

Current Health Event

Influenza A(H1N1)

In the context of monitoring the cases of seasonal influenza and novel viruses, the Ministry of Public Health (MoPH) recorded an increase in the number of cases of A H1N1 in recent weeks; and an increase in the number of cases that were admitted to intensive care. However, the MoPH has not recorded yet any increase in the number of deaths from influenza this year compared to last year ratios.

Editorial note:

The virus A(H1N1) – commonly referred to as “swine flu” in the past – that caused a flu pandemic in 2009, has continued to circulate since as a seasonal human flu virus.

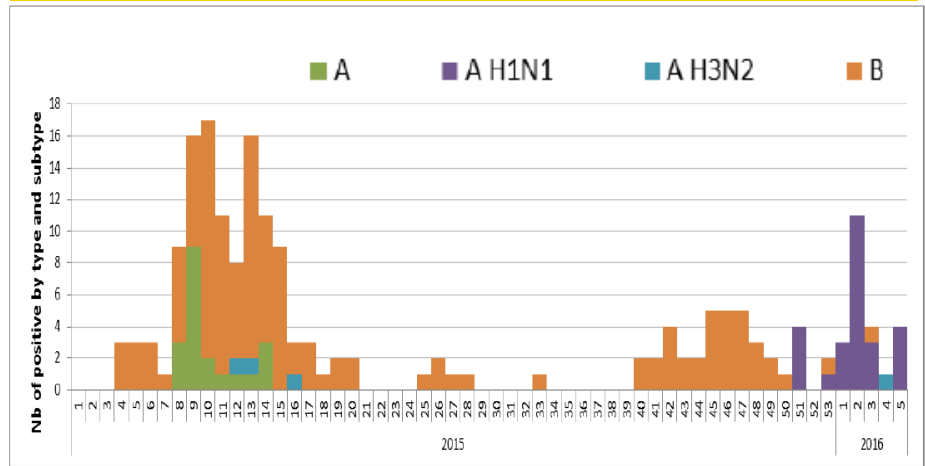
In 2009, the population all over the world had little immunity to A (H1N1) because it was a new strain. As such, it caused a global epidemic.

After 2009, A(H1N1) started circulating as an annual seasonal flu virus together with influenza A(H3N2) and influenza B viruses, although each season can differ based on which viruses predominate.

On the basis of the viruses analyzed so far, the seasonal A(H1N1) strain has not changed significantly from the 2009 virus strain, and there is no evidence that it has become more harmful. Since its emergence in 2009, A(H1N1) has caused rare cases of severe disease in otherwise healthy, young adults, including pregnant women.

Each season, a flu vaccine is developed to protect against the viruses that research suggests will be the most common one circulating.

Figure: SARI sentinel surveillance, National Influenza Center, Lebanon



The 2015–2016 seasonal vaccine includes seasonal influenza A(H1N1) virus, with A(H3N2) and influenza B virus strains, and therefore the current vaccine is expected to provide good protection against this year's influenza.

When influenza starts to spread every winter, WHO strongly recommends that certain groups be vaccinated against the disease. These include people aged over 65, healthcare workers, anyone with a chronic health condition, such as heart or lung disease or chronic neurological conditions, children under 5 years old and pregnant women.

Preventing influenza:

- Avoid close contact with sick persons.
- Wash hands frequently.
- Contain your coughs and sneezes.
- Stay home if sick.

Irrespective of the flu virus type, influenza is always unpleasant, but it is usually mild, and most people recover quickly. People with symptoms such as coughing, sneezing, sore throat, headache and a slight fever should rest at home; or use painkillers and decongestants. People with severe or unusual symptoms and those at increased risk of severe disease and health complications should contact their physician.

Cumulative Notifiable Diseases in Lebanon*				
Disease	2015	2016**	Jan.	Feb.
Vaccine Preventable Diseases				
Polio	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)
AFP	75(9)	6 (0)	5 (0)	1 (0)
Measles	37(11)	6 (0)	2 (0)	4 (0)
Mumps	1400 (337)	34 (10)	17 (4)	17 (6)
Pertussis	37(6)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)
Rabies	0(0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)
Rubella	9(1)	1(0)	1 (0)	0 (0)
Tetanus	3(0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)
Viral Hep. B	140(22)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)
Water/Food Borne Diseases				
Brucellosis	333(57)	15 (3)	13 (3)	2 (0)
Cholera	0(0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)
Hydatid cyst	14(1)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)
Typhoid fever	473(50)	46 (0)	28 (0)	18 (0)
Viral Hep. A	877(159)	51 (2)	43 (1)	8 (1)
Other Diseases				
Leishmaniasis	32(23)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)
Meningitis	309(53)	36 (2)	19 (1)	17 (1)
Viral Hep C	65(3)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)

*Numbers in brackets refer to Syrian **as of 27 Feb. 2016