

COVID-19 Infection Survey

Symptoms reported in Northern Ireland

9th February 2021

Symptoms profile of strong positive cases for Northern Ireland

About this analysis

This ad-hoc analysis looks at each person who tested positive for COVID-19 who had a strong positive test. The strength of the test is determined by how quickly the virus is detected, measured by a cycle threshold (Ct) value. The lower the Ct value, the higher the viral load and stronger the positive test. Positive results with a high Ct value could be seen in the early stages of infection when virus levels are rising, or late in the infection, when the risk of transmission is low. These values are excluded from this analysis to exclude the possibility that symptoms are not identified when an individual tests positive, but it is very early on or later in their infection.

This analysis considers individuals with any positive test that had a Ct value less than 30, between 1 October 2020 and 30 January 2021, and considers what percentage of these individuals reported symptoms at visits within 35 days of a positive test. You can find [more information on Ct values](#) in a paper written by academic partners at the University of Oxford. Individuals taking part in the survey were asked at each visit whether they had experienced a range of possible symptoms¹ in the seven days before they were tested and also separately whether they felt that they had symptoms compatible with COVID-19 infection in the last seven days.

Information contained in this analysis will be published simultaneously by the Office for National Statistics in a UK report on their own website [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) Infection Survey articles - Office for National Statistics](#).

¹ The symptoms respondents were asked to report are: fever, muscle ache (myalgia), fatigue (weakness or tiredness), sore throat, cough, shortness of breath, headache, nausea or vomiting, abdominal pain, diarrhoea, loss of taste or loss of smell.

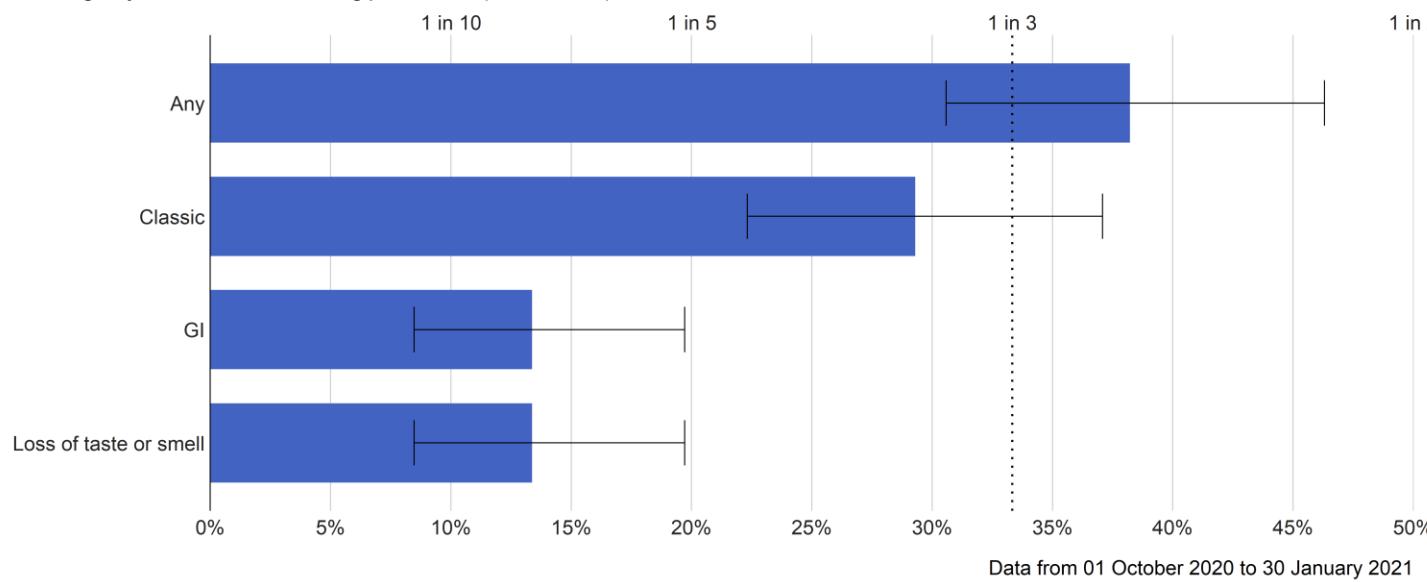
Categorised symptoms in Northern Ireland

In Northern Ireland, 38% of people who tested positive for COVID-19 (95% confidence intervals: 31% to 46%) with high Ct values reported having any symptoms. People who tested positive for COVID-19 with a strong positive test (Ct less than 30) were more likely to report having classic symptoms. People testing positive with high Ct values were less likely to report loss of taste or smell only and gastrointestinal symptoms.

Figure 1: Categorised reported symptoms of people testing positive for COVID-19 with a strong positive test (Ct < 30) in NI

Percentage of people with symptoms in Northern Ireland

Including only those who have a strong positive test (Ct mean <30)



Notes: Source: Office for National Statistics - Coronavirus (COVID-19) Infection Survey

1. All results are provisional and subject to revision.
2. These statistics refer to infections reported in the community, by which we mean private households. These figures exclude infections reported in hospitals, care homes and/or other institutional settings.
3. Symptoms are self-reported and were not professionally diagnosed
4. In Figure 1 above reported symptoms have been categorised as follows: **Any**: all reported symptoms, including reporting symptoms compatible with COVID-19 whilst not naming specific symptoms; **Classic**: cough, fever, shortness of breath, loss of taste or loss of smell; **Gastrointestinal (GI)**: abdominal pain, nausea, vomiting or diarrhoea; and **Loss of taste or smell only**

All symptoms for Northern Ireland

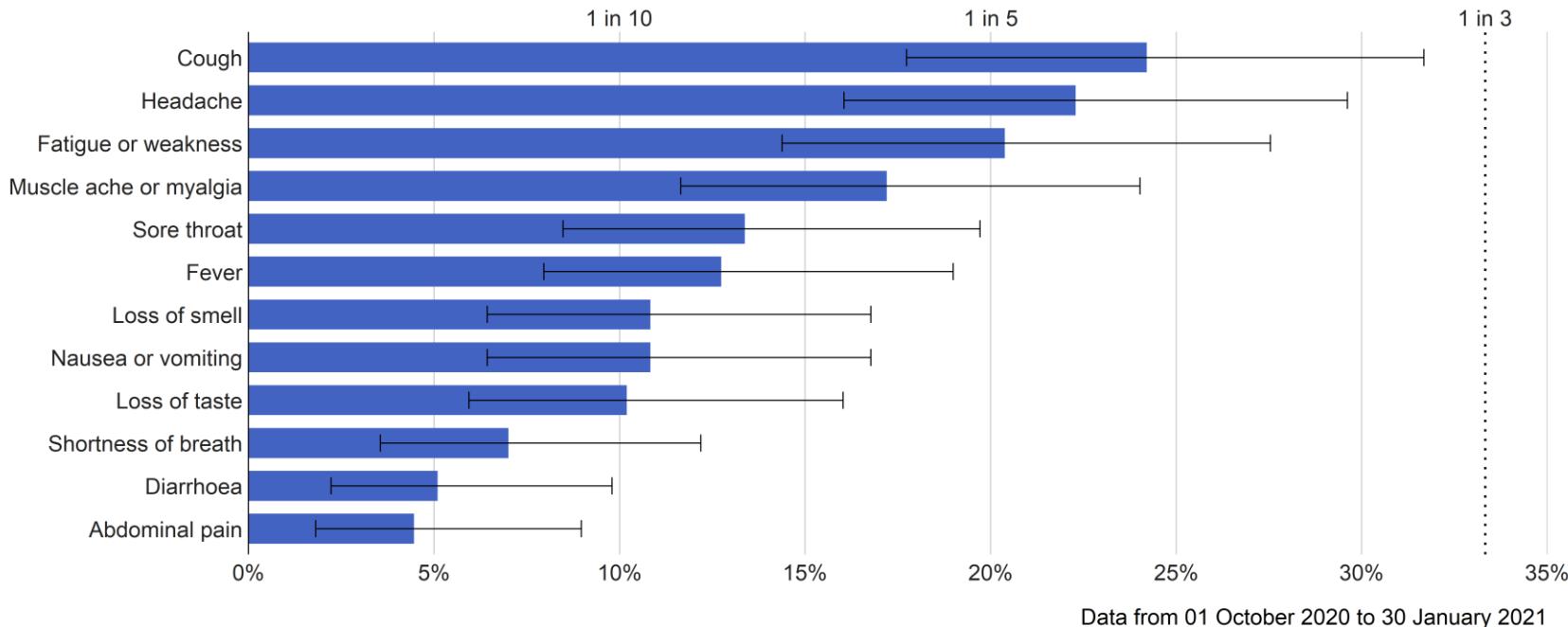
Figure 2 below shows that cough, fatigue and headache were the most common symptoms reported in positive cases in NI (this was also true across the other UK countries). Abdominal pain, diarrhoea and shortness of breath were less commonly reported symptoms in positive COVID-19 cases in NI. Broadly similar trends in reported symptoms were seen in all four UK countries.

It should be noted that results should be interpreted with caution due to the relatively small samples sizes of people who have a strong positive test (Ct less than 30), resulting in wider confidence intervals, meaning there is greater uncertainty in these figures.

Figure 2: All symptoms of people testing positive for COVID-19 with a strong positive test (Ct < 30) in NI

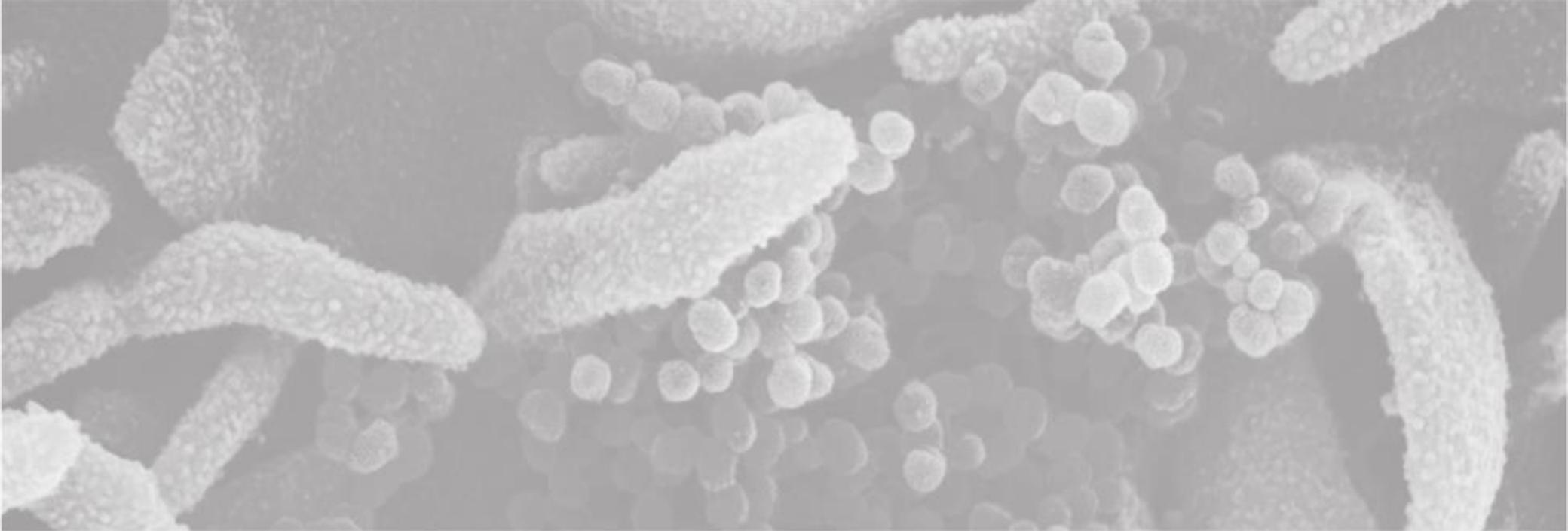
Percentage of people with symptoms in Northern Ireland

Including only those who have a strong positive test (Ct mean <30)



Likelihood of reporting any symptoms for COVID-19 across the UK

- In England, 47% of people who tested positive for COVID-19 (95% confidence intervals: 46% to 48%) with high Ct values reported having any symptoms.
- In Wales, 55% of people who tested positive for COVID-19 (95% confidence intervals: 49% to 62%) with high Ct values reported having any symptoms.
- In Northern Ireland, 38% of people who tested positive for COVID-19 (95% confidence intervals: 31% to 46%) with high Ct values reported having any symptoms.
- In Scotland, 47% of people who tested positive for COVID-19 (95% confidence intervals: 41% to 54%) with high Ct values reported having any symptoms.



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