

Coronavirus (COVID-19)

Weekly Epidemiological Bulletin



Northern Ireland

Summary - Up to week 53 (03 January 2021)

To week 53, there have been a total of 79,907 laboratory confirmed cases¹ of COVID-19, including 1649 registered COVID-19 deaths² in Northern Ireland.

COVID-19 case epidemiology



- 79,907 laboratory confirmed cases (18.6% from HSC laboratories)
- 54.0% of total cases are female
- In week 53, those aged 15-44 had the highest case rate (970.1 per 100,000 population; 27.2% positivity)
- In week 53, Mid Ulster had the highest case rate (948.0 per 100,000 population; 32.5% positivity)

Care home outbreaks (suspected and confirmed)



- 468 confirmed COVID-19 outbreaks reported in total; includes 40 reported in week 53
- Involving 315 care homes (65.2% of all Northern Ireland care homes)
- The highest proportion of outbreaks (71.8%) were reported from the Southern Trust area

Primary care syndromic surveillance




- In week 53:
- In-hours Acute Respiratory Infections (ARI) and COVID-19 consultation rate: 39.0 per 100,000 population

¹ Virological reports and the National Testing Programme


² NISRA; 2020 - up to 18 December 2020. [Data for the current week unavailable](#)

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Out-of-hours (OOH) ARI consultation rate: 73.4 per 100,000 population • OOH COVID-19 consultation rate: 11.0 per 100,000 population
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Sentinel testing

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Testing started 27 April 2020 • Number of individuals tested in total: 747 (4.0% positivity)
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COVID centres

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Testing started 15 June 2020 (one COVID centre: BHSCT) • Virology data from the COVID centre became available from 1 July 2020 • Number of individuals tested 15 - 30 June 2020: 182 (all negative) • Number of individuals tested 1 July – 22 November 2020: 864 (1.6% positivity)
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Critical care surveillance

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 377 confirmed COVID-19 individuals • The majority of reported critical care cases were male (71.1%) • Median age of cases was 61 years (range 26 – 90 years)
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Schools Surveillance

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1459 COVID-19 incidents reported in 832 schools (56.1% of all Northern Ireland schools) • 49% of incidents have been single cases, 37% were clusters of 2-5 cases; 14% were clusters of 6 or more cases
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- Since schools opened, the highest proportion of incidents (69%) have been reported in Belfast

Mortality surveillance



- Excess deaths were reported in weeks 13-20, 22, 44 and 45; mainly in those over 65 years old.

Testing surveillance virology



- Number of individuals tested in total: 854,854 (9.3% positivity)
- Number of individuals tested in;
 - HSC laboratories: 263,182 (30.8% of total tests)
 - National Testing Programme: 591,672 (69.2% of total tests)

Introduction

COVID-19 is a new illness that can affect your lungs and airways. It's caused by a type of virus called SARS-CoV2 (coronavirus).

The Public Health Agency (PHA) Health Protection team has developed this report with the primary focus of looking at the demographic characteristics (age, sex and geographical location) of people affected by the virus. It also looks at some of the wider impact of the virus on the healthcare system, comparing recent trends in activity with historic norms.

There is a large amount of data being regularly published regarding COVID-19 (for example, the Department of Health Dashboard and *Deaths involving coronavirus in Northern Ireland* by the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency). This report presents data from existing and newly developed PHA Health Protection surveillance systems that monitor COVID-19 activity in Northern Ireland and complements the range of existing data currently available.

As this is an emerging pandemic the systems used will constantly evolve and the complexity of the analysis will increase. All updates will be documented in “what’s new” section below.

Unless otherwise stated, data is presented using epidemiological weeks (a standardised method of counting weeks [Monday-Sunday] to allow for the comparison of data year after year). This is dependent on the data available and annual comparisons are not yet possible as the virus only emerged in 2020.

The data included in this report is the most up to date data available at the time of the report; however this is subject to change as the data is subject to ongoing quality assurance.

There is a large amount of data being regularly published regarding COVID-19 (for example, [Department of Health COVID-19 Daily Dashboard Updates](#) and [NISRA Deaths Registered Dashboard](#)). This bulletin complements the range of existing data currently available.

Contact tracing

Contact tracing is the process of identifying, assessing, and managing people who have been exposed to a disease to prevent onward transmission ([WHO](#)). Contact tracing can help break the chains of transmission of COVID-19 and is an essential public health tool for controlling the virus.

Contact tracing seeks to limit and prevent the spread of infections such as COVID-19. It works by identifying a confirmed case and asking them who they have been in contact with. Individual contacts are considered high risk if they have spent more than 15 minutes in close contact with a confirmed case without personal protection. This means that those who have casually passed by someone on the street will not be considered high risk. The person with a confirmed infection and their close contacts will be given advice regarding symptom management and the need to self-isolate to prevent wider spread of the virus. This advice is based on information available on the PHA [website](#) and includes social distancing, handwashing and cleaning in the home to help protect people who are at risk. We can also advise people on how to best look after those in their care.

The most up-to-date contact tracing management service update (issued 31 December 2020) can be found [here](#)*

The StopCOVID NI contact tracing app is now [available](#) from the Google or Apple App store.

*These are experimental performance and activity data and provide a snapshot of contact tracer activity. Data reported relates to a live operational system which includes case and contact activity in progress or in a queue. It is based on manually recorded information and data extracted from current contact tracing systems and reporting methods and parameters may change over time.

Automatic reporting in future may create a discontinuity in figures. New IT systems and data outputs often take some time to bed in. Data should therefore be treated with caution while the system and understanding of the data develops. At this stage, there is a risk of data entry errors or delay, which may require that data are revised and updated in future. The process of finding and removing duplicate records may also need refining, which could result in revisions to the data.

Clusters

Definition: A cluster is currently defined as two or more laboratory confirmed cases of COVID-19 among individuals associated with a key setting, who have illness onset dates within a 14 day period. Key settings in which clusters have occurred include: workplaces, retail, hospitality and leisure premises as well as educational settings³.

Comment:

Number of all clusters (open and closed) that have been recorded by the contact tracing service up to 5pm Monday 4 January 2021. Note: the reporting period for cluster data is slightly different to the remainder of the report in order to provide the most up to date cluster information at the time of the bulletin.

There have been 70 new clusters in the seven days up to 4 January 2021^{4,5}. From week to week the number of clusters may change due to ongoing updates to the source information following detailed risk assessments. For this reason, we would discourage making direct comparisons between the cumulative number of clusters reported each week, with the number reported in the current week the most accurate at the time of the report.

In total, up to 4 January 2021, a total of 245 clusters with greater than five people have been identified in the following council areas; Antrim and Newtownabbey (n=19), Ards and North Down (n=5), Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon (n=18), Belfast City (n=64), Causeway Coast and Glens (n=11), Derry City and Strabane (n=30), Fermanagh and Omagh (n=18), Lisburn and Castlereagh City (n=12), Mid and East

³ COVID-19 transmission is most common in household settings. The number of affected households is not reported.

⁴ Note: the reporting period for cluster data is slightly different to the remainder of the report in order to provide the most up to date cluster information at the time of the bulletin. Some clusters may overlap (larger clusters may contain or overlap with several smaller clusters).

⁵ From week to week the number of clusters may change due to ongoing updates to the source information following detailed risk assessments. For this reason, we would discourage making direct comparisons between the cumulative number of clusters reported each week, with the number reported in the current week the most accurate at the time of the report.

Antrim(n=25), Mid Ulster (n=24) and Newry, Mourne and Down (n=19). In addition, there have been 992 clusters across Northern Ireland with fewer than five people.

Source: Contact Tracing Service / PHA Health Protection Service

Case epidemiology

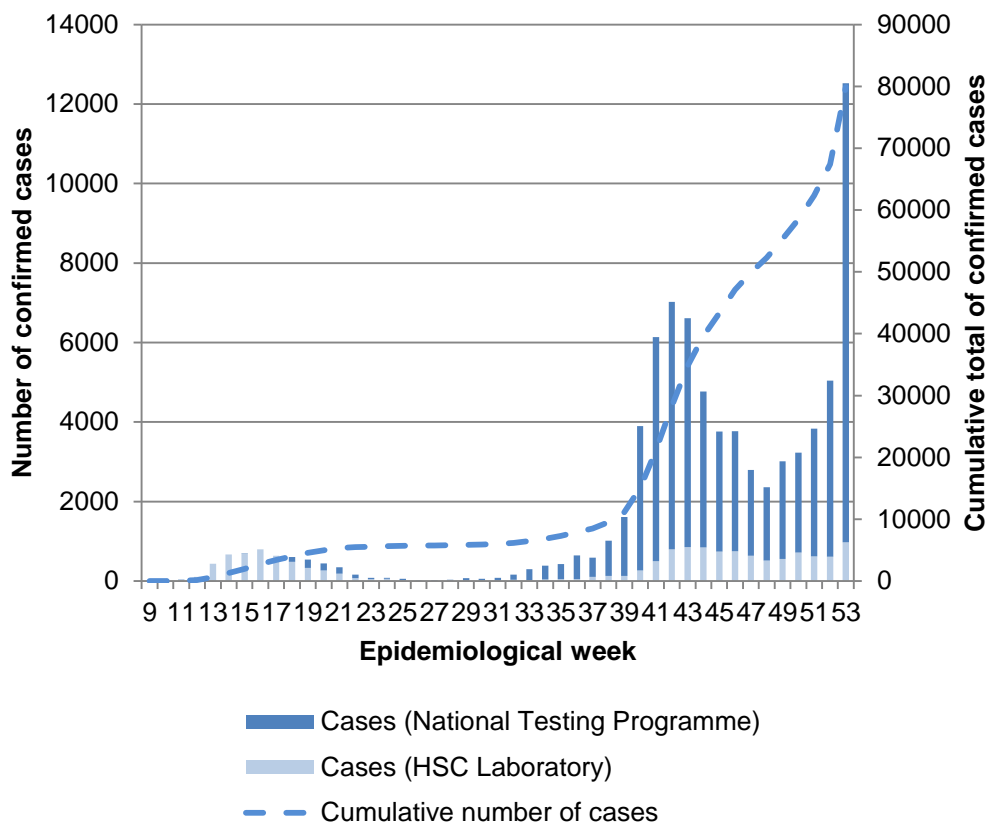


Figure 1. Laboratory confirmed COVID-19 cases by epidemiological week and source (HSC Laboratory testing and the National Testing Programme), 2020

Figure 1 represents the number of new weekly cases reported to the PHA (bars) and the cumulative number of cases (dashed line). Reporting is likely to be incomplete for the most recent week due to natural delays in samples reaching the labs, being tested and the information being reported.

From the end of September (week 40) we have seen a large increase in cases and increasing cumulative confirmed cases, peaking during week 42. This is mainly due to increasing clusters, increasing community transmission and contact tracing within a variety of settings. Although there were decreasing cases from the end of October (week 43) to week 48, since week 49 there have been increasing weekly cases, and there has been a significant increase in weekly cases in week 53 compared to week 52.

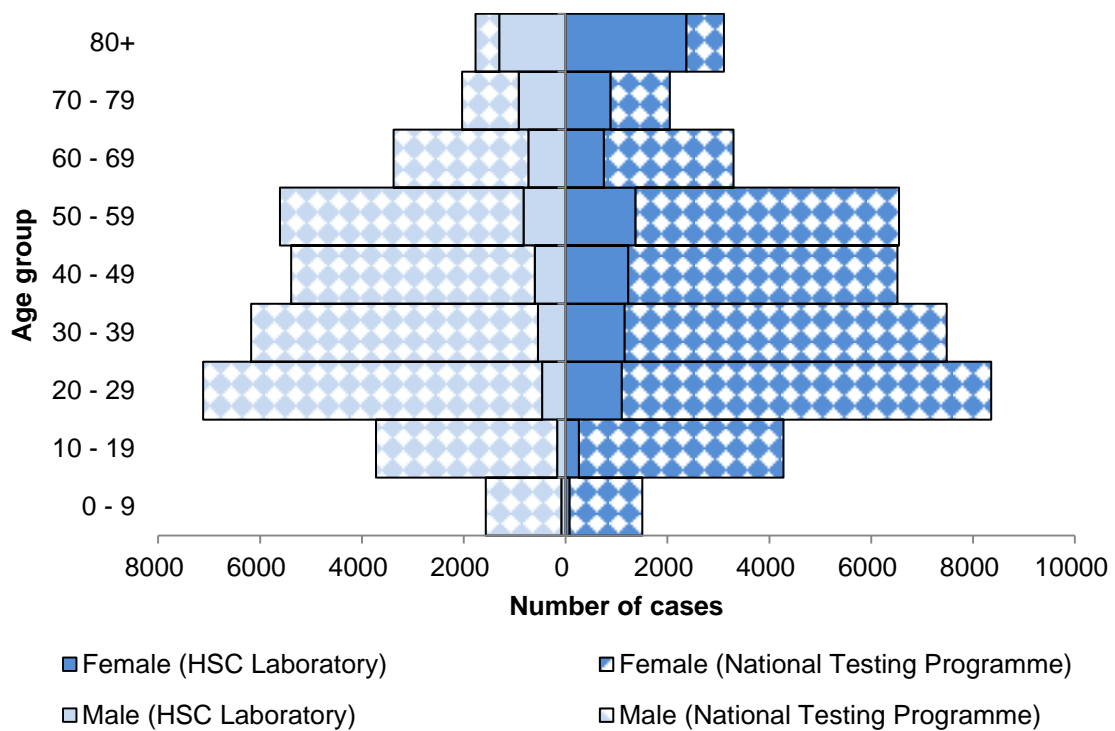


Figure 2. Laboratory confirmed cases, by age, sex and source (HSC Laboratory testing and the National Testing Programme), 2020

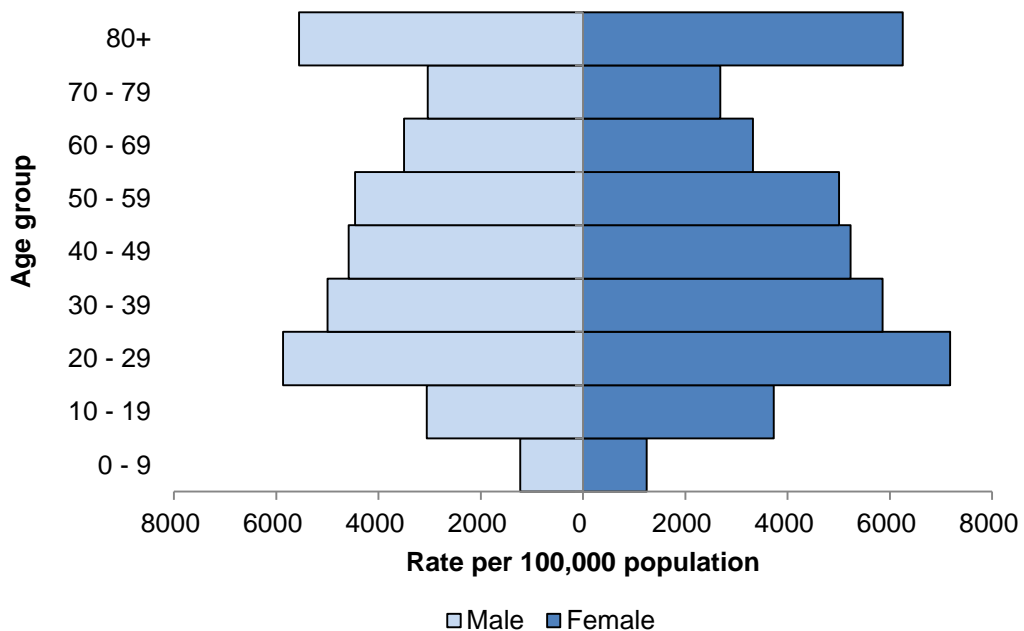


Figure 3. Laboratory confirmed cases per 100,000 population, by age and sex, for all testing data combined, 2020

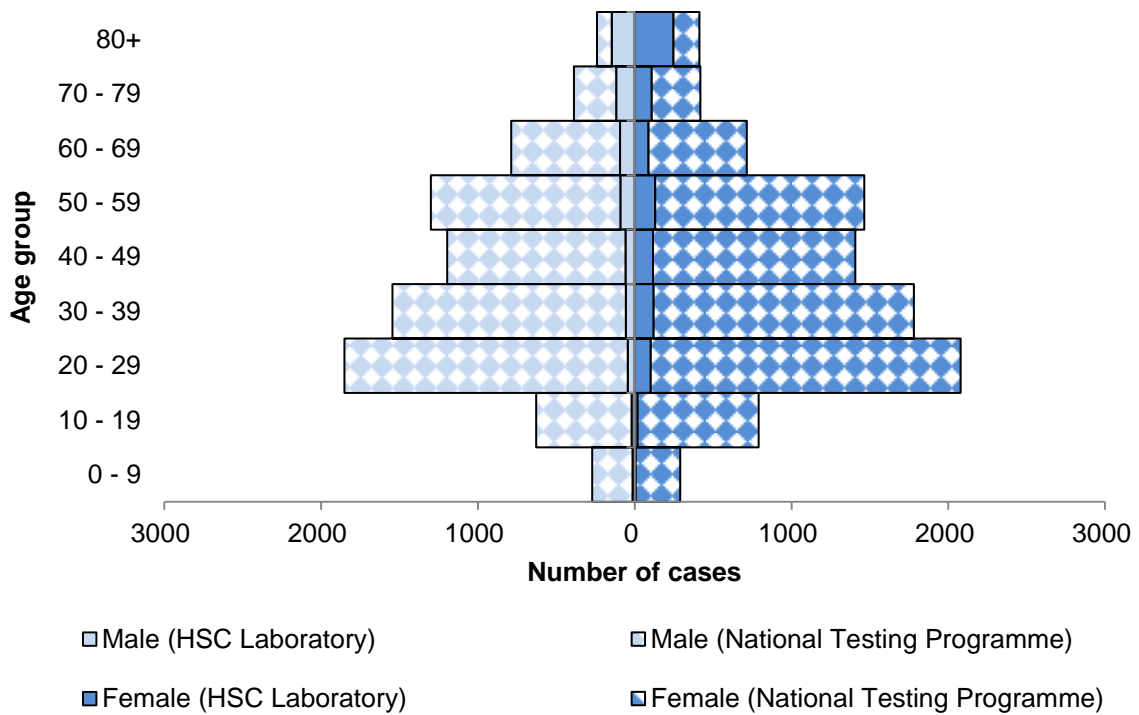


Figure 4. Laboratory confirmed cases, by age, sex and source (HSC Laboratory testing and the National Testing Programme), for weeks 52 and 53

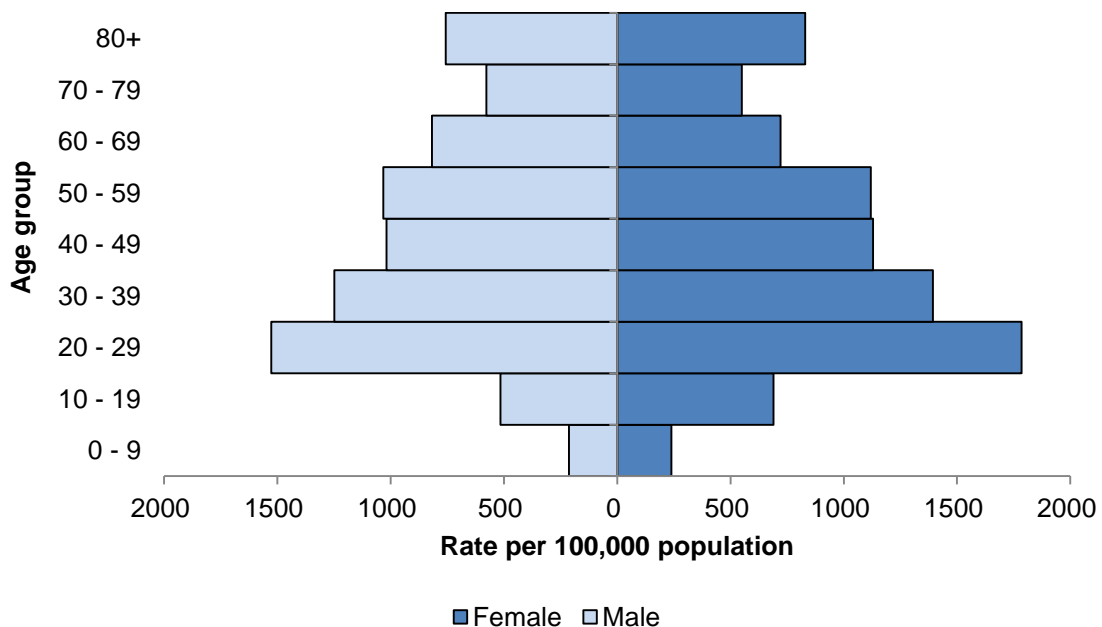


Figure 5. Laboratory confirmed cases per 100,000 population, by age and sex, for all testing data combined, for weeks 52 and 53

Figures 2 and 3 represents the cumulative number of cases reported by HSC laboratories and the National Testing Programme, and overall case rates per 100,000 population, respectively. HSC laboratory cases were mainly detected at the beginning of the pandemic in hospital settings, resulting in higher cases and rates among the older age groups. With the introduction of the National Testing Programme cases it has become the main source of case data as a result of enhanced community testing enabling us to detect a greater spectrum of disease. From this data we have seen a higher number of cases among the 20-29 age group.

Figures 4 and 5 show similar to the cumulative numbers but restricted to the previous two epidemiological weeks. These show how the age groups of cases in the most recent weeks differ from the overall cumulative cases presented in figures 2 and 3. Also, more cases are being detected outside of hospital settings as part of the National Testing Programme.

Table 1. Total laboratory confirmed COVID-19 cases, by sex, for all testing data combined			
Age group	Sex		
	Male	Female	Total*
0 - 9	1566	1507	3073
10 - 19	3721	4280	8001
20 - 29	7114	8359	15473
30 - 39	6176	7481	13657
40 - 49	5388	6513	11901
50 - 59	5607	6550	12157
60 - 69	3377	3298	6675
70 - 79	2034	2046	4080
80+	1768	3110	4878
Unknown		2	2
Total	36751	43146	79897

*Unknown sex for ten cases, these are not included in the total figures

Table 2. Laboratory confirmed COVID-19 cases, by Trust				
Trust Area	Epidemiological Week			
	51	52	53	Total
Belfast	150	137	276	4511
Northern	188	196	239	2982
South Eastern	48	42	119	1922
Southern	90	95	136	2159
Western	49	67	73	1206
Other*	3306	4505	11678	67049
Unknown	1	NA	2	78
Northern Ireland	3832	5042	12523	79907

*Other cases includes those from the National Testing Programme, NIAS, private nursing home residents, pathology services, GPs and hospices

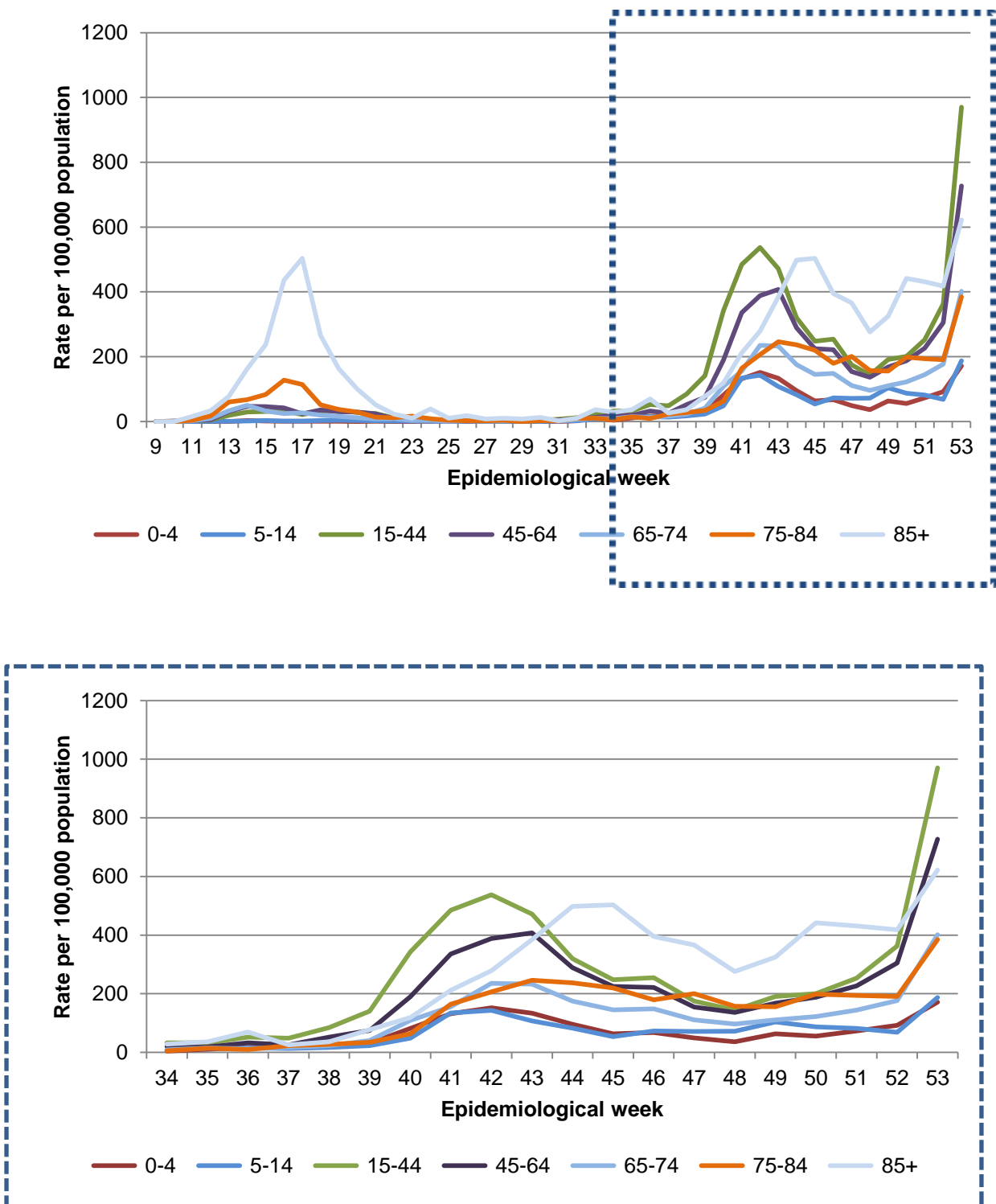


Figure 6. Weekly laboratory confirmed case rates per 100,000 population, by age group, for all testing data combined, 2020

The case rates increased in week 53 compared to the previous week in all age groups. The highest case rates were seen in the 15-44 age group (970.1 per 100,000), which is higher than the peak of 537.4 per 100,000 in the 15-44 age group in week 42 (12-18 October 2020). This is also a change from recent weeks when the highest rates were reported in the older age groups.

In week 53, positivity was highest in the 45-64 age group (27.5%). The lowest positivity was observed in the 0-4 age group (15.5%).

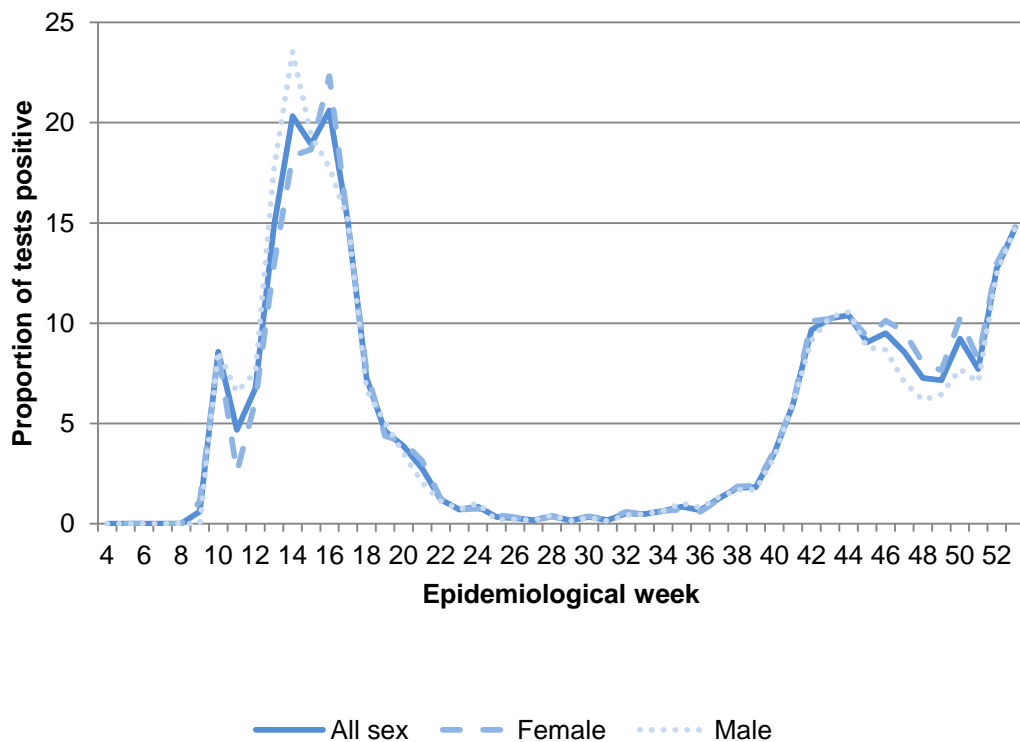


Figure 7. Positivity (%) of laboratory confirmed COVID-19 cases by epidemiological week, overall and by sex (HSC Laboratory testing), 2020

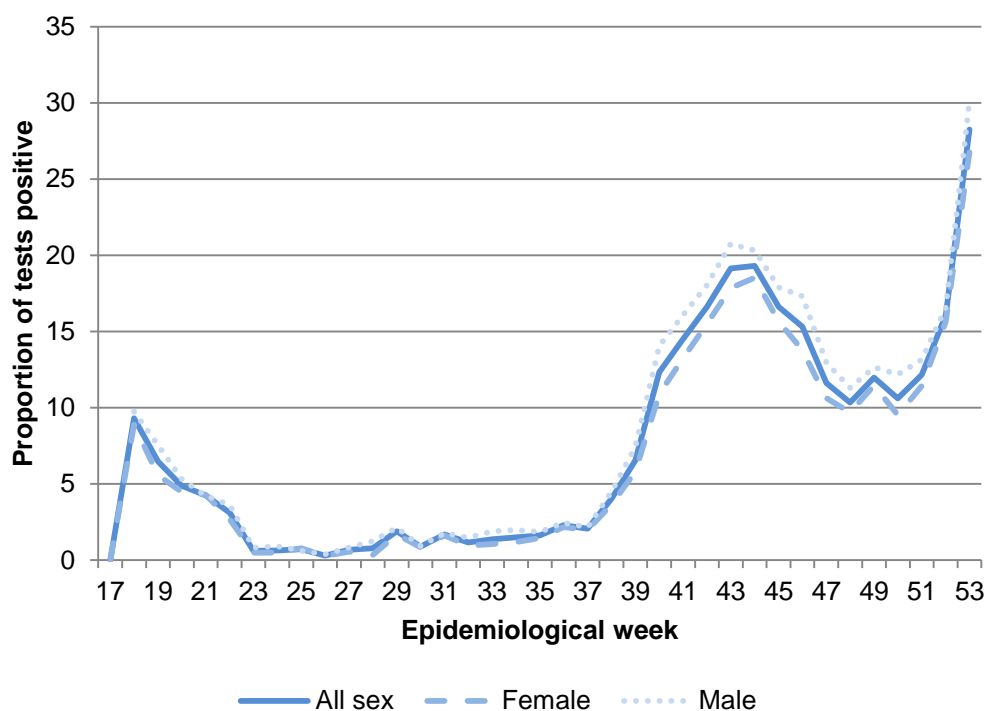


Figure 8. Positivity (%) of laboratory confirmed COVID-19 cases by epidemiological week, overall and by sex (National Testing programme), 2020

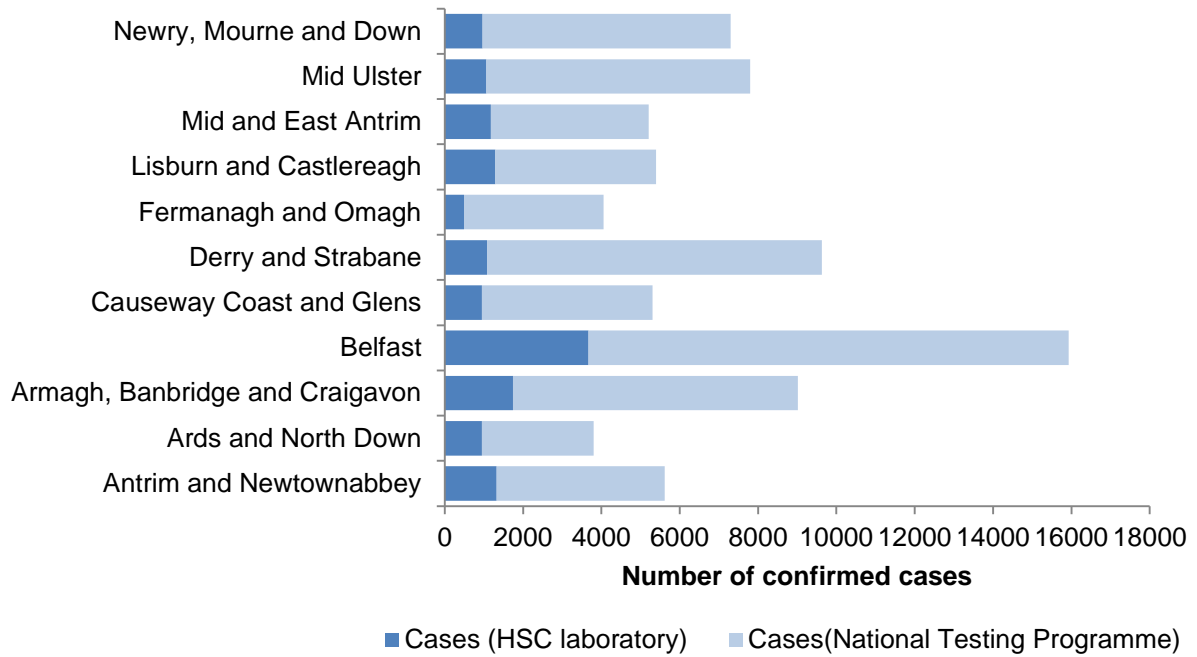
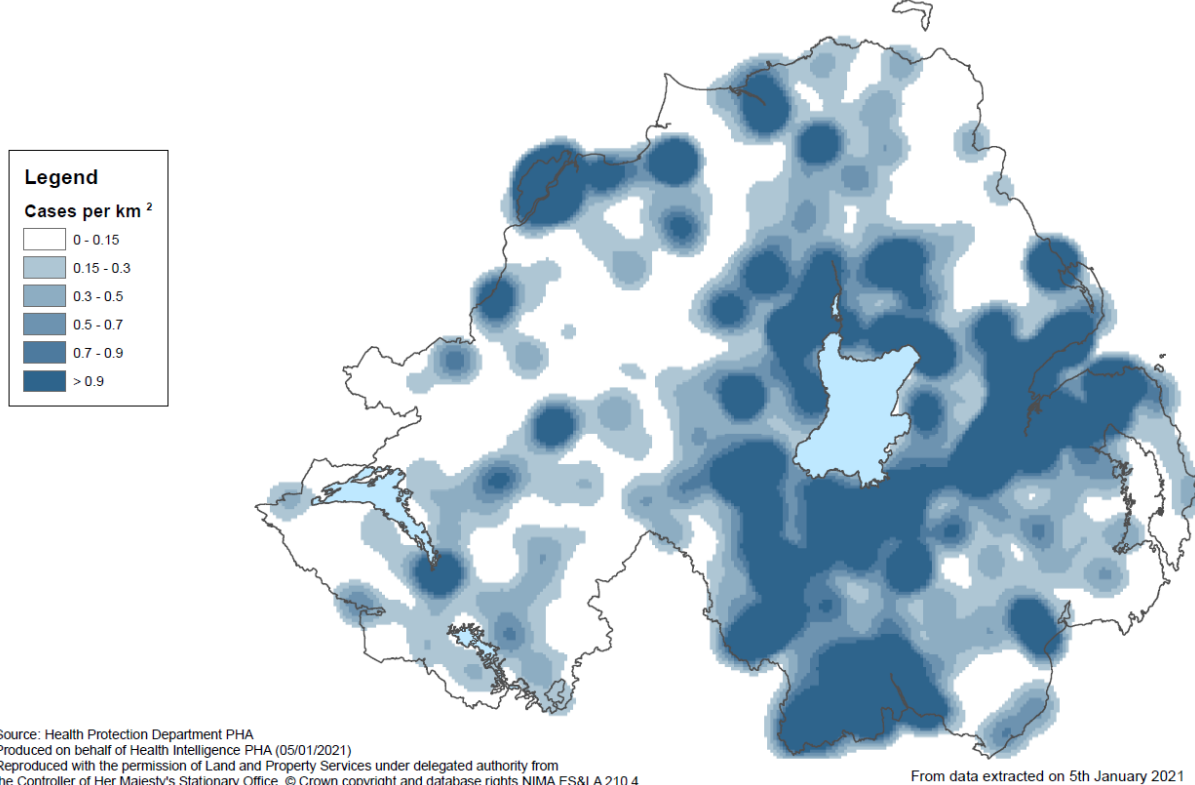


Figure 9. Total laboratory confirmed cases, by Local Government District (LGD) and source (HSC Laboratory testing and the National Testing Programme), 2020

Public Health Agency

Density map of confirmed COVID-19 cases during the week ending 3 January 2021



Source: Health Protection Department PHA
Produced on behalf of Health Intelligence PHA (05/01/2021)
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From data extracted on 5th January 2021

Figure 10. Density map of confirmed COVID-19 cases, for all testing combined, 2020

Figure 10 shows a contour density map based on the number of confirmed COVID-19 cases in week 52. The contour lines on the map indicate increasing density of cases, with the darkest shade of blue indicating where there is the greatest density of cases. The map highlights an increased number of areas with the highest density of COVID19 cases in week 52 and spread of the virus to other areas. However, information should be interpreted with caution as identified rates are based on testing which is not evenly spread across the region.

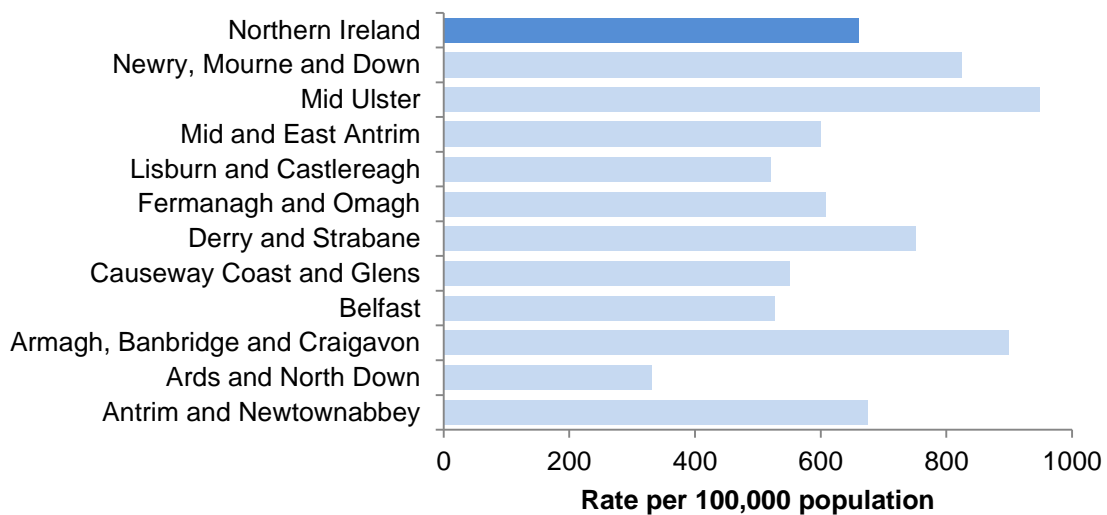
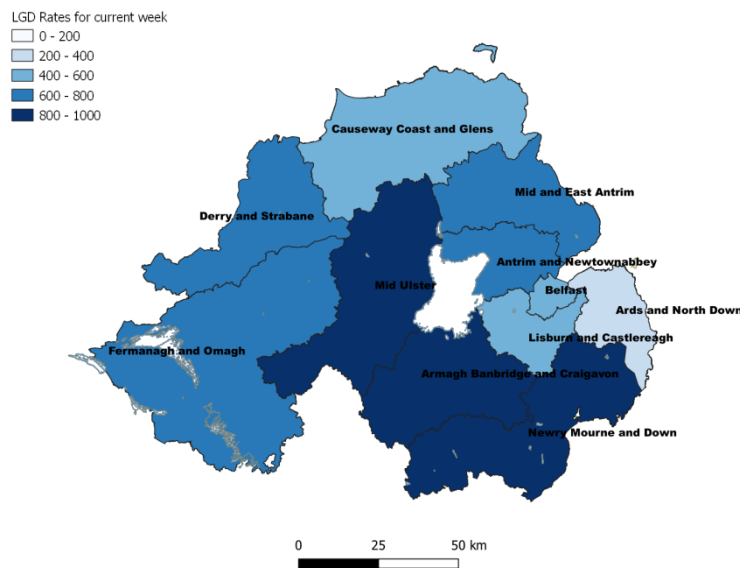
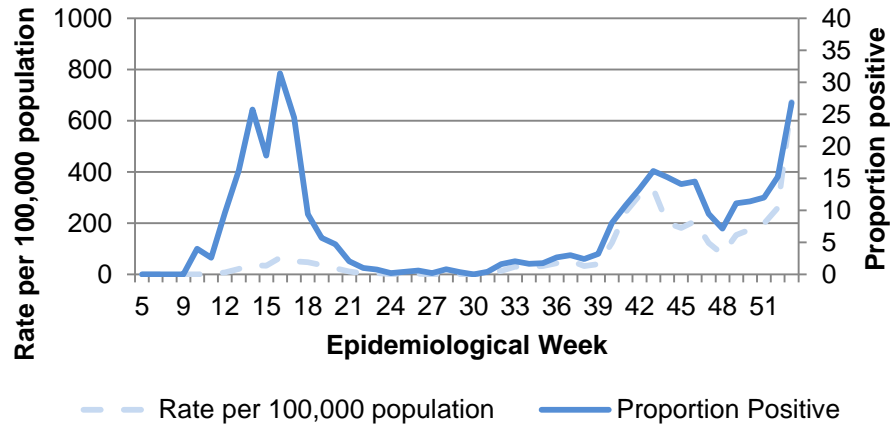
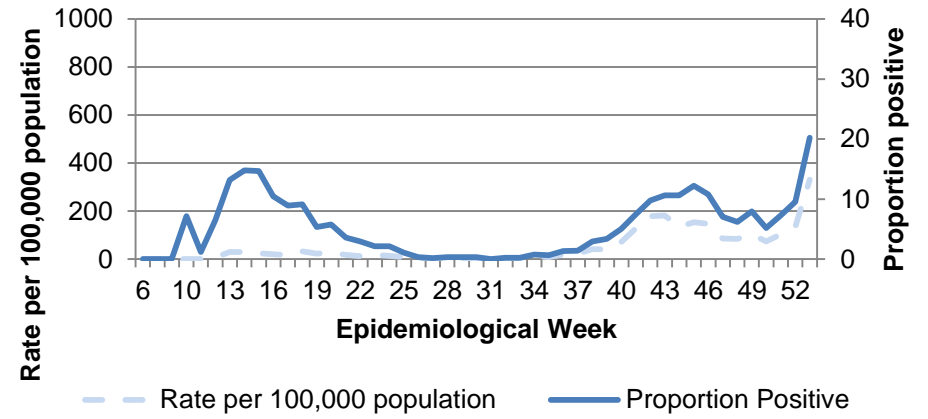


Figure 11. Total laboratory confirmed cases per 100,000 population, by Local Government District (LGD), for all testing data combined, week 53 (27 December 2020-03 January 2021)

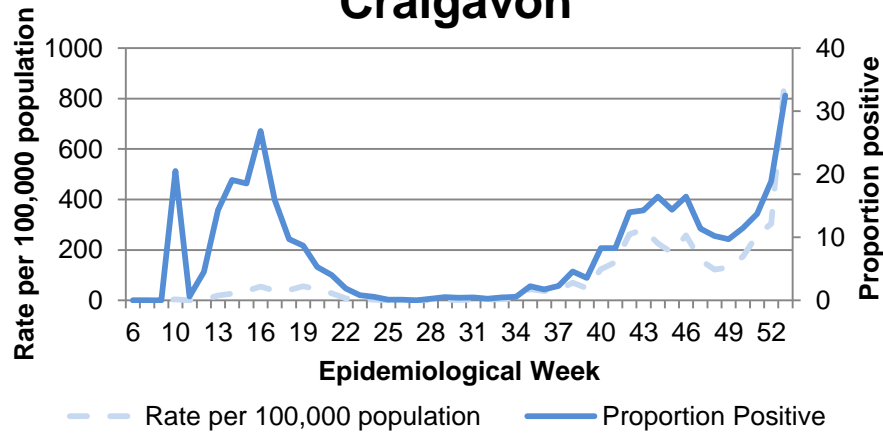
Antrim and Newtownabbey



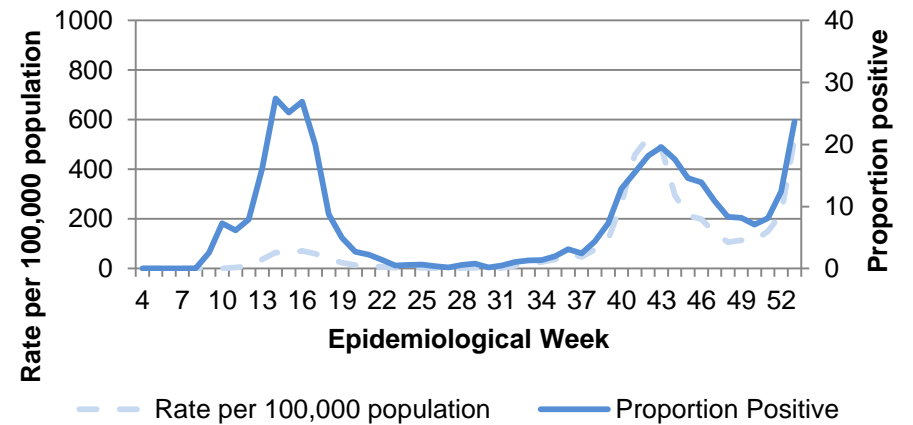
Ards and North Down



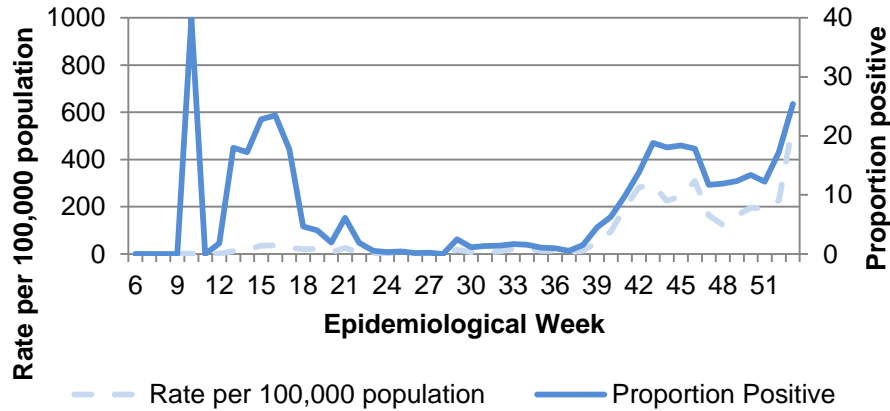
Armagh, Banbridge and Craigavon



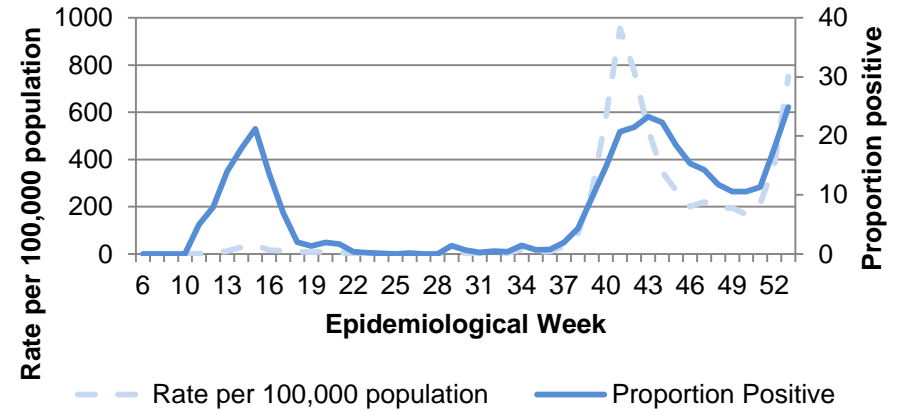
Belfast



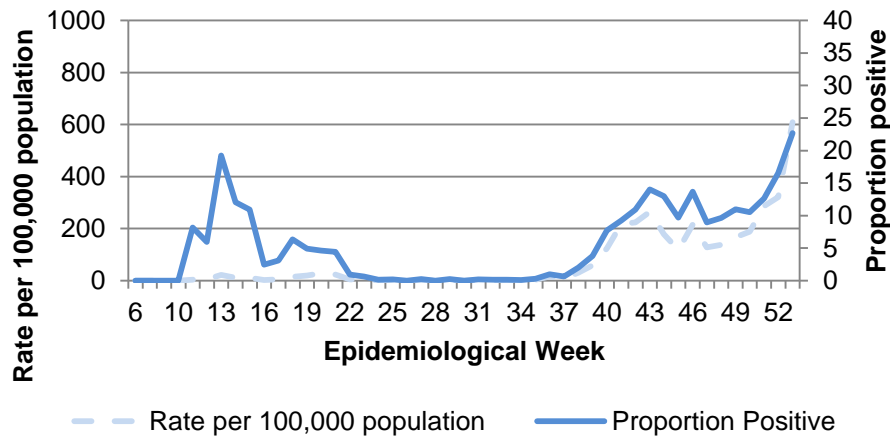
Causeway Coast and Glens



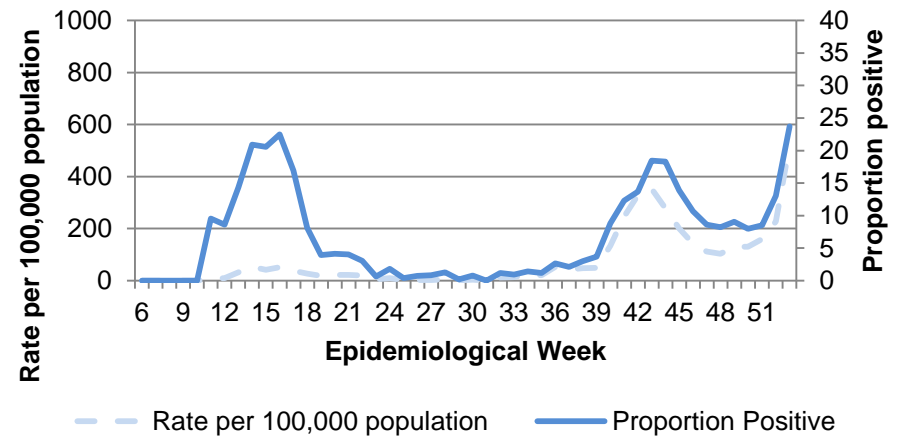
Derry and Strabane



Fermanagh and Omagh



Lisburn and Castlereagh



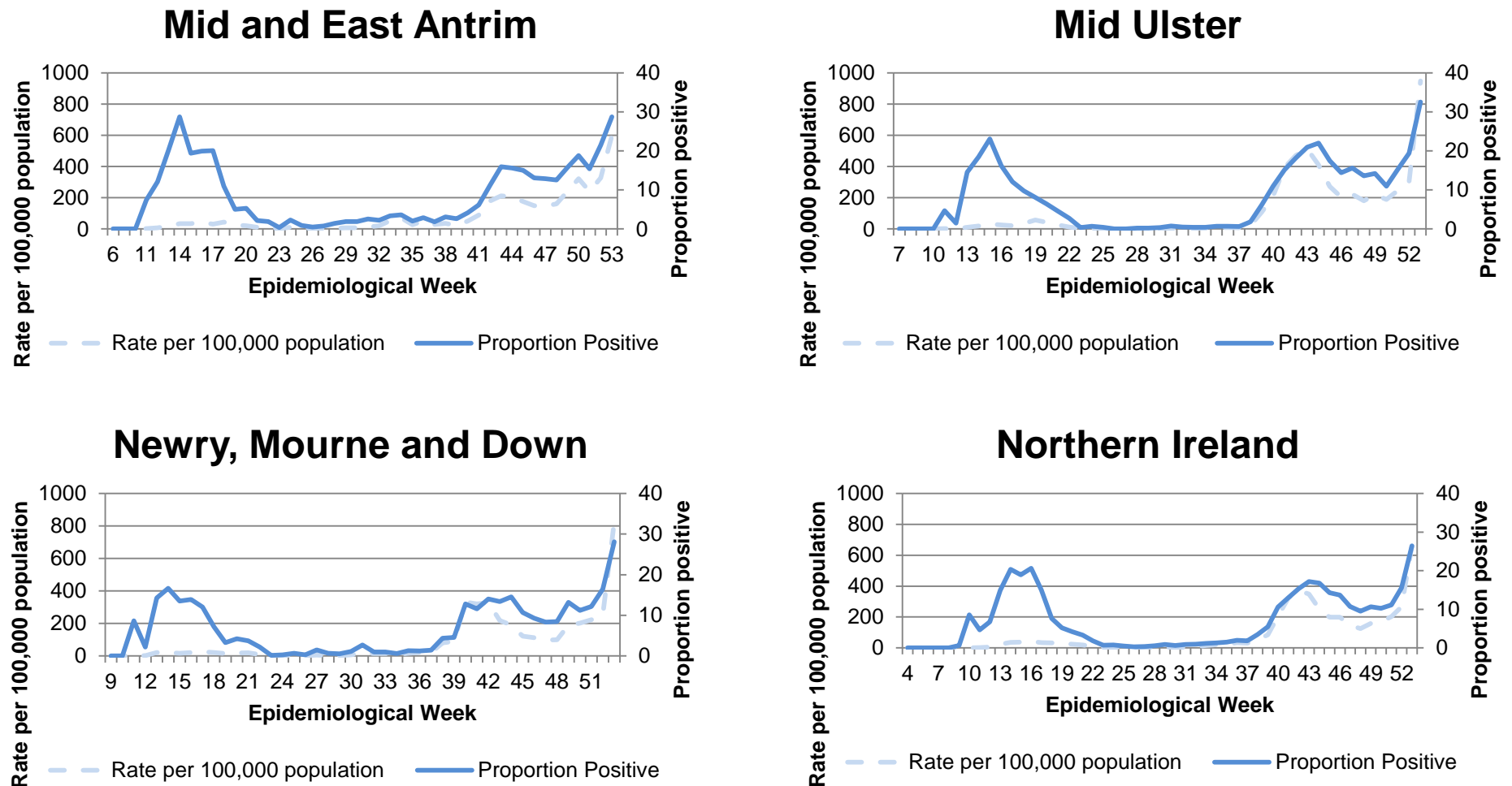


Figure 12. Weekly laboratory confirmed cases per 100,000 population and proportion positive, by Local Government District (LGD) and Northern Ireland, for all testing data combined, 2020-2021.

The case rates increased in all areas in week 53 compared to week 52. Mid Ulster had the highest rate in week 53 compared to other Local Government Districts (948.0 per 100,000 population). The overall Northern Ireland rate increased from 202.4 to 262.9 per 100,000 population between weeks 51 and 52.

The highest positivity occurred in Mid Ulster (32.5%). Northern Ireland's proportion positive in week 53 was 26.4%, an increase from 15.6% in week 52. This is higher than the peak positivity of 20.6% reported across Northern Ireland in week 16 (13 - 19 April 2020).

Source: HSC Trust laboratory reports and the National Testing Programme

Deprivation

An analysis of COVID-19 related health inequalities relating positive test cases and COVID-19 related admissions between the most and least deprived areas of Northern Ireland, including variations across age, sex and urban and rural areas was [published](#) by Department of Health on 16 December 2020.

Care home outbreaks

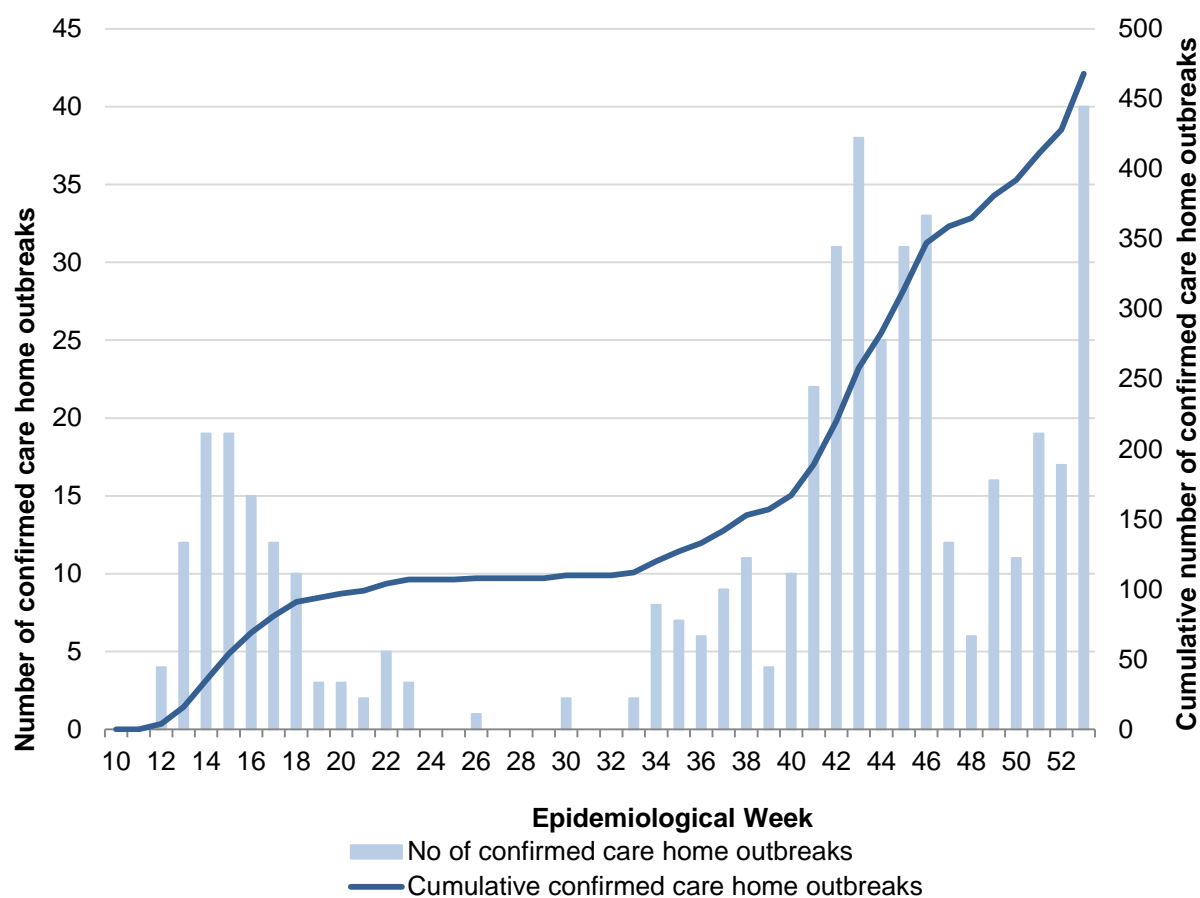


Figure 13. Confirmed COVID-19 care home outbreaks in Northern Ireland, 2020

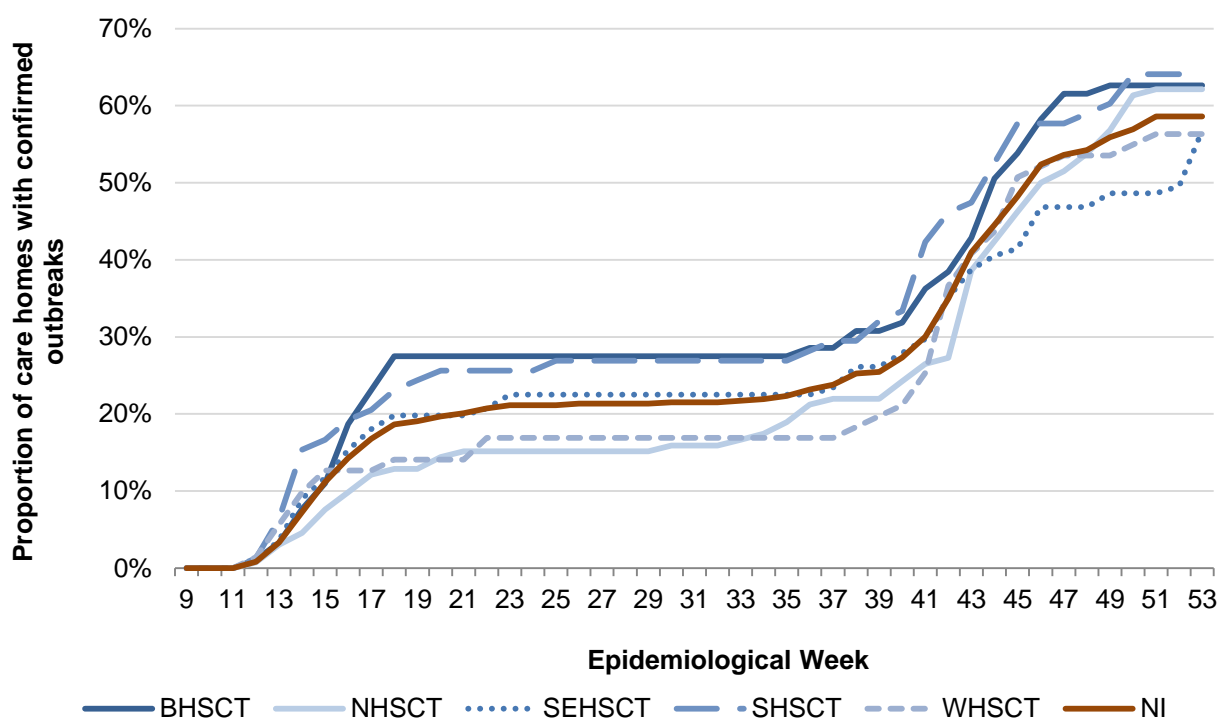


Figure 14. Proportion of care homes with confirmed or suspected COVID-19 in Northern Ireland by Trust, 2020

Table 3. Proportion of care homes with confirmed COVID-19 outbreaks in Northern Ireland, by Trust			
Trust Area	Cumulative total of care homes with outbreaks in 2020	% of care homes with outbreaks	Total number of care homes
Belfast	63	69.2%	91
Northern	86	65.2%	132
South Eastern	63	56.8%	111
Southern	56	71.8%	78
Western	47	66.2%	71
Northern Ireland	315	65.2%	483

To week 53, a total of 468 confirmed COVID-19 care home outbreaks were reported, involving 315 care homes (65.2% of all Northern Ireland care homes). The highest proportion of care homes with confirmed COVID-19 outbreaks (71.8%) were reported from the Southern Trust

area.

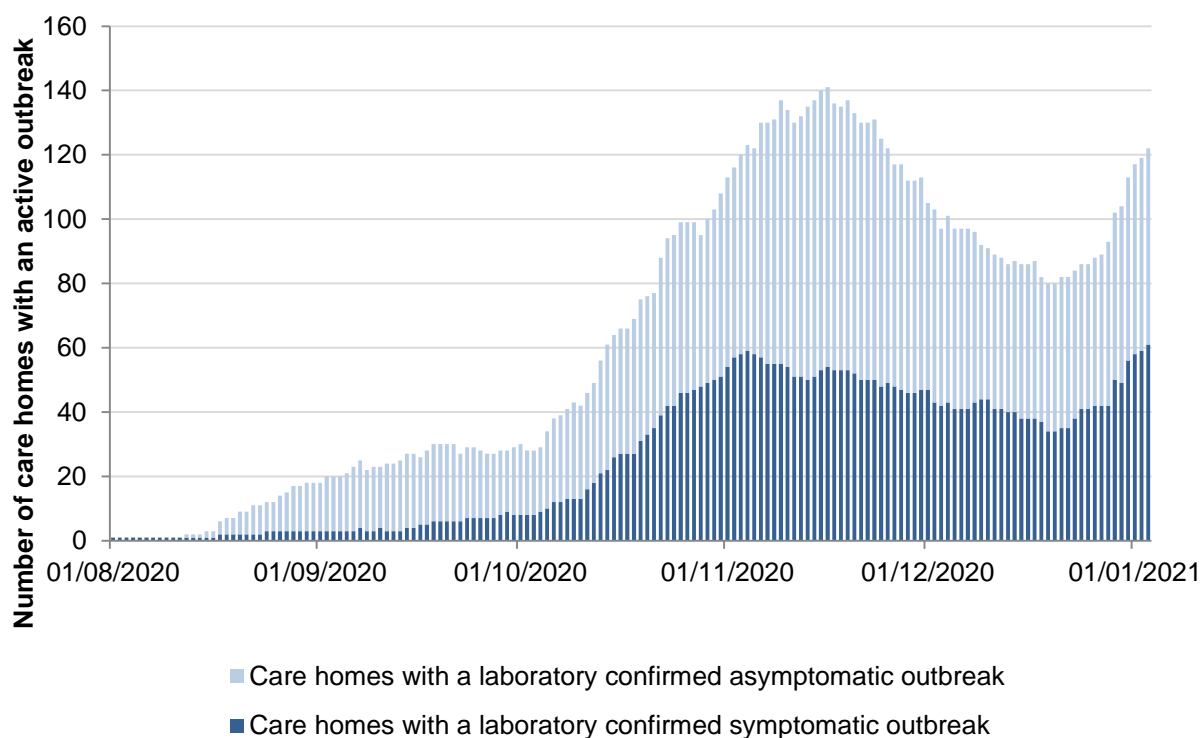


Figure 15. Number of care homes with a confirmed active symptomatic or asymptomatic COVID-19 outbreak⁶ in Northern Ireland, 2020

Source: PHA Health Protection duty room reports from care homes

⁶ PHA began recording confirmed Covid-19 outbreaks as either symptomatic or asymptomatic on 1 August 2020. This means the numbers represented on the graph may not equal the total active confirmed COVID-19 outbreaks. Confirmed COVID-19 outbreaks reported prior to 1 August 2020 and are still ongoing are not included in this graph. Additionally, other respiratory outbreaks are not included.

Primary care syndromic surveillance

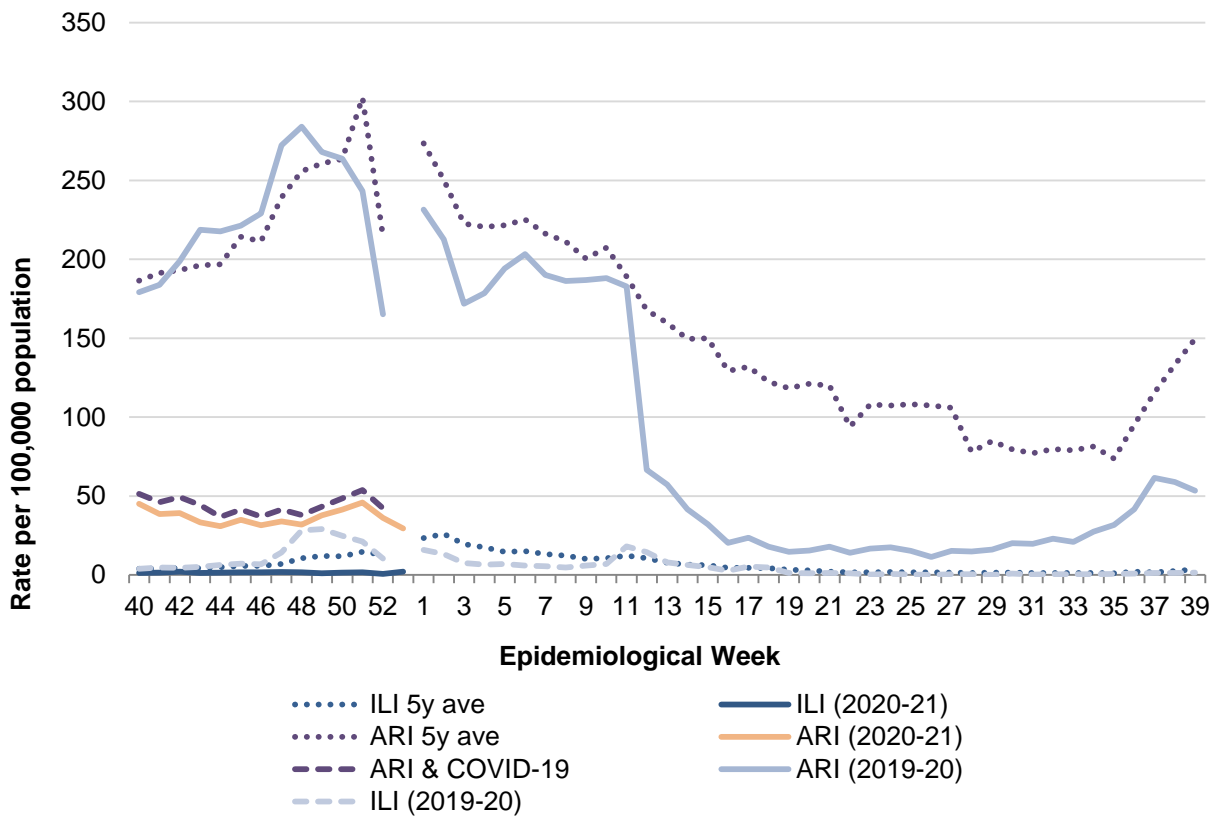


Figure 16. In-hours consultation rates for influenza- like illness (ILI), acute respiratory infections (ARI) and COVID-19, 2019/20 - 2020/21

The ARI consultation rate trend during 2019/20 decreased from week 40 to a peak in week 48 (284.1 per 100,000 population), before declining. The trend pattern for ILI is similar although rates are much smaller. The peak occurred earlier than the previous five year average reflecting the earlier 2019/20 influenza season. In week 11 ARI consultation rates dramatically fell from 182.8 per 100,000 to 66.6 per 100,000 in week 12, which coincides with the introduction of self-isolation advice, the stay at home directive (“lockdown”) and a change to primary care delivery in managing COVID-19 cases. From week 52 to week 53 ARI consultation rates have decreased to 29.5 consultations per 100,000 population.

Please note 2020/21 contains epidemiological week 53. Historic data will not appear for the same period as week 53 did not fall during these years.

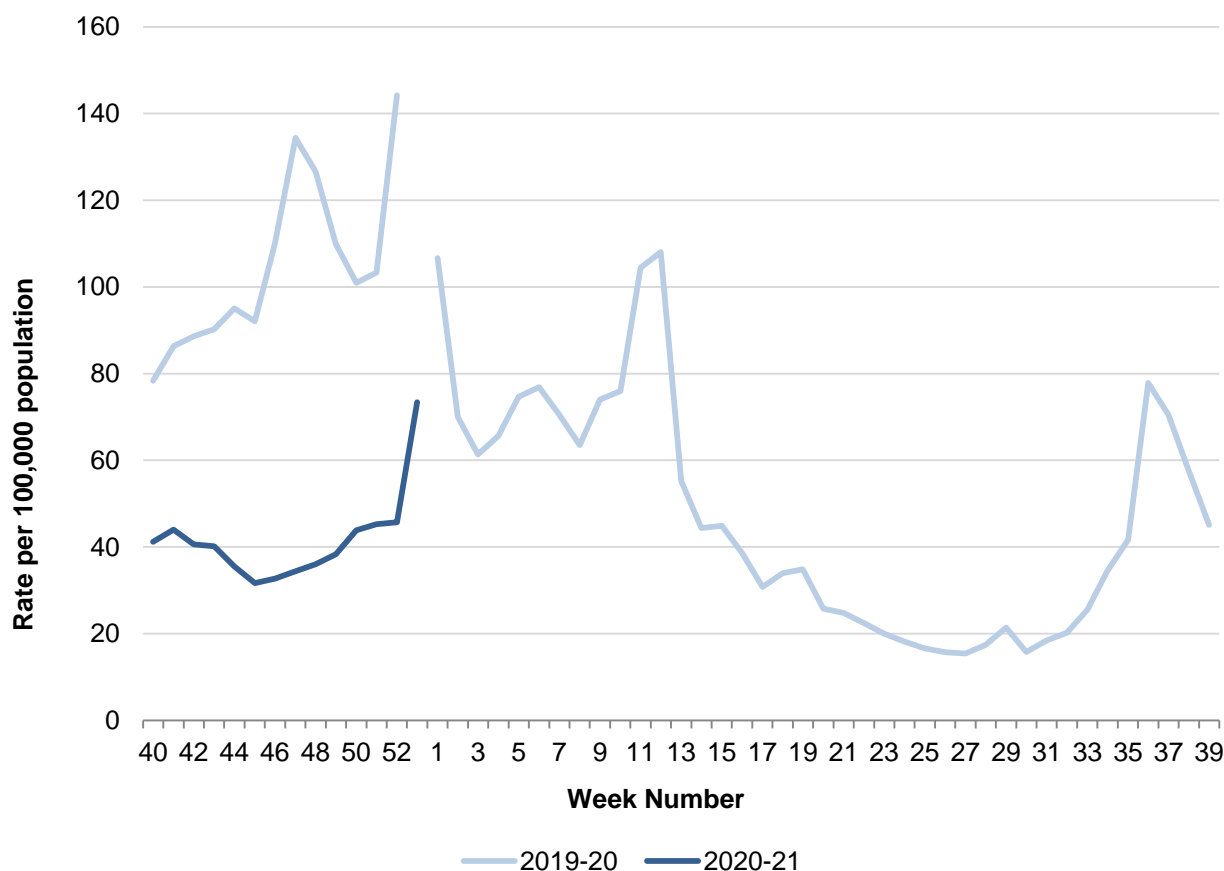


Figure 17. Out-of-hours (OOH) consultation rates for ARI, 2019/20 – 2020-21

The ARI consultation rate in primary care out-of-hours (OOH) trend during 2019/20 increased from week 40 to a peak in week 52 (144.2 per 100,000 population), before declining. In week 10 ARI consultation rates in OOH increased from 76.0 to 108.1 per 100,000 by week 12, before dramatically falling again to 55.2 per 100,000 in week 13. This follows a similar trend to in-hours consultations. The new respiratory 2020-21 year commenced in week 40. Consultations have increasing since week 45.

Please note, 2020/21 contains epidemiological week 53. Historic data will not appear for the same period as week 53 did not fall during these years.

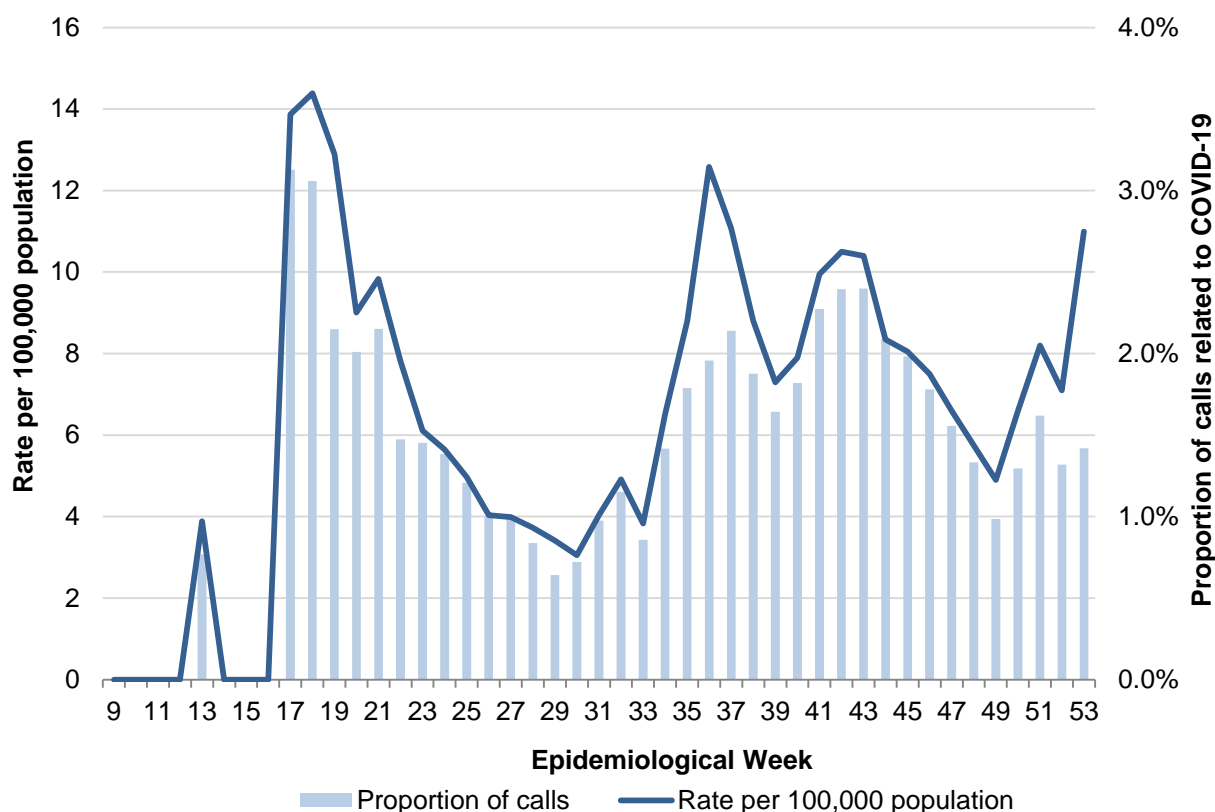


Figure 18. Out-of-hours (OOH) consultation rates for COVID-19, 2020

The COVID-19 consultation rate in OOH centres during 2020 started increasing from week 17. It peaked in week 18 at 14.4 per 100,000 before declining. A similar trend was seen in terms of proportion of calls related to COVID-19, though this proportion has so far remained small. This trend coincides with the introduction of GP COVID-19 codes and the change from using established respiratory codes, such as ARI, to COVID-19.

COVID-19 consultation rates have increased compared to the previous week. The proportion of calls related to COVID-19 has also increased compared to the previous week but remains below 2%.

Source: Apollo, Wellbeing Software

Sentinel testing

Table 4. COVID-19 activity in Northern Ireland Sentinel GP Practices*, week 53, 2020-2021			
Period	Individuals tested	Number positive	Proportion positive
Current week	13	0	0.0%
Total	747	30	4.0%

*Sentinel testing started 27 April 2020; excludes care home residents and healthcare workers

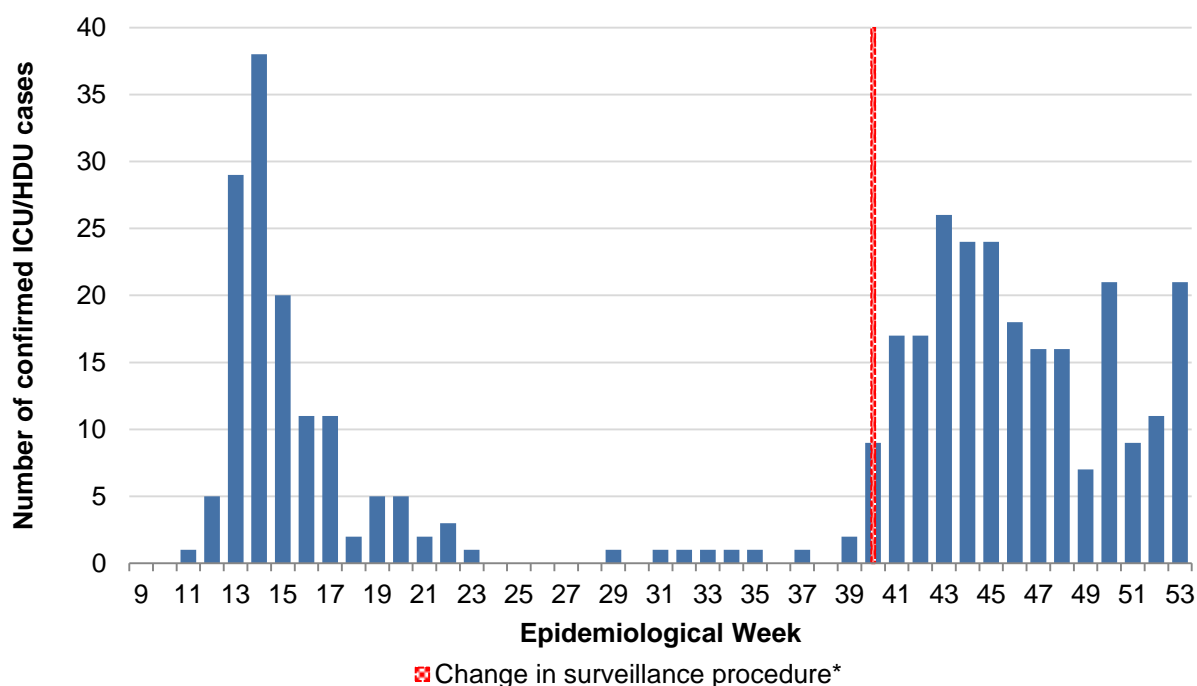
COVID centre testing

Table 5. COVID-19 activity in Northern Ireland COVID Centres*, week 53, 2020-2021			
Period	Individuals tested	Number positive	Proportion positive
Current week	-	-	N/A
Total	864	14	1.6%

* One COVID centre operational from 15 June 2020 (BHSC); virology data in table above from 01 July 2020. Data provided from the COVID centre directly reported 182 individuals tested between 15 June and 30 June 2020 inclusive. All results were negative. This data is subject to change as we continue to quality assure the COVID centre information against virology.

Source: HSC Trust laboratory reports and the National Testing Programme

Critical care surveillance



*Since start of week 40 (28 September 2020), data collection for critical care surveillance has been streamlined to coincide with the well-established surveillance of influenza patients in critical care in conjunction with the Critical Care Network Northern Ireland (CaNNI)

Figure 19. ICU/HDU COVID-19 cases by sample result week, 2020

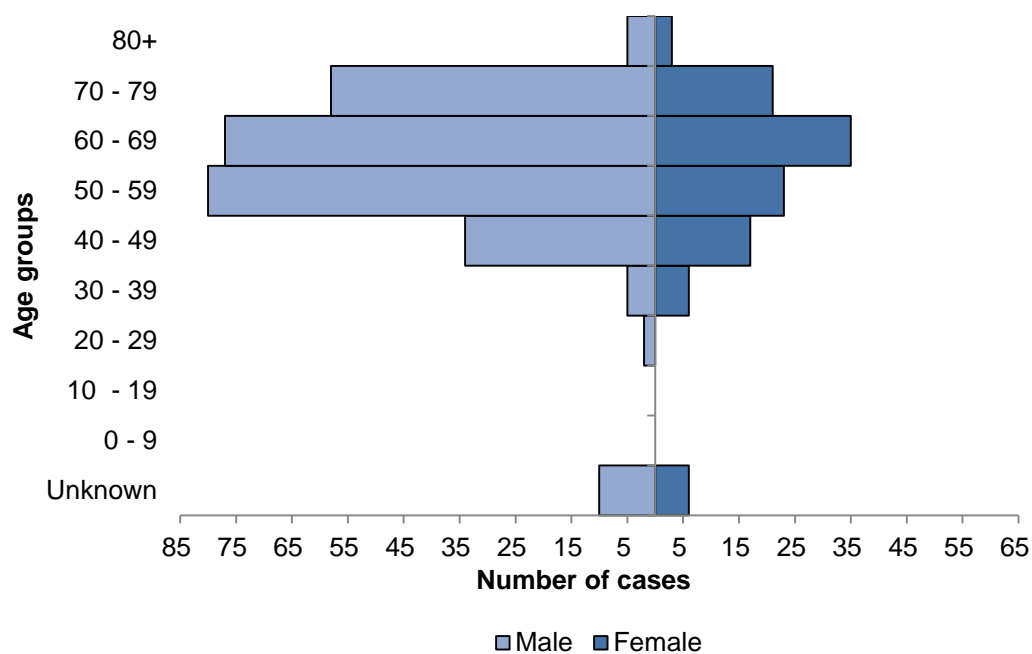


Figure 20. ICU/HDU COVID-19 cases, by age and sex, 2020

To week 53, there have been 377 individuals admitted to critical care with confirmed SARS-CoV2 reported to the PHA. Week 14 saw the highest number of ICU reports with a positive result (n=38).

Of the 377 individuals, 71.1% (n=268) were male. The ages ranged from 26 years to 90 years, with a median age of 61 years.

Source: PHA COVID-19 critical care surveillance online reporting system and the Critical Care Network Northern Ireland (CaNNI)

The Intensive Care National Audit and Research Centre (ICNARC) publish a report on patients critically ill with COVID-19 (<https://www.icnarc.org/Our-Audit/Audits/Cmp/Reports>). There is also a specific report which can be downloaded presenting analysis of data on patients critically ill with confirmed COVID-19 reported to ICNARC up to 4pm on 30 December 2020 from critical care units in Northern Ireland participating in the Case Mix Programme (the national clinical audit for adult critical care).

Schools Surveillance

Information on school COVID incidents is based on situations reported to PHA COVID School Team.

These include:

- **Single confirmed case** of COVID-19 (SARS-CoV-2) in a student or member of staff in the school setting.

The incident is closed after 14 days if there have been no further cases.

- **Cluster of two or more confirmed cases of COVID** (SARS-CoV-2) in a student or member of staff in the school setting within a 14 day period.

The incident is closed after 14 days if there have been no further cases from the last case

The PHA COVID School Team carries out contact tracing of cases that attend a school in collaboration with PHA Test and Trace Programme. Clusters are also further investigated by the School Team in liaison with local partners.

Data is collected on the number of COVID school incidents reported to the PHA COVID School Team since schools reopened.

The number of cases that have been reported by schools to the PHA school team is also included in this section to provide high level information on cases broken down by pupil and staff status. It is important to note that the definitive source for the number of COVID-19 confirmed cases in school aged children is from the HSC Laboratory testing and the National Testing Programme. Direct comparisons should not be made with laboratory data as the school teams figures may underestimate of laboratory data.

Table 6 shows the number of school incidents by type of school that have been reported to the PHA School team up to the end of week 53.

The figures are a snapshot of incidents recorded at the time of data extraction. A school may have had more than one incident since opening. Figures should not be compared from week to week as the number will include new reports and further cases of existing incidents.

School Type	Total to date
Preschool	89 (6.1%)
Primary	832 (57.0%)
Post Primary	462 (31.7%)
Special	76 (5.2%)
Total	1459

Table 7 shows the number of school incidents by type of school and also type of incident i.e. single case in a 14 day period or cluster of cases within a 14 day period.

Clusters have been further broken down into those with 2 to 5 cases and 6 or more cases.

Table 7. Number of Incidents by School and Incident Type			
Incident Type	School Type	Total to date	Proportion
Single Case	Preschool	61	8.5%
	Primary	473	66.2%
	Post Primary	143	20.0%
	Special	37	5.2%
	All	714	
Cluster (2-5 cases)	Preschool	26	4.8%
	Primary	305	56.4%
	Post Primary	178	32.9%
	Special	32	5.9%
	All	541	
Cluster (>5 cases)	Preschool	2	1.0%
	Primary	54	26.5%
	Post Primary	141	69.1%
	Special	7	3.4%
	All	204	

Cumulative number of schools affected by at least one case of COVID-19

A school may have had more than one incident since opening on 24th August. Table 8 shows the cumulative number of schools that have had at least one school incident up to the end of week 53.

The 1459 school incidents have occurred in 832 schools in Northern Ireland. Overall 56.1% of schools have had at least one COVID-19 case in a pupil or member of staff.

Table 8. Number of Schools with a COVID-19 Incident			
School Type	No. Schools that have had at least one case	Total number of schools in Northern Ireland	Proportion of school in Northern Ireland that have had at least one case
Preschool	77	458	16.8%
Primary	530	792	66.9%
Post Primary	191	194	98.5%
Special	34	39	87.2%
Total	832	1483	56.1%

Trend of school incidents

The following information includes the number of incidents in schools since they first reopened until the end of week 53 (03 January 2021).

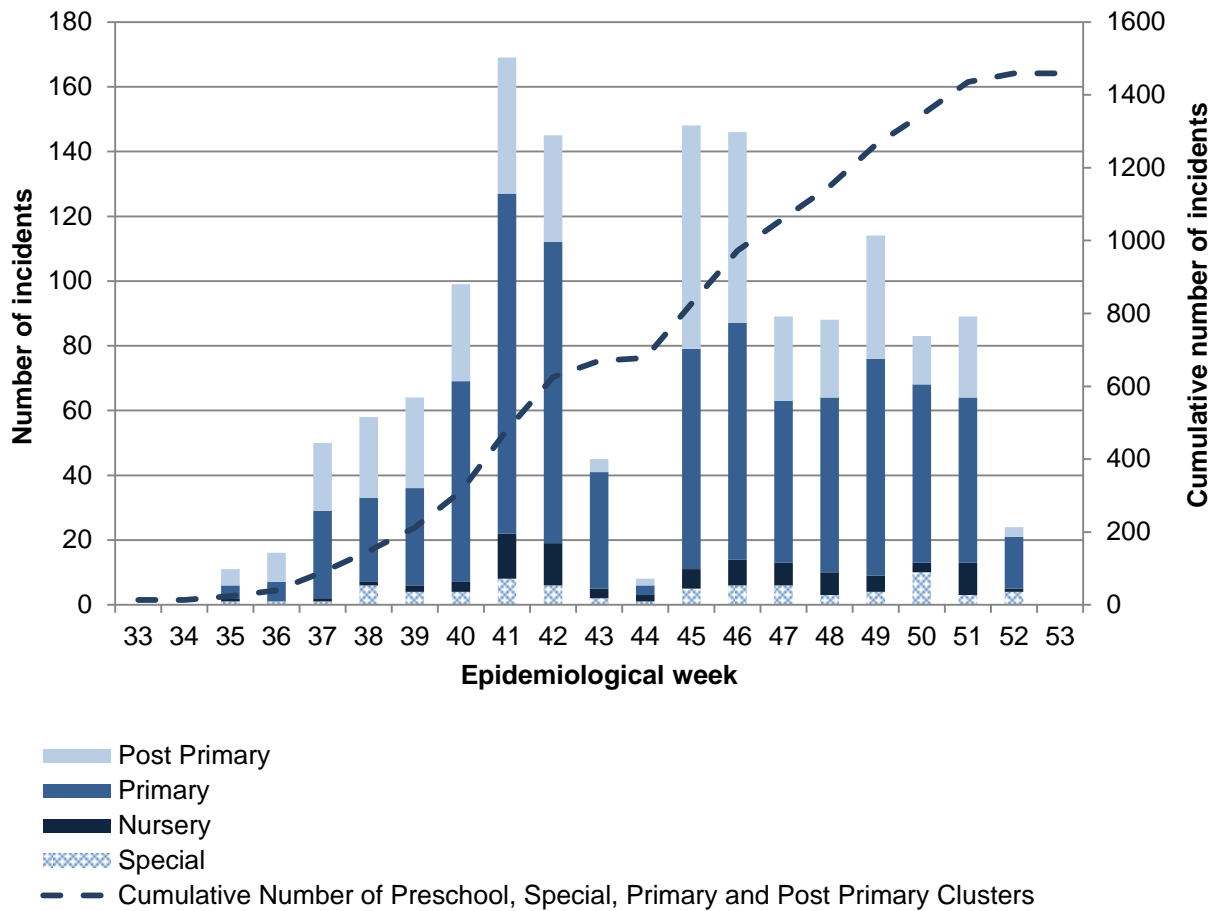


Figure 21. Number of COVID-19 incidents in schools, by school type, week 33 - 53

Cumulative School Incidents by Local Government District

The following information includes the cumulative number of incidents in schools by LGD since they first reopened until the end of week 53 (03 January 2021).

The cumulative community rate per 100,000 population is also shown in the figure.

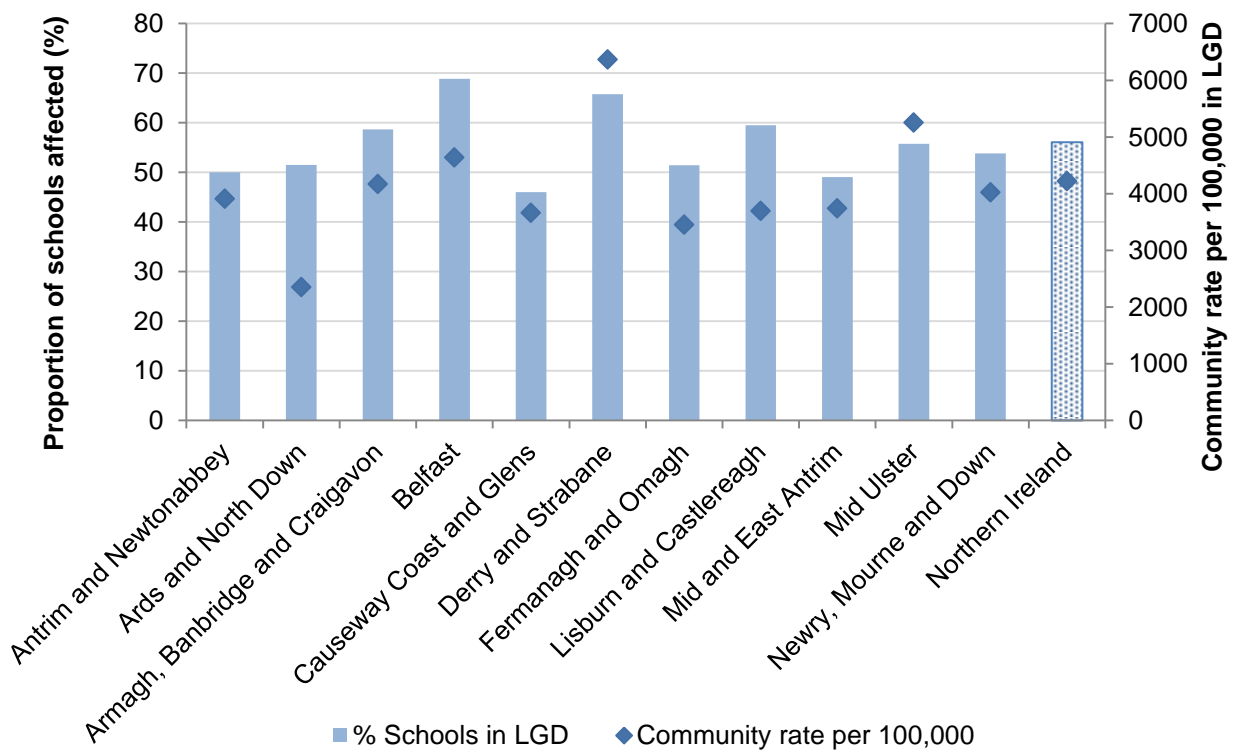


Figure 22. Proportion of schools with a COVID-19 incident and overall background community rate by 100,000 (2020) by Local Government District (LGD)

Cumulative number of COVID-19 cases reported by schools to PHA School Team

Since schools opening on 24th August until end of week 53, there have been 4,720 confirmed COVID-19 cases that occurred at any point during this time reported by schools to the PHA School Team.

The definitive source for the number of COVID-19 confirmed cases in school aged children is from the HSC Laboratory testing and the National Testing Programme. Direct comparisons should not be made with laboratory data.

Staff member includes teaching and non-teaching staff.

Table 9. Number of COVID-19 cases reported by schools where information is available on pupil / status, up to week 53				
School	Pupil Case	Staff Case	Total	Proportion of all cases that are pupils
Preschool	60	79	139	43.2%
Primary	1007	757	1764	57.1%
Post Primary	2068	559	2627	78.7%
Special	55	135	190	28.9%
All	3190	1530	4720	67.6%

Table 10. Number of COVID-19 cases in school aged children reported by schools where information is available as a proportion of all school aged children, up to week 53		
School Type	Pupil cases	Proportion of all school aged pupils in Northern Ireland
Preschool	60	0.02%
Primary	1007	0.29%
Post Primary	2068	0.60%
Special	55	0.02%
All	3190	0.93%

Source: PHA COVID-19 Schools Team, Department of Education school statistics

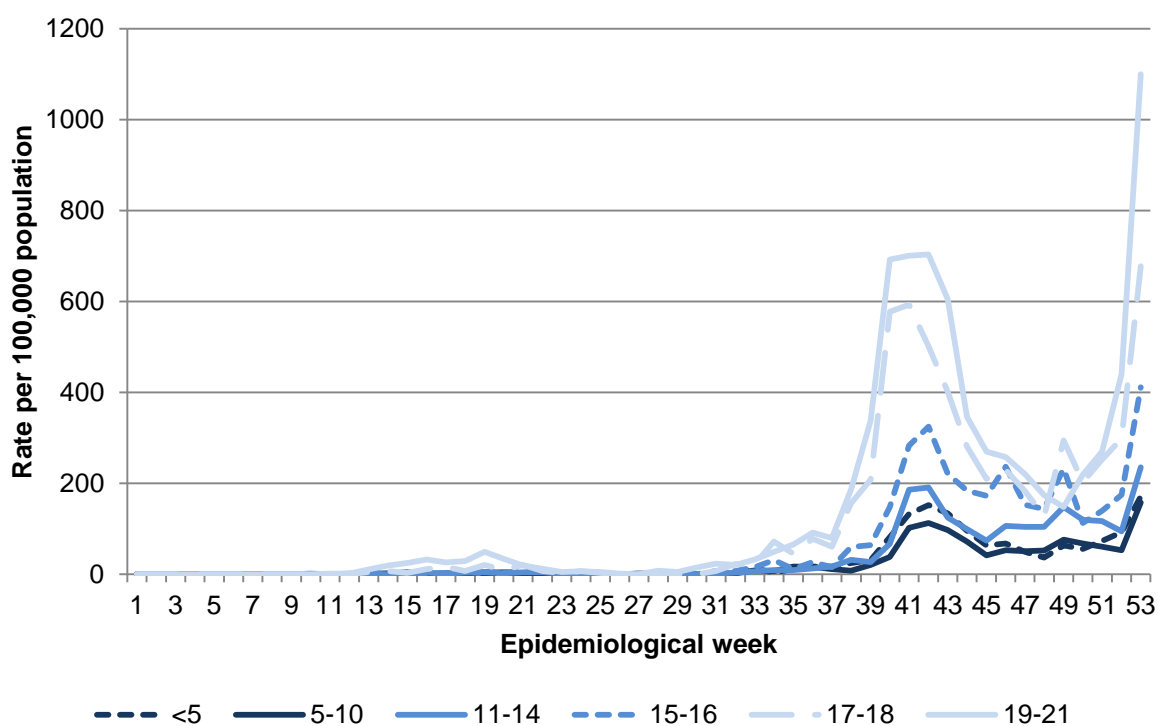


Figure 23. Weekly COVID-19 laboratory confirmed case rates per 100,000 population, by age group, for all testing data combined, in those aged 21 and under, 2020

All of the age groups increased in week 53 compared to week 52. The 19-21 age group had the highest case rates (1099.9 per 100,000), followed by the 17-18 age group (677.3 per 100,000).

Source: HSC Trust laboratory reports and the National Testing Programme

Mortality surveillance

Medical Certificate of Cause of Death for confirmed / suspected COVID-19

The Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA) provide the weekly number of **registered respiratory and COVID-19 deaths each Friday ([here](#))**. In week ending 18 December 2020, the proportion of COVID-19 deaths registered was 23.4%, and from the beginning of 2020 to week ending 18 December 2020 the proportion of COVID-19 deaths registered was 9.8%.

Weekly published data are provisional and is based on registrations of deaths, not occurrences. The majority of deaths are registered within five days in Northern Ireland. Respiratory deaths include any death where terms directly relating to respiratory causes were mentioned anywhere on the death certificate (this includes Covid-19 deaths). This is not directly comparable to the ONS figures relating to 'deaths where the underlying cause was respiratory disease'. Figures relate to all deaths registered up to 18 December 2020 with a mention of COVID on the death certificate. Please note: Where COVID is mentioned in part 1 it may not be the underlying cause of death. Covid-19 deaths include any death where Coronavirus or Covid-19 (suspected or confirmed) was mentioned anywhere on the death certificate. NISRA quarterly statistics provide detail of underlying cause following coding to ICD-10 rules; figures are available [here](#).

Data unavailable for week 51 at time of publication.

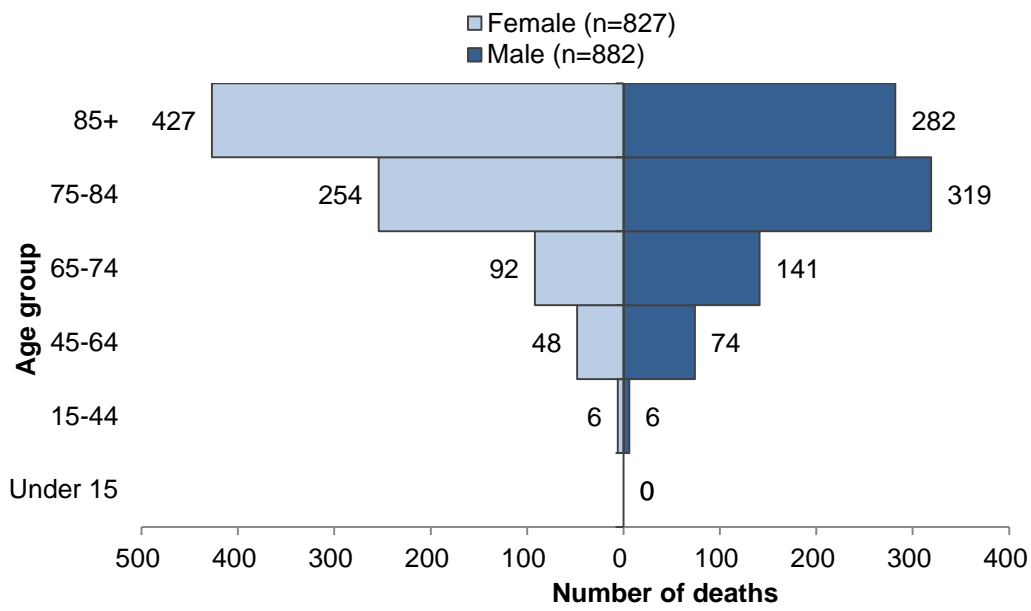


Figure 24. NISRA registered COVID-19 deaths by sex and age group, up to week ending 18th December 2020

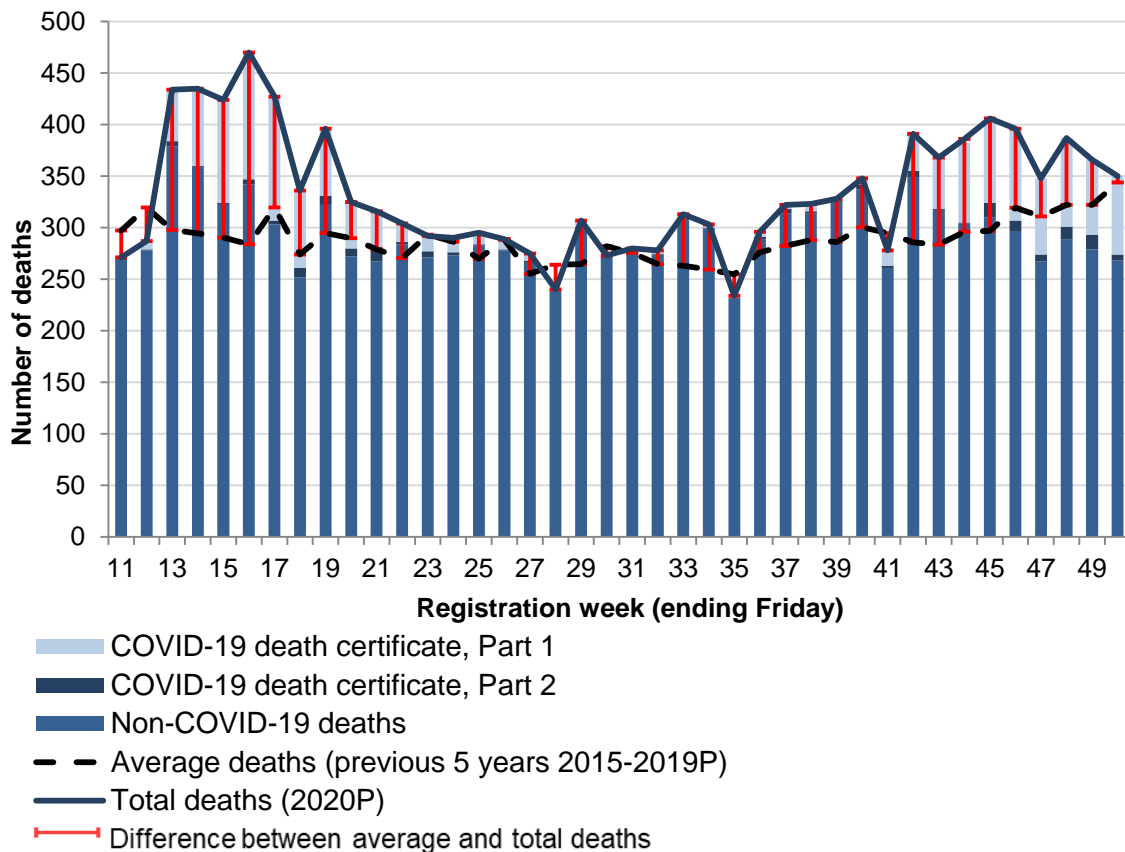


Figure 25. Northern Ireland registered deaths, including COVID-19 associated deaths, Week 11 (ending 20 March 2020) to Week 50 (ending 18 December 2020)

Table 11. Northern Ireland registered deaths, including COVID-19 associated deaths, Week 11 (ending 20 March 2020) to Week 50 (ending 18 December 2020)

Registration week (ending Friday)	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	32	33	34	35	36	37	38	39	40	41	42	43	44	45	46	47	48	49	50
COVID-19 death certificate, Part 1	0	8	50	75	100	123	120	75	65	45	35	18	15	14	11	10	7	0	6	1	4	3	4	3	2	5	4	7	1	6	15	36	50	77	82	89	74	86	73	76
COVID-19 death certificate, Part 2	1	1	5	1	1	5	4	9	9	8	14	2	6	3	1	1	2	2	1	0	1	1	2	1	1	2	4	2	1	5	2	6	1	1	14	11	7	12	14	6
Non-COVID-19 deaths	270	278	379	359	323	342	303	252	322	272	267	284	271	273	283	278	266	238	300	272	275	274	307	299	231	289	314	314	326	337	261	349	317	304	310	296	267	289	279	268
Average deaths (previous 5 years 2015-2019P)	297	320	298	295	290	284	320	274	295	290	279	271	293	286	270	288	255	264	265	282	276	265	263	259	255	276	282	288	286	300	295	286	284	296	297	319	311	322	322	344
Total deaths (2020P)	271	287	434	435	424	470	427	336	396	325	316	304	292	290	295	289	275	240	307	273	280	278	313	303	234	296	322	323	328	348	278	391	368	386	406	396	348	387	366	350

Source: Northern Ireland Statistical Research Agency (NISRA)

All-cause excess deaths

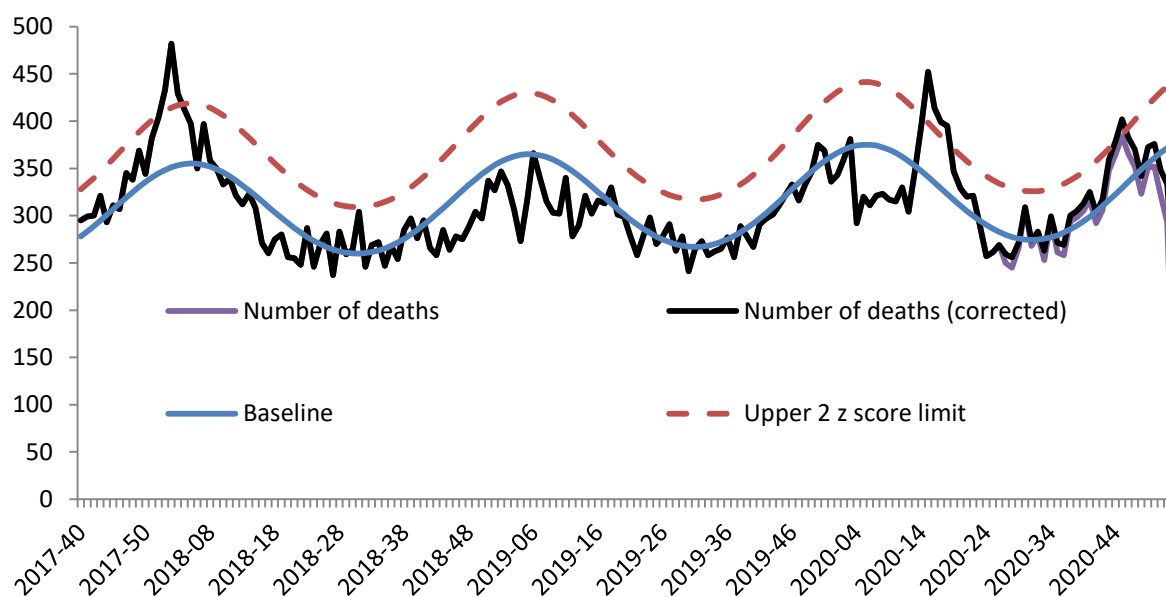
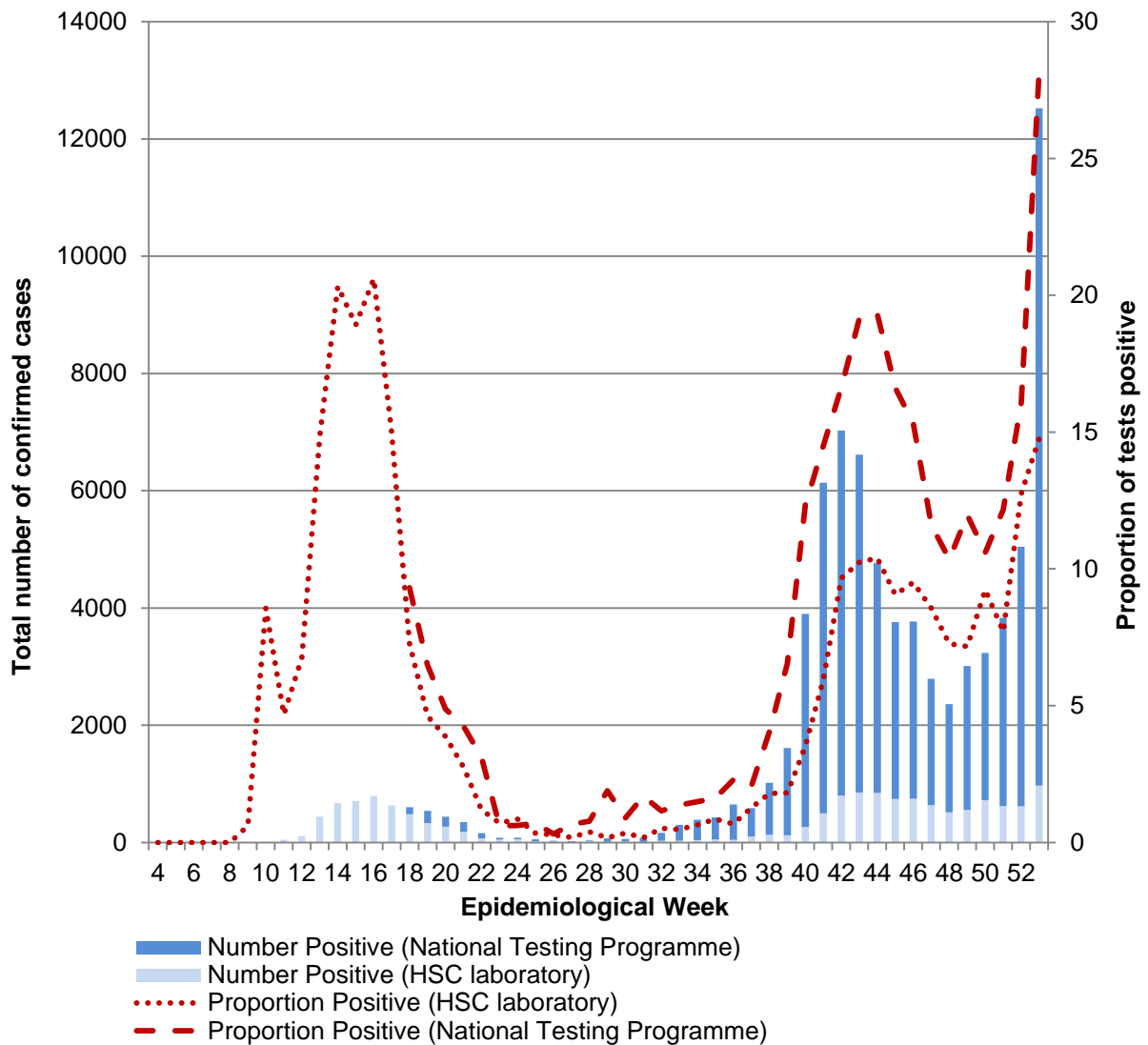


Figure 26. Weekly observed and expected number of all-cause deaths in all ages, week 40 2017 - week 53 2020

In 2020, excess all-cause deaths were reported in epidemiological weeks 13 to 20, and week 22. This increase in deaths happened outside the influenza season and at a time when we know flu was not circulating (here). More recently, excess deaths have also been observed in weeks 44 and 45. While these more recent excesses have occurred within the flu season, reports show flu was not widely circulating. This suggests the excess mortality may in part be related to COVID-19 deaths and to a fall in presentation to hospital with other conditions (data not shown).

Excess deaths were mainly in those over 65 years, which is in line with the age profile of COVID-19 deaths. Despite delay correction, reported mortality data is still provisional due to the time delay in registration and observations which can vary from week to week; not all registrations for the current week will have been included this bulletin.

Virology testing surveillance



* Total individuals tested include those that were reported as indeterminate

Figure 27. Weekly number of individuals tested for SARS-CoV2 and proportion positive, by source (HSC Laboratory testing and the National Testing Programme), 2020

Table 12. COVID-19 activity in Northern Ireland, for all testing data combined, week 53, 2020-2021			
Period	Individuals tested	Number positive	Proportion positive
Current week	47463	12523	26.4%
Total	854,854	79907	9.3%

Table 13. COVID-19 activity in Northern Ireland (HSC laboratory), week 53, 2020-2021			
Period	Individuals tested	Number positive	Proportion positive
Current week	6578	972	14.8%
Total	263,182	14868	5.6%

Table 14. COVID-19 activity in Northern Ireland (National Testing Programme), week 53, 2020-2021			
Period	Individuals tested	Number positive	Proportion positive
Current week	40885	11551	28.3%
Total	591,672	65039	11.0%

Source: HSC Trust laboratory reports and the National Testing Programme

To week 53, the total number of individuals tested was 854,854, positivity 9.3%. Overall, more individuals have now been tested as part of the National Testing Programme, and positivity is now higher (11.0%) compared to HSC laboratories (5.6%).

Global situation

As of 06 January , [WHO](#) has been notified of 84,780,171 confirmed cases of COVID-19, including 1,853,525 related deaths.

Appendix

PHA Health Protection COVID-19 surveillance systems

The PHA Health Protection Directorate has established the following surveillance systems to monitor COVID-19 activity across the spectrum of community and health care settings. As new systems are developed they will be added to this report.

Case epidemiology

SARS-CoV2 testing was first developed by the National Reference Laboratory (Public Health England) for all of the United Kingdom on 24 January 2020. On 7 February 2020, SARS-CoV2 testing was developed locally by the Regional Virus Laboratory, Belfast Health and Social Care (HSC) Trust and performed testing across Northern Ireland. Since 23 March, 28 March, 3 April and 13 May respectively, Northern HSC Trust, Southern HSC Trust, Western HSC and South Eastern HSC Trust laboratories, have been performing SARS-CoV2 testing.

The PHA Health Protection Directorate laboratory surveillance system collates SARS-CoV2 laboratory data on all tests from HSC Trust laboratories.

As an individual may have more than one test for clinical purposes, the laboratory data is then collated to enable monitoring of individuals rather than tests performed by laboratories. This is done using the Organism-Patient-Illness-Episode (OPIE) principle, a standard approach used across the UK.⁷ The episode length used nationally is 6 weeks (42 days), and is being reviewed as more data becomes available.

⁷ Public Health England. 2016. Laboratory reporting to Public Health England: A guide for diagnostic laboratories. [ONLINE] Available at:

If an individual is infected on two separate occasions by the same organism (within the episode of infection) they will be represented by one distinct record. It is still unclear to what extent second infections occur in COVID-19. The exception to this is where the first result is negative and is then followed by a positive result on a second occasion. In such circumstances, the later positive result will be recorded rather than the earlier negative one. If an individual is infected on two separate occasions by the same organism (outside the episode of infection with recovery implied) they will be represented by two distinct records, regardless of the test result. This is a standard approach which is taken across a range of infectious diseases.

All laboratories report a standardised data set which includes individual demographics, test result and source (location) at the time the specimen was taken. Data is collated to produce information on the number and trend of individuals tested at HSC Trust laboratories and the number and trend of confirmed cases in Northern Ireland.

National Testing Programme

The National Testing Programme in Northern Ireland consists of drive through (regional test sites), mobile test unit sites, home testing and satellite testing of nursing homes.

Everyone in Northern Ireland with symptoms of coronavirus is now eligible for testing.

Testing is prioritised through the website gov.uk for essential workers who are self-isolating because they are symptomatic, or have household members who are symptomatic, to help enable essential workers to return to work as soon as safe.

Testing is available for the general public through the website nhs.uk.

The StopCOVID NI contact tracing app is now [available](#) from the Google or Apple App store.

Testing for non-HSC essential workers and the general public is currently conducted in drive-through sites operating in Belfast, Enniskillen, Derry/Londonderry and Portadown. In addition there is a mobile testing unit currently operating within Northern Ireland.

Home testing can be requested by any individual meeting the criteria with a test kit(s) being mailed to the individual and household contacts.

Tests are processed in laboratories outside the normal health and social care network and data fed back to the Public Health Agency via the Business Services Organisation.

The data has been included in the case epidemiology and virology testing surveillance sections. This data should be interpreted with caution, when interpreted alongside the HSC laboratory data, because it includes testing undertaken as part of the outbreak response i.e. possibly asymptomatic people with a certain age, gender or area profile. Testing numbers may be skewed to different local government districts depending on whether an outbreak was detected and managed.

For more information see [here](#).

Care home outbreak surveillance

A care home is a term that includes all nursing homes and residential homes in Northern Ireland that are registered with the Regulation and Quality Improvement Agency (RQIA) and can either be HSC Trust or independent sector owned. There are 472 active care homes in Northern Ireland.

All care homes have a requirement to notify the PHA Health Protection duty room of suspected outbreaks of any infectious disease. A suspected outbreak of COVID-19 occurs when two or more residents and/or staff meet the case definitions for suspected COVID-19, confirmed COVID-19, influenza-like illness or worsening shortness of breath.

The PHA Health Protection Directorate care home outbreak surveillance system collects and collates data on all initial notifications of suspected COVID-19 outbreaks from the duty room clinical records.

The care home COVID-19 outbreak surveillance system is updated every day to reflect public health management. If the risk assessment subsequently excludes an outbreak of the initial notification then the surveillance data will be updated.

Currently, care homes with multiple facilities, i.e. nursing and residential, but the same name may be reported as one outbreak, rather than two (if both units are affected) which may underestimate the number of care homes affected.

Primary care surveillance

a. GP in-hours respiratory syndromic surveillance

The GP in-hours respiratory-related syndromic surveillance system collects and analyses anonymised respiratory-related data from over 320 GP practices via the Apollo GP Flu Surveillance System (Wellbeing Software), hereafter referred to as Apollo. This covers approximately 98% of the population.

Based on standardised definitions and extracted using READ codes in the GP Clinical Systems, respiratory-related data is collected on:

- Influenza Like Illness (ILI)
- Acute Respiratory Infections (ARI)
- Suspected COVID-19 (introduced late March 2020).

Data is analysed on a weekly basis to produce trends of ARI, ILI and COVID-19 consultation rates for Northern Ireland and at HSC Trust level.

GP out-of-hours syndromic surveillance

The GP respiratory-related syndromic surveillance system collects and analyses anonymised ARI, ILI and COVID-19 data from five OOH practices via Apollo. This system covers 100% of the population and complements the existing GP surveillance systems that cover in-hours consultations.

Data is analysed on a weekly basis to produce trends of ARI, ILI and COVID-19 consultation rates for Northern Ireland and at HSC Trust

level. The system also monitors the number of unscheduled visits and calls to GPs every day during evenings, overnight, on weekends and on public holidays.

b. Sentinel testing

The GP sentinel testing surveillance system builds on the existing flu sentinel testing system where 36 general practices ('spotter' practices), representing approximately 11% of practices across Northern Ireland, are commissioned to carry out flu testing in suspected influenza-like illness.

Individuals registered at a spotter practice with symptoms of suspected COVID-19 and who are well enough to self-care in their own home are referred to a Trust testing facility for testing. The service commenced in 13 spotter practices in Belfast and South Eastern HSC Trust locality at the end of April and is currently being rolled out to the other 23 practices in Northern, Southern and Western HSC Trust localities.

Laboratories reports from spotter practices are identified from the laboratory (virology) surveillance and are collated to produce information on the number of individuals tested and the number of confirmed cases.

c. COVID centre testing

A COVID centre is a separate facility created as an extension of primary care to help direct suspected COVID positive patients for assessment.

This keeps practices free to deal with any other medical problems. Triage will still occur at the practice, most likely via phone followed by referral to the centre if required.

There are three categories of patient that might be assessed at a COVID centre:

1. patients symptomatic for COVID, or already test positive who are clinically worsening: there will also be direct pathways for investigation and/or admission from the centre
2. patients where there is diagnostic uncertainty: symptoms similar to COVID but could be another clinical problem ranging from

tonsillitis to meningitis requiring an assessment to exclude or confirm

3. patients being discharged from hospital: this group will grow with time but on many occasions will still have a need for clinical assessment and follow up.

Centres are staffed by GPs, helped by other members of staff, including nurses, health care workers etc.

Centres run from 8am to 10pm and see patients after triage and referral (by CCG) from the practice.

Patients can either be seen in their car outside the centre if a straightforward examination is needed, or brought into the centre for assessment. Patients are told to wait in their car until phoned to come in to prevent any crowding or grouping of patients.

Centres are hosted by the trusts and operate in each trust area.

Critical care surveillance

Until 28th September 2020, the PHA Health Protection COVID-19 critical care online reporting system captured the incidence of COVID-19 infections in critical care and aims to improve the understanding of severe disease.

This system should complement critical care data collected by the Health and Social Care Board for service planning purposes and the publicly available reports on COVID-19 in critical care Northern Ireland by the Intensive Care National Audit and Research Centre (iCNARC) ([here](#)).

Since 28th September 2020, data collection for critical care surveillance has been streamlined to coincide with the well-established surveillance of influenza patients in critical care in conjunction with the Critical Care Network Northern Ireland (CaNNI).

Data is collected on all individuals admitted to an Intensive Care Unit (ICU) or High Dependency Unit (HDU) with a positive SARS-CoV2 result, from either before or during the ICU/HDU admission.

Schools Surveillance

Information on school COVID incidents is based on situations reported to PHA COVID School Team. These include:

- **Single confirmed case** of COVID (SARS-CoV-2) in a student or member of staff in the school setting. The incident is closed after 14 days if there have been no further cases.
- **Cluster of two or more confirmed cases of COVID** in a student or member of staff in the school setting within a 14 day period. The incident is closed after 14 days if there have been no further cases from the last case

PHA COVID School Team carries out contact tracing of cases that attend a school in collaboration with PHA Test and Trace Programme. All clusters are also investigated by the School Team in liaison with local partners.

Data is collected on the number of COVID school incidents reported to the PHA COVID School Team since schools reopened. This is the first week of reporting school surveillance.

Mortality surveillance

Medical Certificate of Cause of Death for confirmed/suspected COVID-19

The traditional method for examining the number of deaths, and the range of causes of death, takes information from death certificates that are reported to the General Registrar's Office (GRO). The death certificate contains two parts. Part 1 describes the immediate causes of death and Part 2 provides information on related conditions that may also have contributed to death. The numbers of deaths from COVID-19 are based on COVID-19 being recorded on any part of the death certificate (i.e. Part 1 or Part 2).

These include all deaths in which a doctor feels that COVID was either a direct or indirect cause of death. It includes confirmed cases (deaths with a positive laboratory result) and probable or suspected cases, where a doctor assesses that COVID was a cause of death but there is either no lab test or the test was negative. It captures deaths in all settings, such as hospitals, care homes, hospices and the community. It takes up to five days for most deaths to be certified by a doctor, registered and the data processed, meaning these deaths will be reported on about a week after they occurred.

Inclusion of references to COVID-19 in Part 2 of the death certificate may slightly over estimate the number of individuals where COVID-19 is a significant contributor to death.

All-cause excess deaths

The PHA Health Protection Directorate reports the weekly number of excess deaths from any cause for Northern Ireland using the Mortality Monitoring in Europe (EuroMOMO) model. EuroMOMO provides a coordinated, timely and standardised approach to monitoring and analysing mortality data across the UK and Europe, to ensure that signals are comparable between countries. Further information is available [here](#).

Based on mortality data supplied by NISRA, EuroMOMO produces the number of expected and observed deaths every week, corrected for reporting delay and standardised for the population by age group and region. Excess mortality is reported if the number of observed deaths exceeds the number of expected deaths, and is defined as a statistically significant increase in the number of deaths reported over the expected number for a given point in time.

Case definitions

Case definitions are determined by Public Health England, on the advice of the New and Emerging Respiratory Virus Threats Advisory Group (NERVTAG). As the pandemic evolves and more evidence emerges the definitions will change to ensure individuals are appropriately identified.

Possible case of COVID-19 (as of 28 September 2020)

As of 2nd October, case definitions for inpatient and community settings were consolidated into one list. Unusual presentations are also highlighted.

Individuals with

- new continuous cough **OR**
- high temperature **OR**
- a loss of, or change in, normal sense of smell (anosmia) or taste (ageusia)

Individuals with any of the above symptoms but who are well enough to remain in the community should follow the [stay at home guidance](#) and [get tested](#).

Clinicians should be alert to the possibility of atypical presentations in patients who are immunocompromised.

Alternative clinical diagnoses and epidemiological risk factors should be considered.

A wide variety of clinical symptoms have been associated with COVID-19.

Patients with acute respiratory infection, influenza-like illness, clinical or radiological evidence of pneumonia, or acute worsening of underlying respiratory illness, or fever without another cause should have a SARS-CoV-2 test, whether presenting in primary or secondary care.

In addition, the following situation should prompt clinicians to consider SARS-CoV2 testing:

- Onset of delirium (acute confusion) in older people, or in those with dementia or cognitive impairment. New infections in people with dementia may be manifest as delirium.

Confirmed case of COVID-19

An individual with clinical symptoms and a positive SARS-CoV2 specimen result.

Critical care COVID-19 case

A case that has either been admitted to an ICU/HDU in Northern Ireland with a pre-existing positive result for SARS-CoV2, or received a positive result for SARS-CoV2 post-admission to ICU/HDU.

Influenza-like Illness (ILI)

Acute respiratory disease with sudden onset of symptoms and:

- at least one systemic symptom (fever $\geq 37.8^{\circ}\text{C}$, myalgia, malaise, headache) AND
- at least one respiratory symptom: cough (with or without sputum), shortness of breath (and/or wheezing), sore throat, nasal discharge, sneezing or congestion

Further Information

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