

Current major event

Influenza season in Eastern Mediterranean Region 2018/2019

Monitoring the seasonal influenza activity is one of the main objectives of influenza surveillance systems. Currently, 19 out of 22 countries in the Eastern Mediterranean Region (EMR) of WHO are reporting regularly through at least one of the global or regional platforms.

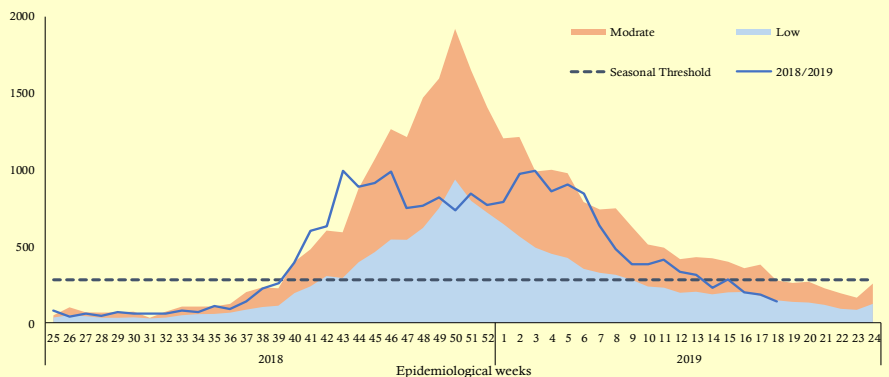
Editorial note

Influenza is caused by a virus that attacks mainly the upper respiratory tract and also the lungs but rarely. Influenza rapidly spreads around the world in seasonal epidemics and imposes a considerable burden. In annual influenza epidemics, 5-15% of the population are affected with upper respiratory tract infections.

The overall objective of influenza surveillance system is to minimize the impact of the disease by providing useful information to public health authorities for better control and intervention measures. In EMR, 86% of the countries have established/sustained SARI and ILI sentinel surveillance sites, while enhancing the detection capacity of 20 National Influenza Centers and other influenza laboratories. The influenza activity is monitored to describe the seasonality of influenza and to identify locally circulating virus types and subtypes. WHO monitors and reports on influenza activity in region on a weekly and monthly basis throughout the influenza season in collaboration with Member States.

Majority of the countries with functioning influenza surveillance system maintained higher weekly reporting rate during the season. The composite of weekly enrolled cases and weekly percentage of positivity rates of the data of previous four seasons; from 2014 to 2018 used as indicator to monitor the transmissibility of influenza. The influenza season of 2018/2019 started in EM countries during the week 40-2018 with high level of transmission. The season started few weeks earlier compared to the previous season. The influenza transmissibility is mostly observed during the weeks of the influenza season. (see the graph).

Transmissibility* of influenza during the season 2018/2019, EMR, FluNet and EMFLU



*The indicator is composite of weekly enrolled cases and weekly percentage, 2014–2018 positivity rates for influenza

Circulating influenza viruses in the EMR by subtype, seasons 2014/2015 to 2018/2019

Season	Influenza subtype No. (%)			
	A (H1N1) pdm09	A (H3)	A (not subtyped)	B (Total)
14/15	2596 (31)	1790 (22)	1208 (15)	2530 (31)
15/16	9561 (64)	1037 (7)	1579 (11)	2829 (19)
16/17	982 (14)	1830 (25)	2192 (30)	2261 (31)
17/18	14186 (56)	4075 (16)	544 (2)	6403 (25)
18/19	7204 (34)	5317 (25)	3817 (18)	4570 (22)

During the 2018/2019 influenza season, Influenza A (H1N1) pdm09 was predominated regionally representing an estimated 34% of all influenza positive cases. While Influenza A (H3) and Influenza B represented 25% and 22% respectively. No significant different of the distribution of the influenza subtypes compared to the previous seasons. (see the table). Majority of the countries experienced higher influenza activities in 2018/19 as compared to the previous season, despite some geographic variation in the region. The average percentage of positivity rate decreases to 21.3% in 2018/19 season as compared to 23.7% in 2017/18 season.

WHO recommends that all countries shall maintain effective influenza surveillance system in order to enhance capacity of pandemic influenza preparedness and to prevent and control seasonal influenza outbreaks. Seasonal influenza vaccine targeting high risk group and other preventive measure shall be advocated.

Update on outbreaks

in the Eastern Mediterranean Region

MERS in Saudi Arabia; **MERS** in Oman; **cholera** in Somalia; **cholera** in Yemen; **Multidrug-resistant typhoid fever** in Pakistan.

Current public health events of concern

[cumulative N^o of cases (deaths), CFR %]

Avian influenza: 2006-2017

Egypt (A/H5N1) [359 (122), 33.98%]
Egypt (A/H9N2) [4 (0)]

Ebola virus disease (EVD): 2018-2019

Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) [1 554 (1 028), 66.15%]

Cholera: 2017-2019

Somalia [7 187 (46), 0.64%]
Yemen [1 691 324 (3 319), 0.19%]

Diphtheria: 2018-2019

Yemen [3 524 (203), 5.76%]
Bangladesh [8 612 (45), 0.52%]

MERS: 2012-2019

Saudi Arabia [2 040 (763), 37.40%]
Oman [24 (7), 29.16%]

Multidrug-resistant typhoid fever: 2016-2019

Pakistan [7 075 (0)]