



DIRECTORATE
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NOROVIRAL INFECTIONS – AN INCREASING PROBLEM

In November this year the Chief Epidemiologist received notification of a serious outbreak of noroviral infection in a hospital in eastern Iceland. Such outbreaks have increasingly affected the operation of many hospital wards, nursing homes and residential homes for the elderly in recent years. This happens in particular during the winter months when patients, residents and staff become infected, sometimes causing the temporary closure of whole wards during an outbreak. The picture below shows the number of samples diagnosed with norovirus at the Dept. of Virology of the Landspítali University Hospital (LUH).

Noroviral gastroenteritis is very contagious. The virus contaminates the faeces or vomitus of the infected and is easily transmitted to the environment and between people. The incubation period of the infection is 12 to 48 hours and the illness is usually over in one to three days. The infection can last much longer in people with long-term illnesses and can be

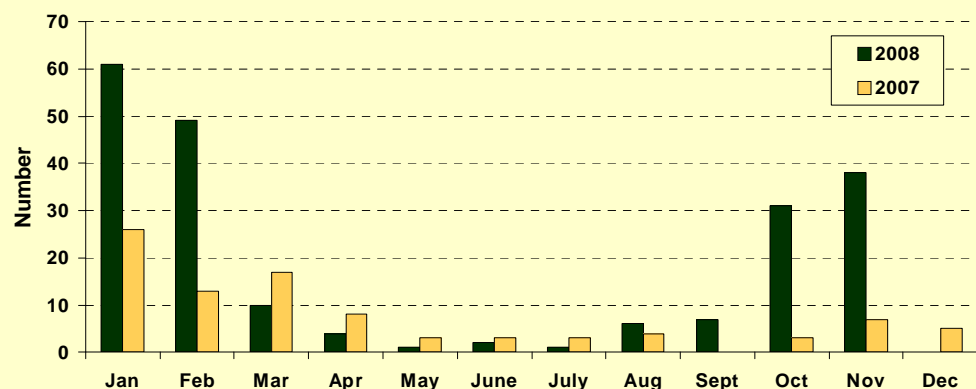
quite serious for the elderly and people with long-term illnesses.

Measures required to contain the spread of the infection are both uncomfortable and costly. Important measures for preventing the transmission are the isolation of those infected, hand cleansing with soap or disinfectants, and thorough cleaning of the environment of the patients. It is also extremely urgent to prevent those who are infected from visiting relatives or friends in hospitals, nursing homes or homes for the elderly during their illness as such visits can easily start an outbreak in the institution concerned.

The Chief Epidemiologist for Iceland encourages hospitals and homes and wards for the elderly to strengthen their infectious disease control, to be on the alert regarding any symptoms of gastrointestinal infections and to take appropriate measures immediately.

Ása St. Atladóttir

Samples diagnosed with norovirus at
the LUH Dept. of Virology 2007–2008, by month



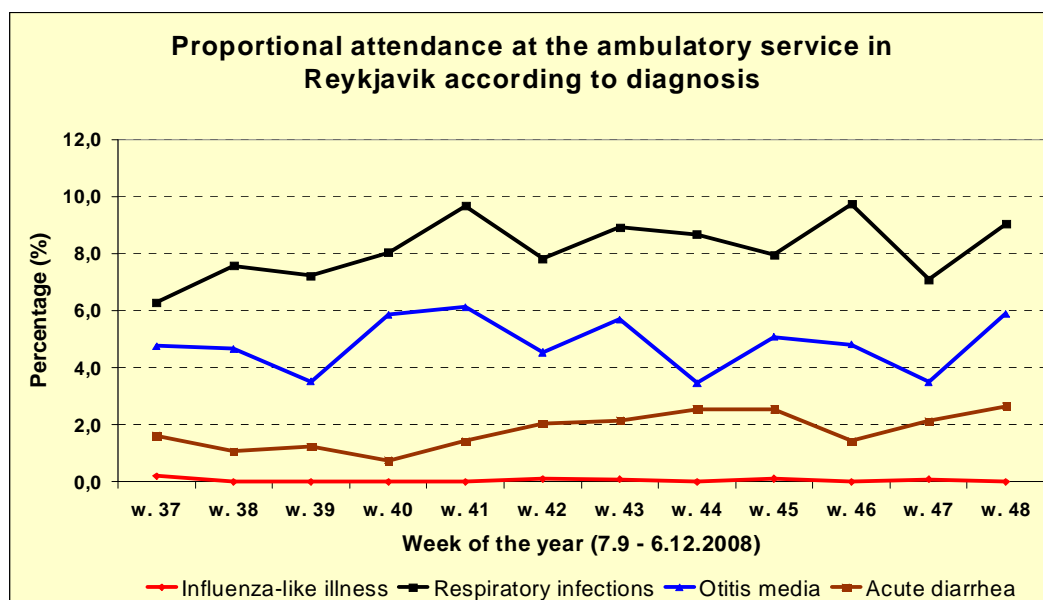
The seasonal influenza epidemic is not expected to hit Iceland until the beginning of next year.

WHERE IS THE SEASONAL INFLUENZA?

In late August and the beginning of September this year, two cases of influenza (A and B) were diagnosed in Iceland. Since then no cases have been diagnosed at the Department of Virology of Landspítali University Hospital. Influenza-like illness (ILI) has also been monitored at a sentinel ambulatory service in Reykjavik, along with certain other diseases (see fig.). Only a few cases of ILI have been detected.

The situation is the same in the other Nordic countries but there are indications of increasing influenza activity in many other European countries. The seasonal influenza epidemic, therefore, will not hit Iceland early this season and it is expected that the influenza will not arrive until the beginning of next year and will follow the patterns of recent years.

Haraldur Briem



In November, the Chief Epidemiologist received notification of a serious outbreak of noroviral infection in a hospital in eastern Iceland.

DIAGNOSES AT THE LUH DEPARTMENT OF VIROLOGY IN NOVEMBER 2008

I. Respiratory infections

In November 2008, RSV was detected in three children. Other viruses detected were: Enterovirus, herpes simplex-1, parainfluenza-1, rhinovirus and enteroviruses. Most samples were from children.

It seems that the annual RSV epidemic has not fully started yet.

II. Gastrointestinal infections

Thirty eight individuals (children and adults) had noroviral infection (calicivirus) confirmed in November 2008 and one individual had adenovirus detected. Noroviral infections are still frequent in the society.

Thorolfur Gudnason