) in wards outside ICUs reported: 4 cases were in children between 0-4 years old, 4 cases were in patients aged 15-64 years, and 1 case (influenza type B), which was fatal, in a patient over 65 years old. Seven of the 8 influenza type A virus cases were subtyped as A(H1)pdm09.

### Severe acute respiratory infection (SARI)-based hospital surveillance

For week 06/2021, 1 078 SARI cases were reported by 10 countries or areas. Of 429 specimens tested for influenza viruses, none were positive.

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 24 237 SARI cases and 7 518 were tested for influenza viruses. Ten specimens from Ukraine have tested positive to date (7 were type A viruses and 3 were type B).

### 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 06/2021, 17 of 19 610 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: 11 were type A and 6 were type B (Table 2). Table 2. Influenza virus detections in non-sentinel source specimens by type and subtype, week 06/2021 and cumulatively for the influenza season 2020-2021

Since the beginning of the season, 621 of 338 252 non-sentinel specimens tested positive for influenza viruses; 310 (49.9%) were type A and 311 (50.1%) type B. Of 59 subtyped A viruses, 26 (44.1%) were A(H1)pdm09 and 33 (55.9%) were A(H3). Of 311 type B viruses, only 6 were ascribed to a lineage: 5 B/Victoria and 1 B/Yamagata.

**Table 2. Influenza virus detections in non-sentinel source specimens by type and subtype, week 06/2021 and cumulatively for the influenza season 2020-2021**

Virus type and subtype	Current Week (06)		Influenza Season 2020-2021	
	Number	% <sup>a</sup>	Number	% <sup>a</sup>
<b>Influenza A</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>71</b>	<b>310</b>	<b>49.9</b>
A(H1)pdm09	0	100	26	44.1
A(H3)	0	0	33	55.9
A not subtyped	11	-	251	-
<b>Influenza B</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>311</b>	<b>50.1</b>
B/Victoria lineage	0	-	6	85.7
B/Yamagata lineage	0	-	1	14.3
Unknown lineage	6	-	304	-
<b>Total detections (total tested)</b>	17 (19 610)	-	621 (338 252)	-

<sup>a</sup> 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, 4 viruses have been characterized genetically:

- 3 type A: 2 influenza A(H3), 1 attributed to the HA subgroup 3C.2a1b + T131K-A, represented by A/Slovenia/1637/2020 and 1 attributed to the HA subgroup 3C.2a1b + T135K-A, represented by A/Denmark/3264/2019, and 1 A(H1)pdm09 attributed to the group 6B.1A5A + 187V/A represented by A/Guangdong-Maonan/SWL1536/2019.
- 1 type B: B(Vic)-lineage clade 1A (d162-164) represented by B/Washington/02/2019

Note: It is essential that reporting laboratories submit any data they have generated to GISAID (and thereby TESSy) as soon as possible, together with sharing influenza-positive samples with WHO CC, London for more detailed characterization.

ECDC published the [December](#) virus characterisation report that describes the available data from viruses circulating recently including the season 2019-20. At that point, no antigenic data

relating to viruses detected in the course of the 2020-2021 influenza season had been generated and the report was based on an analysis of seasonal influenza HA sequenced most recently and submitted to GISAID. The following text is repeated from the Summary text of this report with minor modification. Previously published influenza virus characterization reports are also available on the [ECDC website](#).

## Antiviral susceptibility of seasonal influenza viruses

Since the beginning of the season, 2 influenza viruses have been tested for susceptibility to neuraminidase inhibitors: 1 influenza A(H3) virus that showed normal inhibition (NI) to both oseltamivir and zanamivir and 1 type B/Vic virus that showed NI to oseltamivir.

## 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);
- 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( $\Delta$ 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);
- 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( $\Delta$ 3)B); and
- a B/Phuket/3073/2013 (B/Yamagata lineage)-like virus (Clade 3).

It is 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](#).

Based on WHO published recommendations on 25 September 2020, the composition of influenza vaccines for use in the **2021 southern hemisphere influenza season** will contain the following:

#### **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 is 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](#).

This weekly update was prepared by an editorial team at the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (Cornelia Adlhoch, Lisa Ferland, Favelle Lamb, Andrew Amato-Gauci and Angeliki Melidou) and the WHO Regional Office for Europe (Piers Mook and Richard Pebody). It was reviewed by experts from the network (Adam Meijer, National Institute for Public Health and the Environment (RIVM), the Netherlands); Rod Daniels and John McCauley, WHO Collaborating Centre for Reference and Research on Influenza, Francis Crick Institute, United Kingdom.

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.

Suggested citation:

European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control/WHO Regional Office for Europe. Flu News Europe, Joint ECDC–WHO weekly influenza update, week 06/2021.

Tables and figures should be referenced:

European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control/WHO Regional Office for Europe. Flu News Europe, Joint ECDC–WHO weekly influenza update, week 06/2021.

© World Health Organization 2021.

© European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control 2021.

Reproduction is authorized, provided the source is acknowledged.