

NSW Respiratory Surveillance Report - week ending 28 January 2023

COVID-19 Summary

- Notifications of COVID-19 continue to decline however the rate of this reduction appears to be slowing and PCR positivity has stabilised. This indicates that we may be approaching the bottom of this wave.
- XBF is now the most common variant circulating with BR.2 and other BA.2.75 sublineages including CH.1.1 also contributing to the variant mix.
- There were 6,812 people diagnosed with COVID-19 this week, a decrease of 13.4% since the previous week. PCR testing for COVID-19 has decreased by 10.6% compared to the previous week. The proportion of PCR tests that were positive for COVID-19 is stable at around 9%.
- The seven-day rolling average of daily hospital admissions decreased to an average of 39 admissions by the end of this week, compared with 48 admissions at the end of the previous week. There were 272 people with COVID-19 admitted to hospital and 28 people admitted to ICU this week.
- Emergency department presentations for coronaviruses requiring an admission have decreased to 113 from 134 admissions in the previous week.
- There were 86 COVID-19 deaths reported this week. Deaths may not have occurred in the week in which they were reported.

Other respiratory viruses summary

- Influenza activity is currently at low levels with PCR positivity remaining below 2% for tests reported by the NSW sentinel laboratory network. Influenza activity in the northern hemisphere is falling following their early seasonal peak. Vaccination continues to be recommended.
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Data sources

The NSW Respiratory Surveillance Report consolidates data from a range of sources to provide an understanding of what is happening in the community. This data includes laboratory results, hospital administrative data, emergency department syndromic surveillance, death registrations and community surveys. Data in this report are collected for surveillance purposes and are indicative of trends. Data should not be compared between reports as data for previous weeks are updated when new information becomes available.

COVID-19 hospital admissions, intensive care unit admissions, and deaths

Figure 1. Daily seven-day rolling average of people with COVID-19 admitted to hospital within 14 days of their diagnosis, NSW, 01 October 2022 to 28 January 2023

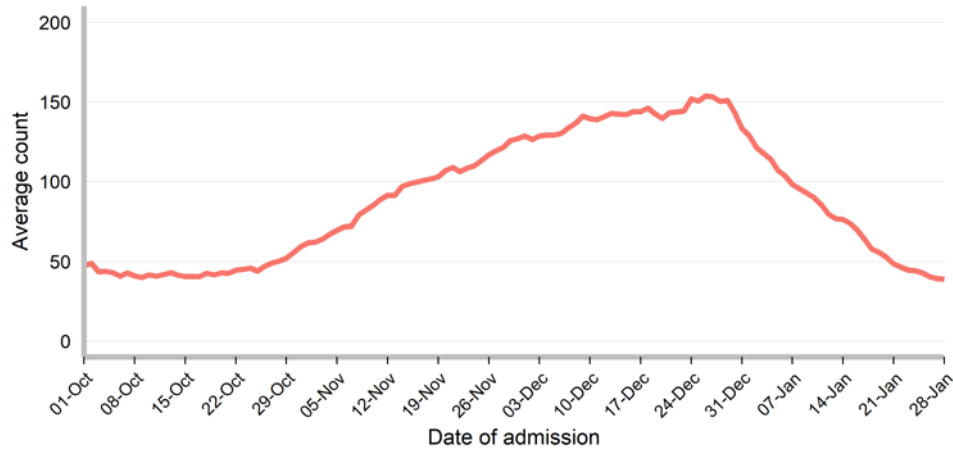
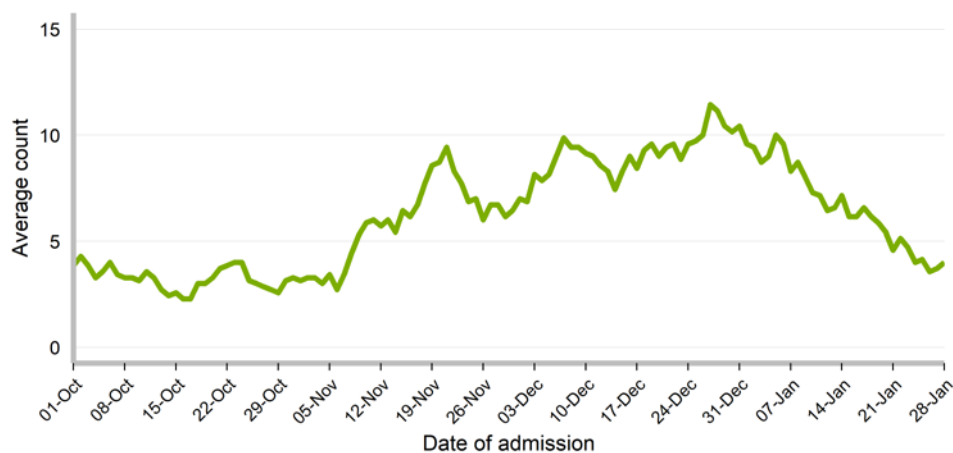


Figure 2. Daily seven-day rolling average of people with COVID-19 admitted to intensive care units, NSW, 01 October 2022 to 28 January 2023



- Hospital admissions in people with COVID-19 have decreased in the last week. ICU admissions for people with COVID-19 have decreased in the last week
- Two hundred and seventy two people diagnosed with COVID-19 in the previous 14 days were admitted to a NSW public hospital. The seven-day rolling average of daily hospital admissions decreased to an average of 39 admissions by the end of this week, compared with 48 admissions at the end of the previous week.
- Twenty eight people diagnosed with COVID-19 were admitted to ICU. The seven-day rolling average of daily ICU admissions decreased to an average of 4 admissions by the end of this week, compared with 5 admissions at the end of the previous week.

Table 1. People with a COVID-19 diagnosis in the previous 14 days who were admitted to hospital, admitted to ICU or reported as having died in the week ending 28 January 2023

	Admitted to hospital (but not to ICU)	Admitted to ICU	Deaths
Gender			
Female	138	14	47
Male	134	14	39
Transgender	0	0	0
Not stated / inadequately described	0	0	0
Age group (years)			
0-9	16	1	0
10-19	4	0	0
20-29	14	1	0
30-39	11	6	0
40-49	17	0	0
50-59	11	3	3
60-69	29	4	6
70-79	75	9	11
80-89	66	4	33
90+	29	0	33
Local Health District of residence*			
Central Coast	11	0	3
Illawarra Shoalhaven	33	4	3
Nepean Blue Mountains	9	0	3
Northern Sydney	26	4	14
South Eastern Sydney	36	2	4
South Western Sydney	25	2	12
Sydney	19	3	5
Western Sydney	23	2	6
Far West	2	0	2
Hunter New England	43	3	17
Mid North Coast	8	0	6
Murrumbidgee	7	2	4
Northern NSW	11	3	2
Southern NSW	4	0	3
Western NSW	14	0	2
Total	272	28	86

*Excludes cases in correctional settings

- Forty seven deaths were aged care residents. Ten of these people died in hospital and 37 died at an aged care facility.
- Five of the deaths occurred at home. Of these, four were diagnosed with COVID-19 prior to death.
- Deaths are identified from the NSW Registry of Births Deaths and Marriages (BDM). If a person dies in NSW, their death must be registered under the Births, Deaths and Marriages Registration Act 1995 (Part 7). NSW Health receives a secure feed from the BDM on a daily basis under the Public Health Act 2010 (Part 129A). Seventy five percent of COVID-19 deaths in 2022 have been registered in less than four weeks of death. Deaths reported to a coroner will be registered with the BDM, however cause of death information may be delayed as it is not recorded until there is a coronial determination.

Notifications of COVID-19

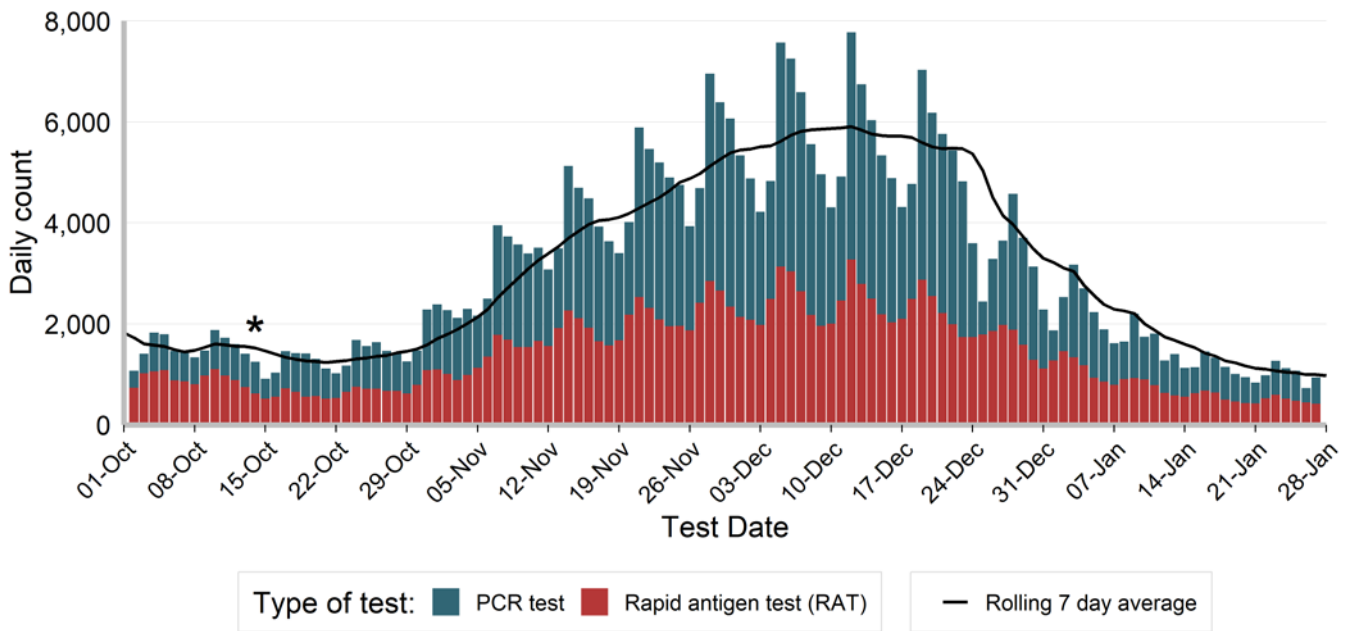
Table 2. Notifications of COVID-19 by gender, age group, Local Health District, NSW, tested in the week ending 28 January 2023

	Week ending 28 January 2023			Year to date
	PCR	RAT	Total	Total
Gender				
Female	2,007 (55.0%)	1,943 (61.4%)	3,950 (58.0%)	23,716 (56.6%)
Male	1,640 (44.9%)	1,218 (38.5%)	2,858 (42.0%)	18,128 (43.3%)
Transgender	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)
Not stated / inadequately described	3 (0.1%)	1 (0.0%)	4 (0.1%)	59 (0.1%)
Age group (years)				
0-4	171 (4.7%)	91 (2.9%)	262 (3.8%)	1,506 (3.6%)
5-9	63 (1.7%)	133 (4.2%)	196 (2.9%)	870 (2.1%)
10-19	126 (3.5%)	209 (6.6%)	335 (4.9%)	2,123 (5.1%)
20-29	380 (10.4%)	384 (12.1%)	764 (11.2%)	5,521 (13.2%)
30-39	482 (13.2%)	497 (15.7%)	979 (14.4%)	6,416 (15.3%)
40-49	427 (11.7%)	567 (17.9%)	994 (14.6%)	5,760 (13.7%)
50-59	479 (13.1%)	475 (15.0%)	954 (14.0%)	5,849 (14.0%)
60-69	544 (14.9%)	401 (12.7%)	945 (13.9%)	5,634 (13.4%)
70-79	533 (14.6%)	302 (9.6%)	835 (12.3%)	4,625 (11.0%)
80-89	331 (9.1%)	83 (2.6%)	414 (6.1%)	2,636 (6.3%)
90+	114 (3.1%)	20 (0.6%)	134 (2.0%)	957 (2.3%)
Local Health District of residence[#]				
Central Coast	133 (3.7%)	156 (5.0%)	289 (4.3%)	2,084 (5.1%)
Illawarra Shoalhaven	386 (10.8%)	230 (7.4%)	616 (9.2%)	2,614 (6.4%)
Nepean Blue Mountains	158 (4.4%)	141 (4.5%)	299 (4.5%)	1,840 (4.5%)
Northern Sydney	402 (11.3%)	309 (9.9%)	711 (10.6%)	4,901 (12.0%)
South Eastern Sydney	424 (11.9%)	252 (8.1%)	676 (10.1%)	4,394 (10.7%)
South Western Sydney	373 (10.4%)	263 (8.5%)	636 (9.5%)	4,214 (10.3%)
Sydney	370 (10.4%)	227 (7.3%)	597 (8.9%)	3,567 (8.7%)
Western Sydney	509 (14.3%)	279 (9.0%)	788 (11.8%)	5,260 (12.8%)
Far West	7 (0.2%)	4 (0.1%)	11 (0.2%)	97 (0.2%)
Hunter New England	447 (12.5%)	643 (20.7%)	1,090 (16.3%)	5,800 (14.1%)
Mid North Coast	53 (1.5%)	120 (3.9%)	173 (2.6%)	1,155 (2.8%)
Murrumbidgee	42 (1.2%)	125 (4.0%)	167 (2.5%)	1,125 (2.7%)
Northern NSW	77 (2.2%)	117 (3.8%)	194 (2.9%)	1,422 (3.5%)
Southern NSW	64 (1.8%)	133 (4.3%)	197 (2.9%)	1,027 (2.5%)
Western NSW	126 (3.5%)	112 (3.6%)	238 (3.6%)	1,491 (3.6%)
Aboriginal status[^]				
Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander	88 (2.4%)	178 (5.6%)	266 (3.9%)	1,401 (3.3%)
Not Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander	2,134 (58.5%)	2,696 (85.3%)	4,830 (70.9%)	29,913 (71.4%)
Not Stated / Unknown	1,428 (39.1%)	288 (9.1%)	1,716 (25.2%)	10,589 (25.3%)
Total	3,650 (100%)	3,162 (100%)	6,812 (100%)	41,903 (100%)

[#]Excludes cases in correctional settings

[^]Aboriginal status is reported by COVID-19 cases when completing their RAT registration or responding to a short text message survey sent to cases detected by PCR. Not all cases respond to the question.

Figure 3. People notified with COVID-19, by date of test and type of test performed, NSW, 01 October 2022 to 28 January 2023



* from the 14th October RATs were no longer required to be notified

- There were 6,812 people diagnosed with COVID-19 this week, a decrease of 13.4% since the previous week.

Figure 4. Daily seven-day rolling average rate of COVID-19 notifications per 100,000 population, by age group and test date, NSW, 01 October 2022 to 28 January 2023

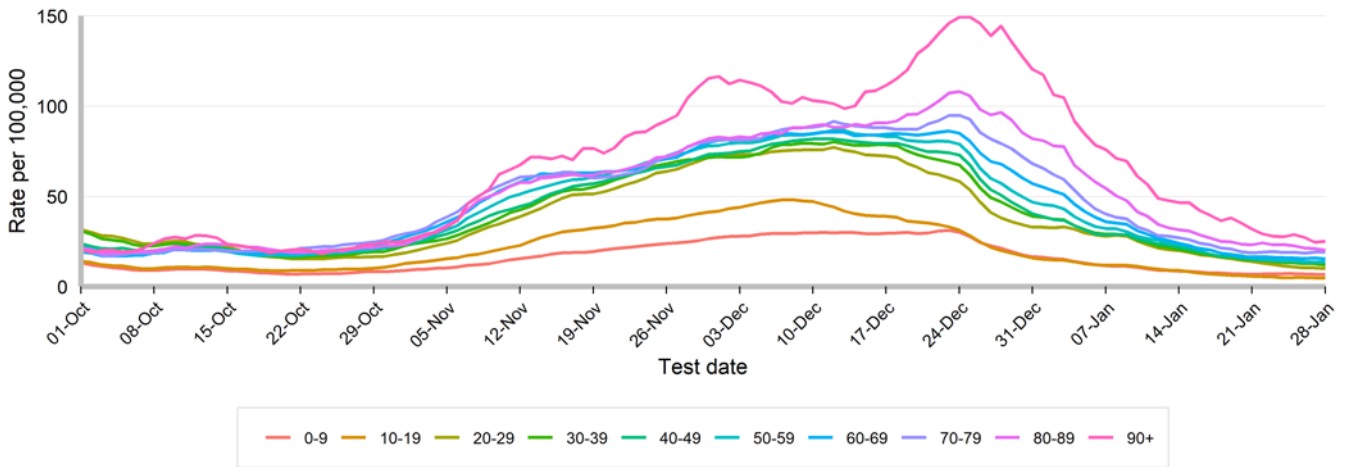


Figure 5. Daily seven-day rolling average rate of COVID-19 notifications per 100,000 population, by metropolitan Local Health District and test date, NSW, 01 October 2022 to 28 January 2023

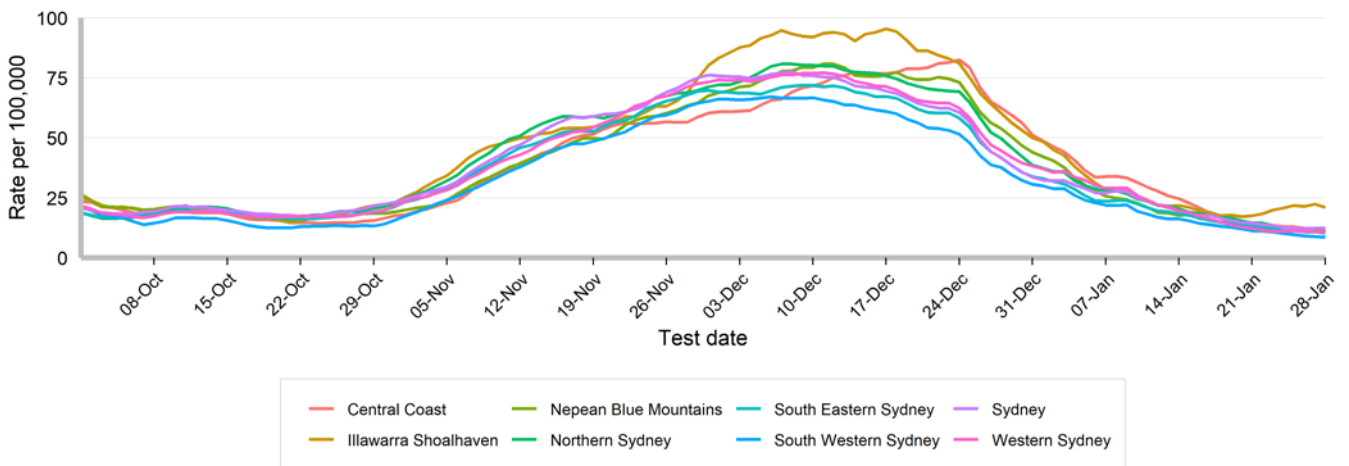
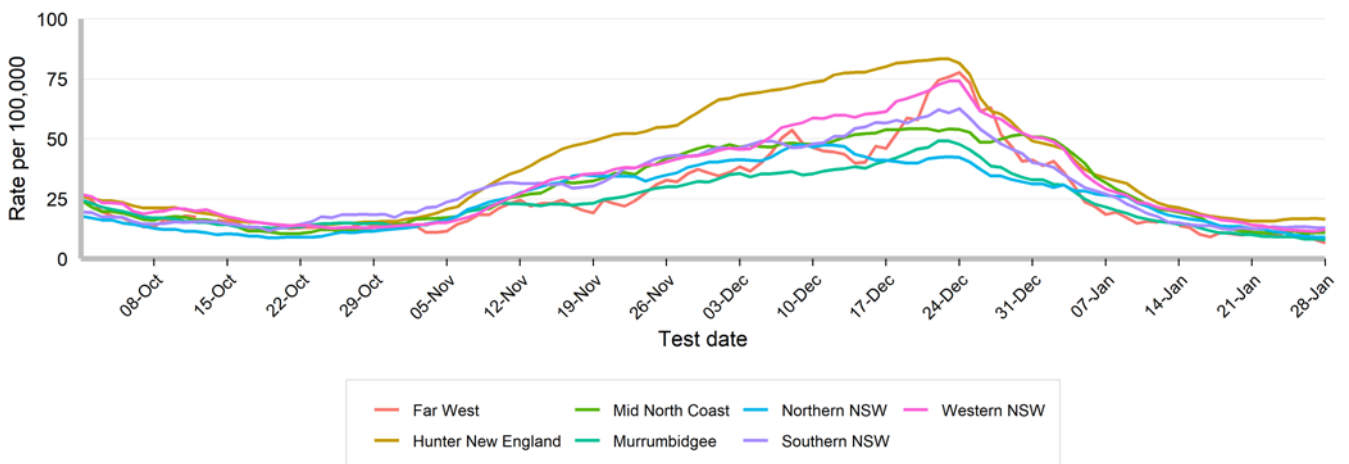


Figure 6. Daily seven-day rolling average rate of COVID-19 notifications per 100,000 population, by rural and regional Local Health District and test date, NSW, 01 October 2022 to 28 January 2023



Emergency department and community surveillance

Public Health Rapid, Emergency, Disease and Syndromic Surveillance (PHREDSS) system

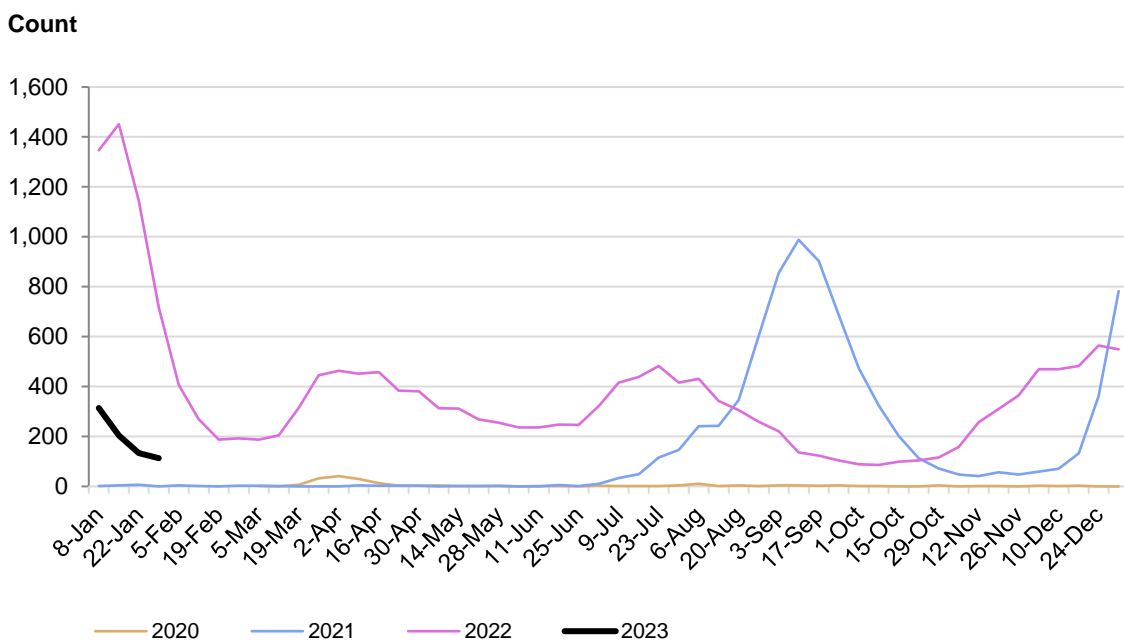
The NSW Public Health Rapid, Emergency, Disease and Syndromic Surveillance (PHREDSS) system provides daily monitoring of most unplanned presentations to NSW public hospital emergency departments (EDs) and all emergency Triple Zero (000) calls to NSW Ambulance. Emergency hospital presentations and ambulance calls are grouped into related acute illness and injury categories.

The number of presentations and calls in each category is monitored over time to quickly identify unusual patterns of illness. Unusual patterns could signify an emerging outbreak of disease or issue of public health importance in the population. PHREDSS is also useful for monitoring the impact of seasonal and known disease outbreaks, such as seasonal influenza or gastroenteritis, on the NSW population.

The 88 NSW public hospital EDs used in PHREDSS surveillance account for 95% of all ED activity in NSW public hospitals in 2020-2021, including most major metropolitan public hospitals (99%) and rural public hospitals (89%).

The emergency department 'coronaviruses/SARS' surveillance syndrome includes provisional diagnoses (SNOMEDCT and ICD-10-AM codes) for coronavirus infections SARS, MERS, COVID-19 or other coronaviruses, or clinical condition of Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS). It excludes testing and suspected coronavirus codes. There are no ICD-9 codes for COVID-19, so COVID-19 ED presentations at Albury Hospital will be mapped to the fever/unspecified infection surveillance syndrome. A person with COVID-19 may be admitted for reasons other than COVID-19, and of this the number of admissions from ED with a diagnosis of coronaviruses/SARS will be less than the number of confirmed cases of COVID-19 who are in hospital.

Figure 7. Weekly counts of unplanned emergency department (ED) presentations for 'coronaviruses/SARS', that were admitted, for 2023 (black line), compared with the previous two years (coloured lines), persons of all ages, 88 NSW hospitals

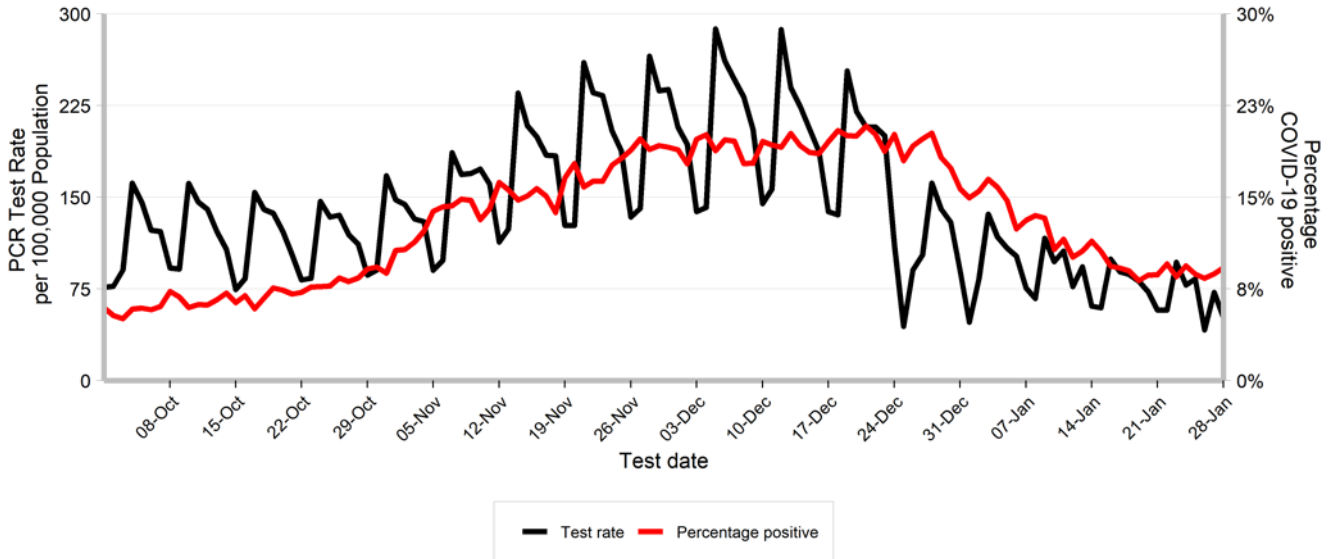


- Emergency department presentations for coronaviruses/SARS requiring an admission have decreased to 113 from 134 admissions in the previous week.

Laboratory Surveillance

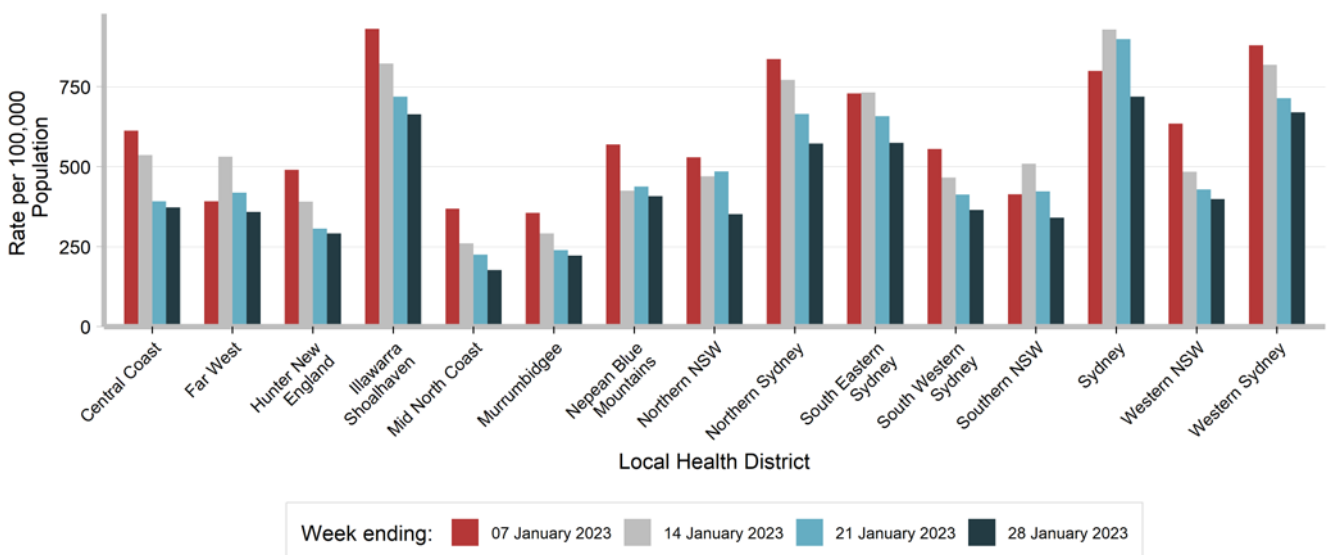
COVID-19 PCR testing

Figure 8. Rate of PCR tests for COVID-19 per 100,000 population per day, and percentage of PCR tests which were positive for COVID-19, by test date, NSW, 01 October 2022 to 28 January 2023



- There were 43,217 PCR tests reported this week. This is a 10.6% decrease compared to 48,344 PCR tests reported in the previous week.
- The percentage of PCR tests that were positive for COVID-19 has increased to 9.2% compared to 8.6% at the end of the previous week admissions by the end of this week.

Figure 9. Rate of PCR tests for COVID-19 per 100,000 population by Local Health District and test date, NSW, in the four weeks to 28 January 2023



COVID-19 Whole Genome Sequencing

Whole genome sequencing (WGS) is a laboratory procedure that identifies the genetic profile of an organism. WGS can help understand how a virus transmits, responds to vaccination and the severity of disease it may cause. It can also help to monitor the spread of the virus by identifying specimens that have are genomically similar. WGS has been used in NSW since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic to inform epidemiological investigations, and to monitor for and analyse the behaviour of new SARS-CoV-2 variants circulating in the community. WGS is conducted at three NSW reference laboratories. Prior to August 2021, low community transmission meant that most positive specimens were able to be sequenced. However, since that time high case numbers have required prioritisation of specimens for sequencing.

Specimens from people with COVID-19 who are admitted to hospital or an ICU are prioritised to identify and understand lineages with increased disease severity. Specimens from overseas arrivals are also prioritised to monitor for the introduction of new variants into the community. This is not a random sample, therefore the proportion of sequences identified is not necessarily reflective of their distribution in the community. There is a lag between the date a PCR test is taken and the date that the results of WGS are reported, therefore the count of sequences for recent dates will increase over time.

Variants of Concern

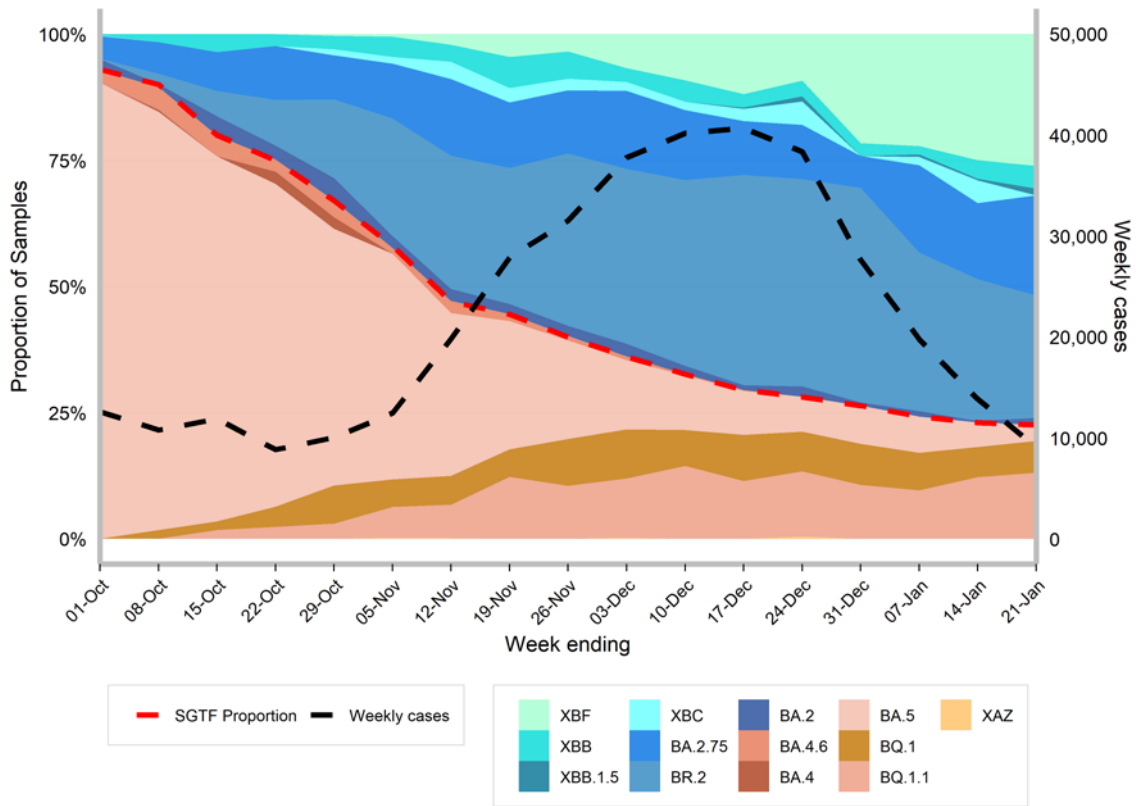
- Like all viruses, the SARS-CoV-2 virus changes over time. The World Health Organization monitors these changes and classifies lineages according to the risk that they pose to global public health. Those that they identify as having changes that increase transmissibility, increase virulence, or decrease the effectiveness of vaccines or treatments are designated as variants of concern (VOCs).

Table 3. Variants of concern (VOCs) identified by whole genome sequencing (WGS) of virus from people who tested positive for SARS CoV-2 by PCR, by test date, NSW, in the four weeks to 21 January 2023

Variant	Week ending			
	31 December	07 January	14 January	21 January
Omicron (BA.2)	2 (0.6%)	3 (0.5%)	4 (0.9%)	3 (1%)
Omicron (BA.2.3.20)	1 (0.3%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Omicron (BA.2.75)	43 (13.2%)	117 (21.2%)	82 (17.5%)	55 (17.5%)
Omicron (BA.2.75.2)	0 (0%)	2 (0.4%)	1 (0.2%)	0 (0%)
Omicron (BA.5)	28 (8.6%)	35 (6.3%)	19 (4.1%)	13 (4.1%)
Omicron (BQ.1)	23 (7.1%)	33 (6%)	29 (6.2%)	23 (7.3%)
Omicron (BQ.1.1)	33 (10.1%)	59 (10.7%)	56 (11.9%)	43 (13.7%)
Omicron (BR.2)	116 (35.6%)	159 (28.8%)	113 (24.1%)	64 (20.4%)
Recombinant (XBB)	12 (3.7%)	13 (2.4%)	15 (3.2%)	20 (6.4%)
Recombinant (XBB.1.5)	0 (0%)	5 (0.9%)	5 (1.1%)	8 (2.5%)
Recombinant (XBC)	3 (0.9%)	3 (0.5%)	17 (3.6%)	1 (0.3%)
Recombinant (XBF)	65 (19.9%)	123 (22.3%)	128 (27.3%)	83 (26.4%)
Recombinant (XBK)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (0.3%)
Total	326	552	469	314

- The BA.1, BA.4 and BA.5 lineages of the Omicron variant have a mutation that results in a failure of certain PCR test platforms to detect the S gene (SGTF). This mutation is typically not present in the BA.2 lineage, and therefore the detection of an S gene (SGTP) can be used as a proxy to estimate the prevalence of BA.2 and its sub-lineages in the community (Figure 10).
- A PCR testing platform used by a large private pathology provider in NSW can routinely report on detection of the S gene in a specimen positive for SARS-CoV-2. Around 80% of SARS-CoV-2 positive specimens currently have an S gene detected (Figure 10).
- Figure 10 shows the distribution of sub-lineages in the community estimated using the ratio of SGTP/SGTF. This figure provides an indication of the sub-lineages which may be circulating in the community. This sample does not include overseas arrivals, or tests taken from hospitalised cases.

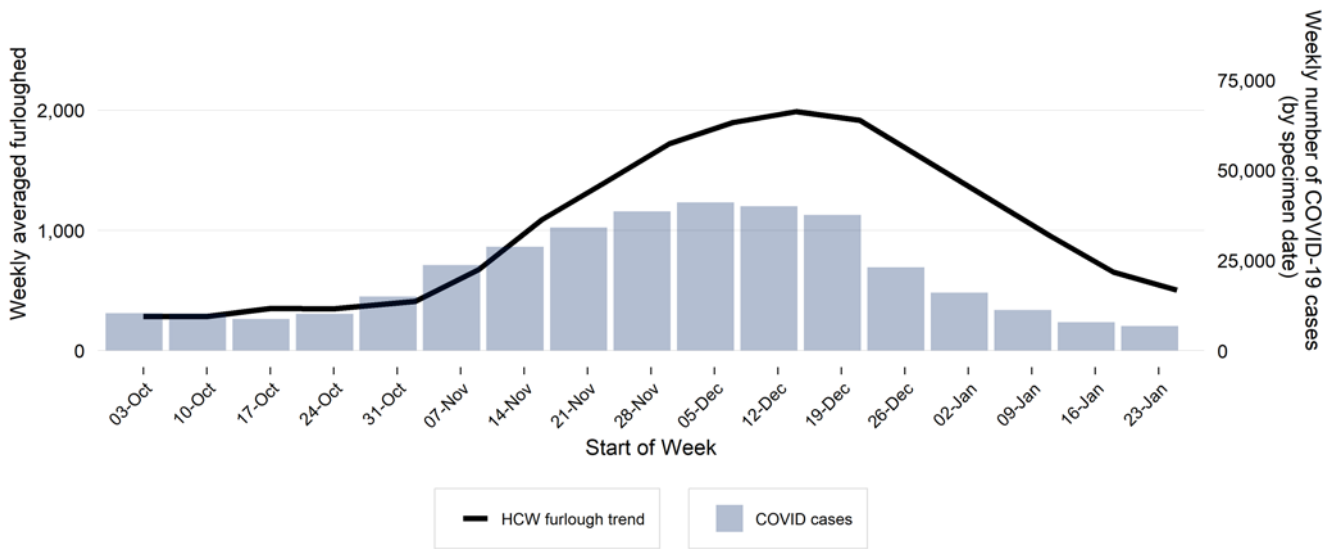
Figure 10. Estimated distribution of COVID-19 sub-lineages in the community, 01 October 2022 to 21 January 2023



NSW Healthcare worker furloughing

NSW Health collects data on the workforce impacts of COVID-19 within Local Health Districts. Healthcare workers are included in these statistics if they are in isolation and unable to work due to testing positive to COVID-19, exposure to COVID-19, and/or whilst waiting a negative test result. As healthcare workers can be exposed to COVID-19 within the community when the amount of COVID-19 circulating in the community increases the risk of exposure and transmission also increases leading to increased numbers of healthcare workers being furloughed (absent) from work. This indicator is helpful to assess the level of COVID-19 circulating in the community when community testing decreases. These data also provide an insight into the stress experienced within the healthcare system due to reduced staffing capacity.

Figure 11. Average number of healthcare worker furloughing and number of COVID-19 notifications by week in NSW, 01 October 2022 to 29 January 2023



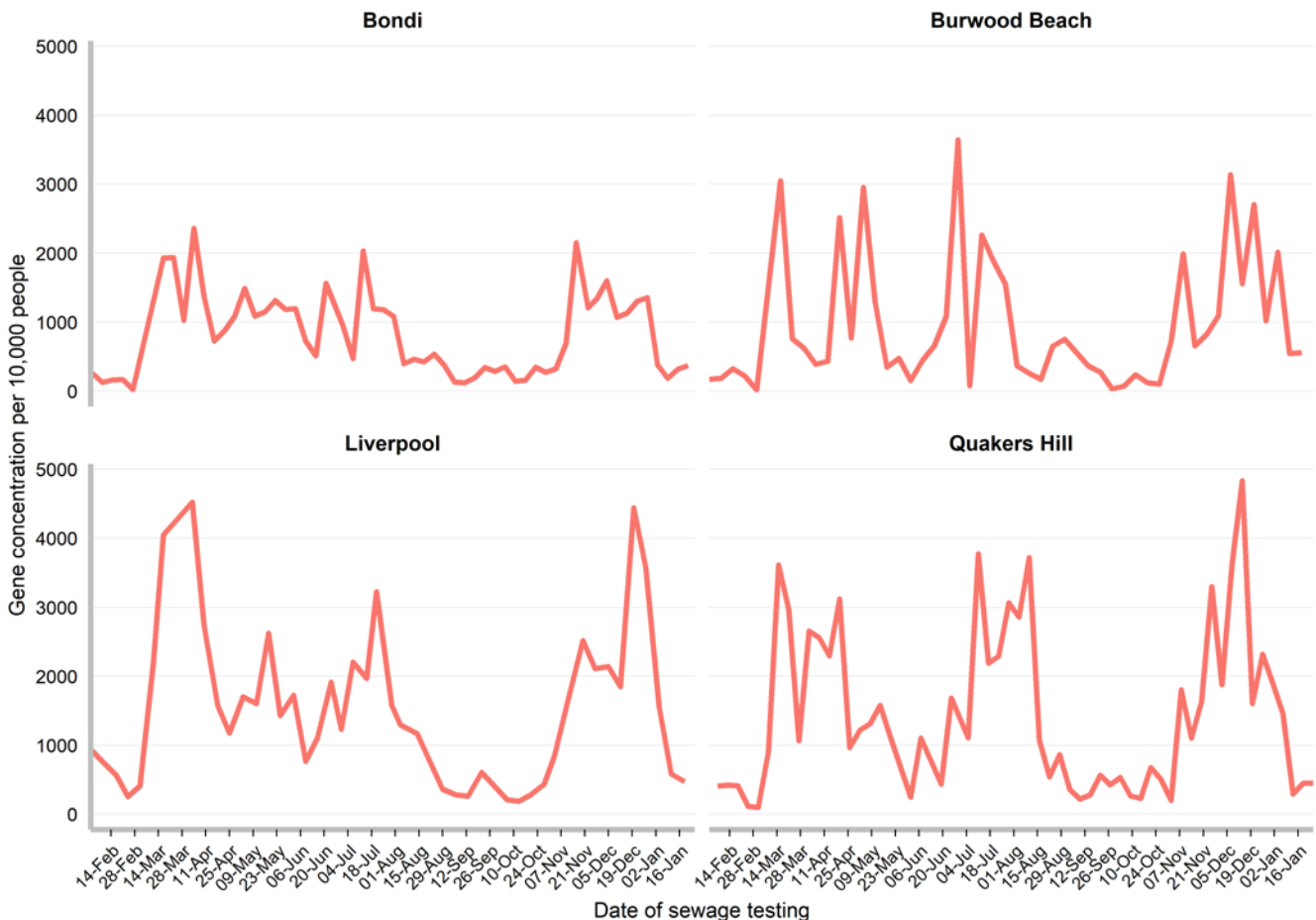
COVID-19 Sewage surveillance program

The NSW Sewage Surveillance Program tests untreated sewage for fragments of the SARS-CoV-2 virus that causes COVID-19. Gene copy numbers are influenced by many factors including virus shedding by people (which varies individually and over the course of the infection), dilution of virus within sewage – such as during rain, the period of time over which the sewage sample is collected, and the presence of chemicals and microorganisms in the sewage that affects how well the testing can detect SARS-CoV-2 virus fragments. Gene copy numbers are reported per 10,000 people in the catchment over time. Trends should be interpreted over an extended period to take into account these fluctuations in environmental conditions.

Trends are presented for Sydney Bondi, Quakers Hills, Liverpool and Burwood Beach sewage catchments from 5 February 2022 to the week ending 28 January 2023. Peaks in gene copy numbers can be seen that relate to peaks in COVID-19 notifications during March and July 2022. Dips in the graph in early April and July are due to heavy rain. Gene copy numbers have stabilised to low levels in recent weeks.

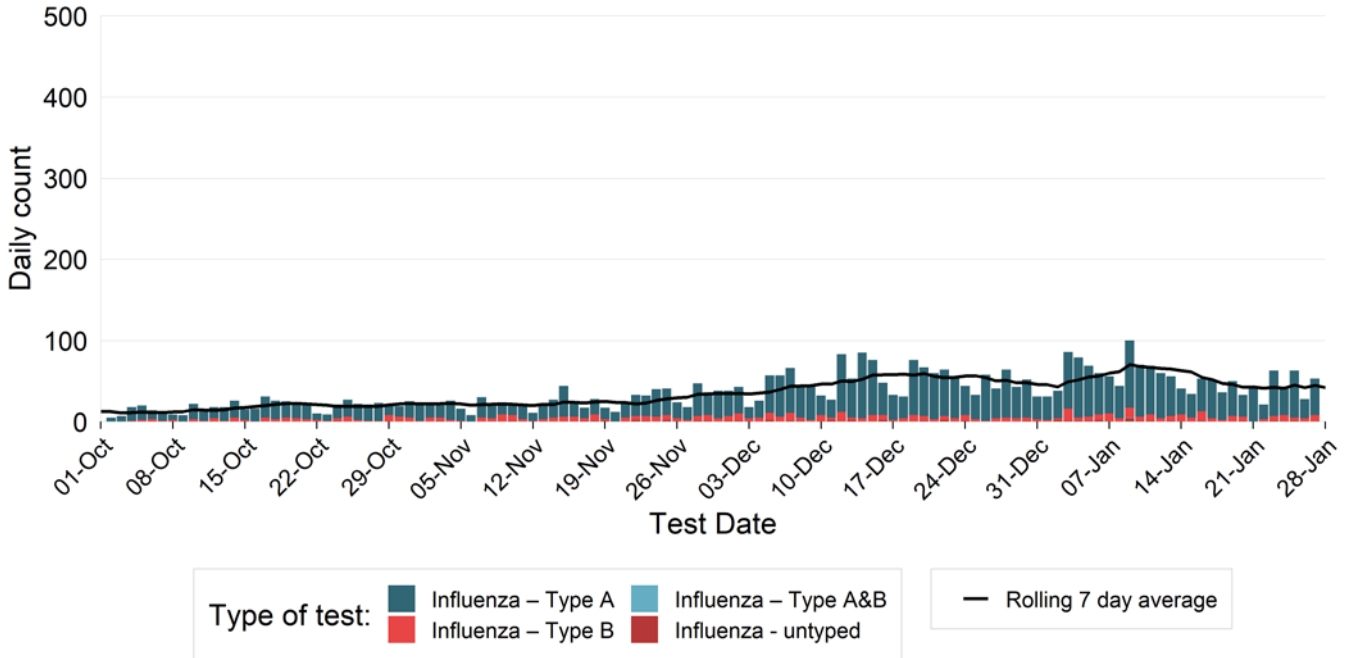
For more results, please see the COVID-19 Sewage Surveillance Program website: <https://health.nsw.gov.au/Infectious/covid-19/Pages/sewage-surveillance-weekly-result.aspx>.

Figure 12. Gene concentration, per 10,000 people in each sewage catchment, 5 February 2022 to 28 January 2023



Influenza and other respiratory viruses

Figure 13. People notified with influenza, by date of test and virus type, NSW, 01 October 2022 to 28 January 2023



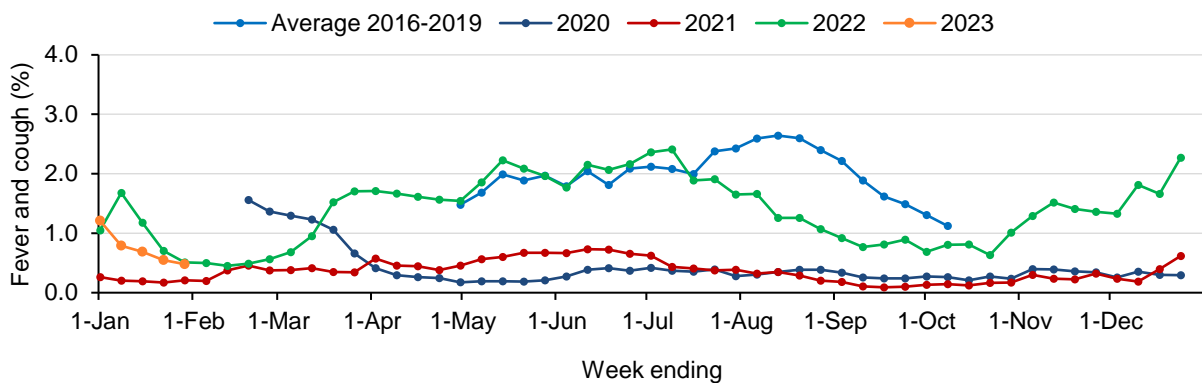
- There were 293 people diagnosed with influenza this week, a decrease of 2.7% since the previous week.

FluTracking

FluTracking is an online health surveillance system used to detect epidemics of influenza across Australia and New Zealand. Participants complete an online survey each week to provide community level influenza-like illness surveillance, consistent surveillance of influenza activity across all jurisdictions over time, and year to year comparisons of the timing, attack rates and seriousness of influenza in the community.

The FluTracking weekly sample size is currently in a decreased inter-seasonal period. Between 31 October 2022 and 1 April 2023 participants are able to opt out of completing the weekly survey. In previous years roughly two thirds of participants continue to complete the weekly survey. Should there be a surge in COVID-19 or influenza activity, participants who have consented will be asked if they would like to recommence surveys earlier. Additional FluTracking reports are available at: <https://info.flutracking.net/reports-2/australia-reports/>

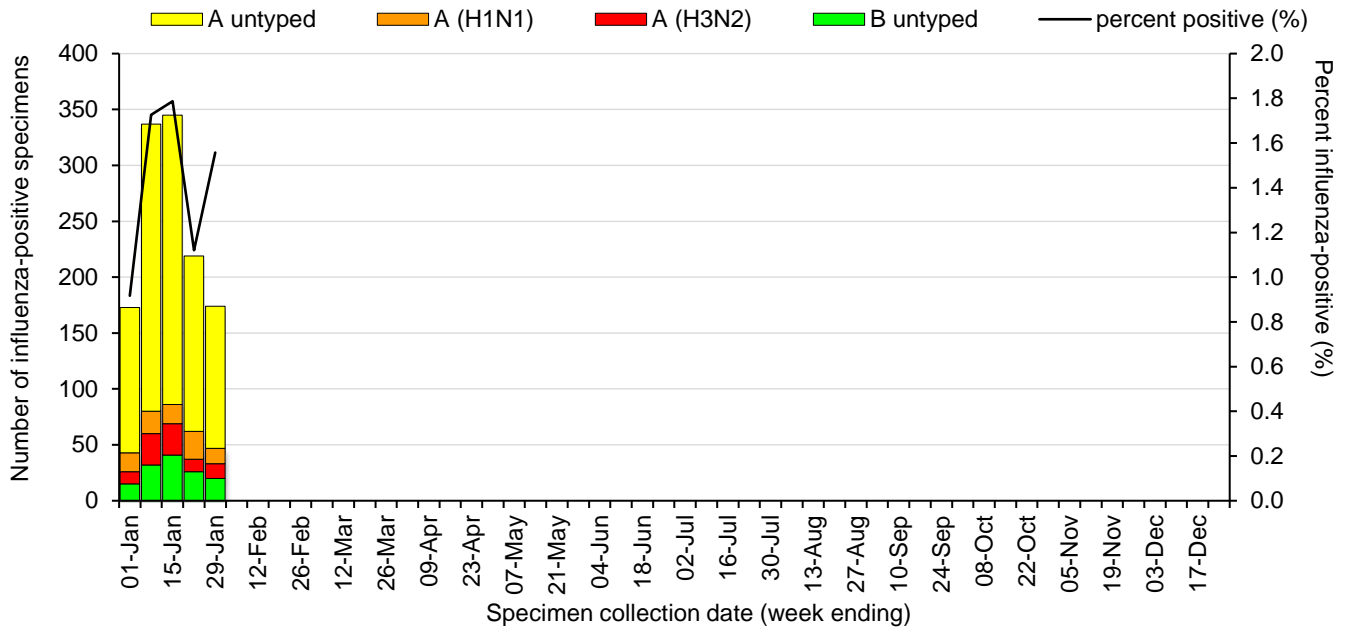
Figure 14. Proportion of FluTracking participants reporting influenza-like illness, NSW, 1 January to 29 January 2023



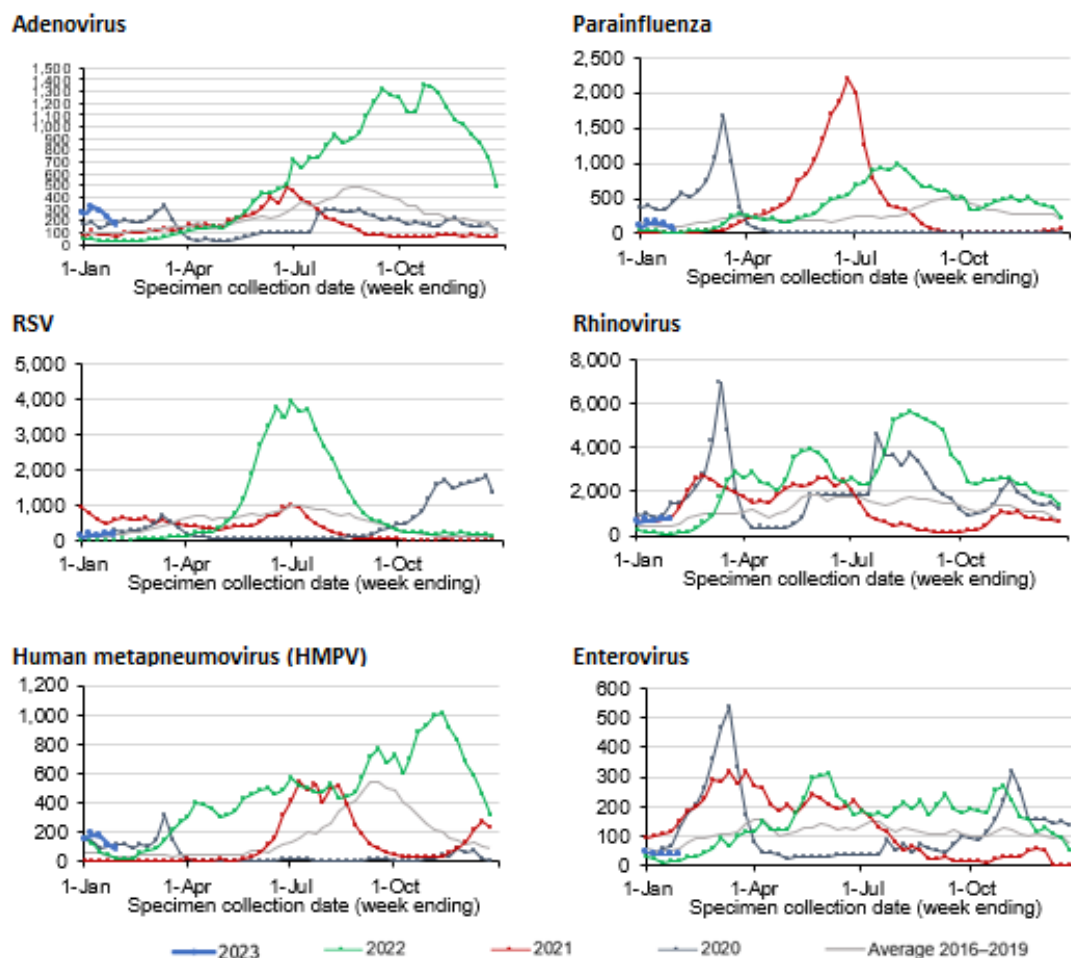
- The proportion of FluTracking participants reporting influenza-like illness decreased this week.

The NSW sentinel laboratory network comprises of 13 public and private laboratories throughout NSW who provide additional data on positive and negative test results. This helps us to understand which respiratory viruses are circulating as well as how much.

Figure 15. Number and proportion of tests positive for influenza at sentinel NSW laboratories, 1 January 2022 to 29 January 2023



- Of the 11,178 tests conducted for influenza, the proportion positive has remained stable at below 2%.

Figure 16. Number of positive PCR test results for other respiratory viruses at sentinel NSW laboratories, 1 January 2022 to 29 January 2023.

- Recent data is subject to change. For the week ending 29 January 2023, 8 out of 13 sentinel laboratories have provided testing data at the time of reporting.

Table 4. Total number of respiratory disease notifications from sentinel laboratories, NSW in the four weeks to 29 January, 2023

	Week ending				Year to date
	08 January	15 January	22 January	29 January*	
Adenovirus	312	279	216	166	1,225
Respiratory syncytial virus (RSV)	131	109	165	140	638
Rhinovirus	676	660	719	738	3,373
Human metapneumovirus (HMPV)	184	173	106	87	699
Enterovirus	38	37	34	36	186
Number of PCR tests conducted	19,516	19,308	19,555	11,178	88,422

*Recent data is subject to change. For the week ending 29 January 2023, 8 out of 13 sentinel laboratories have provided testing data at the time of reporting.