



NHS DIRECT SYNDROMIC SURVEILLANCE BULLETIN

England and Wales ~ Bulletin 408: 20 November 2009



NHS Direct derived data are being used to detect national and local rises in syndromes occurring in the community. The main trends in these syndromes are reported below.

Key Messages ~ Data for 11th November – 17th November 2009

Over the weekend of 14/15 November there was a system change implemented at NHS Direct which has affected the syndromic call data received at the HPA. Although the total call numbers received have remained at expected levels (figure 1), the numbers of calls with allocated symptoms/syndromes have fallen. We are currently trying to assess how this might be affecting the proportions of syndromic calls presented in this bulletin and therefore the data presented in the graphs must be interpreted with caution.

Syndromes at a glance: National picture

Please note: The NHS Direct system change that was introduced on Saturday 4th July to deal with the increased call volumes experienced due to swine flu has been discontinued over the weekend of 3-4 October (as shown in figures 1-3). As a result of this change all syndromic indicators saw a sharp increase in their proportions and therefore the syndromes presented below must be interpreted with caution. We will continue to monitor this situation to confirm whether the syndromes have returned to 'normal seasonal levels'.

Vomiting: above the norovirus threshold. Previous years' data suggest that when the proportion of vomiting calls (all ages) exceeds a threshold value of 4% this often marks the beginning of periods of increased norovirus activity nationally (figure 3). **The current value is 4.3% (17 November).**

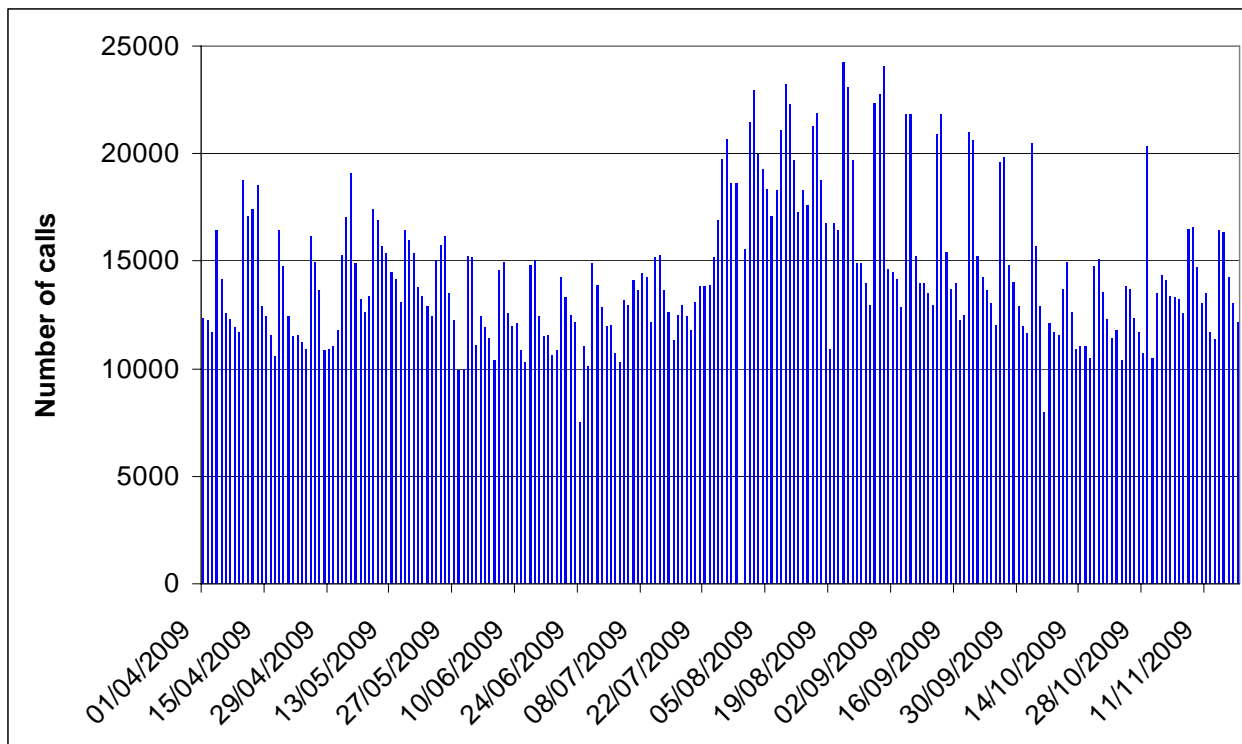
Fever (all ages): above baseline levels

Cough, diarrhoea, difficulty breathing: just above baseline levels

Rash, eye problems, double vision, lumps: below baseline levels.

Please note that due to the changes to NHS Direct mentioned above we are not presenting the age-group specific & Strategic Health Authority trends in an Appendix on the HPA website.

Figure 1 Total NHS Direct symptomatic calls for England & Wales for all ages



Syndromic Surveillance.

The daily number of calls for 7 algorithms (syndromes), as a proportion of total triaged calls is presented nationally (Figures 2-4).

Figure 2 - RESPIRATORY CALLS: Daily 'fever' and 'cough' calls as a proportion of total calls (2008-09), compared with 4-year averages.

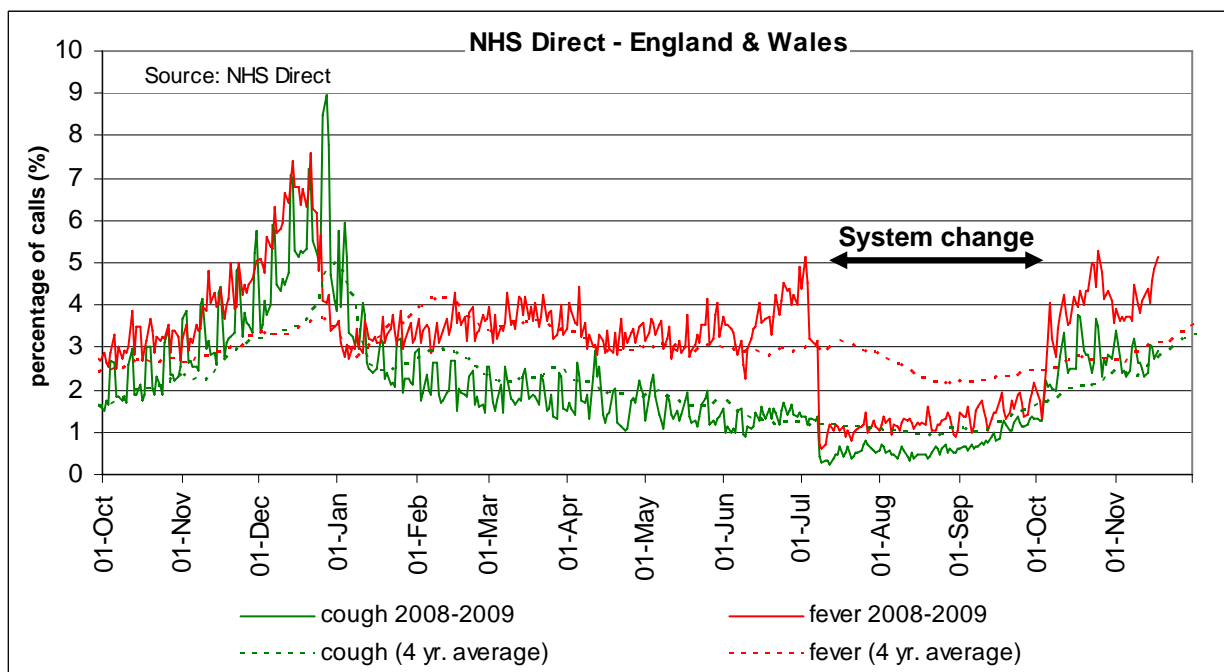


Figure 3 - GASTROINTESTINAL CALLS: Daily 'diarrhoea' and 'vomiting' calls as a proportion of total calls (2008-09), compared with 4-year averages.

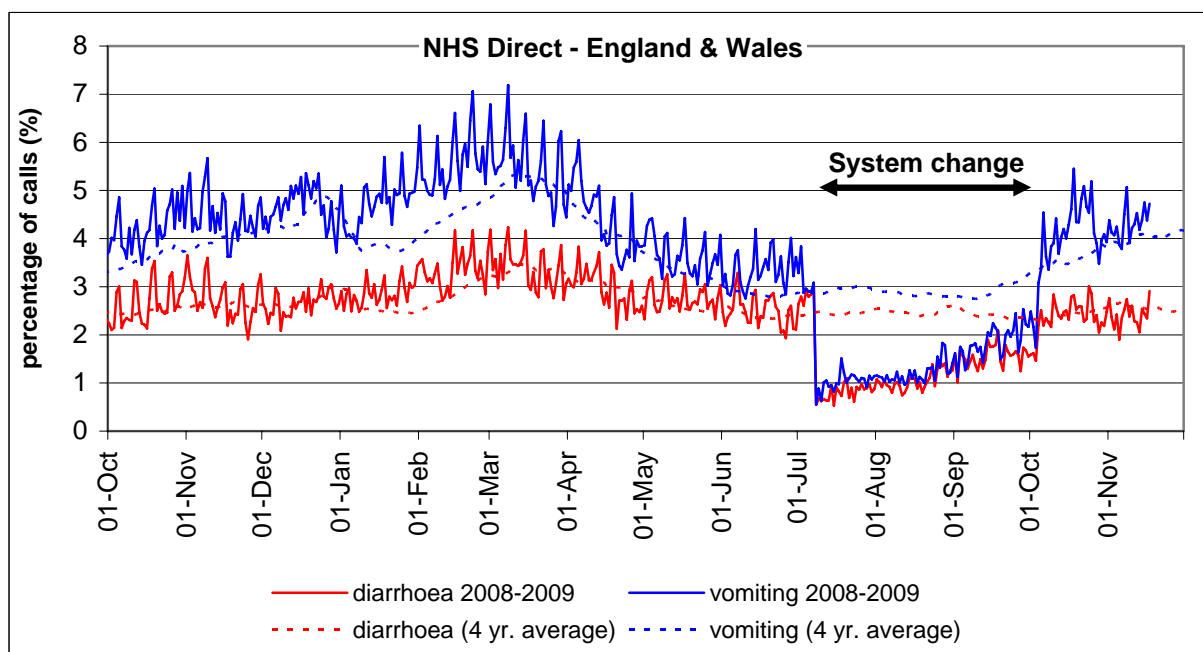
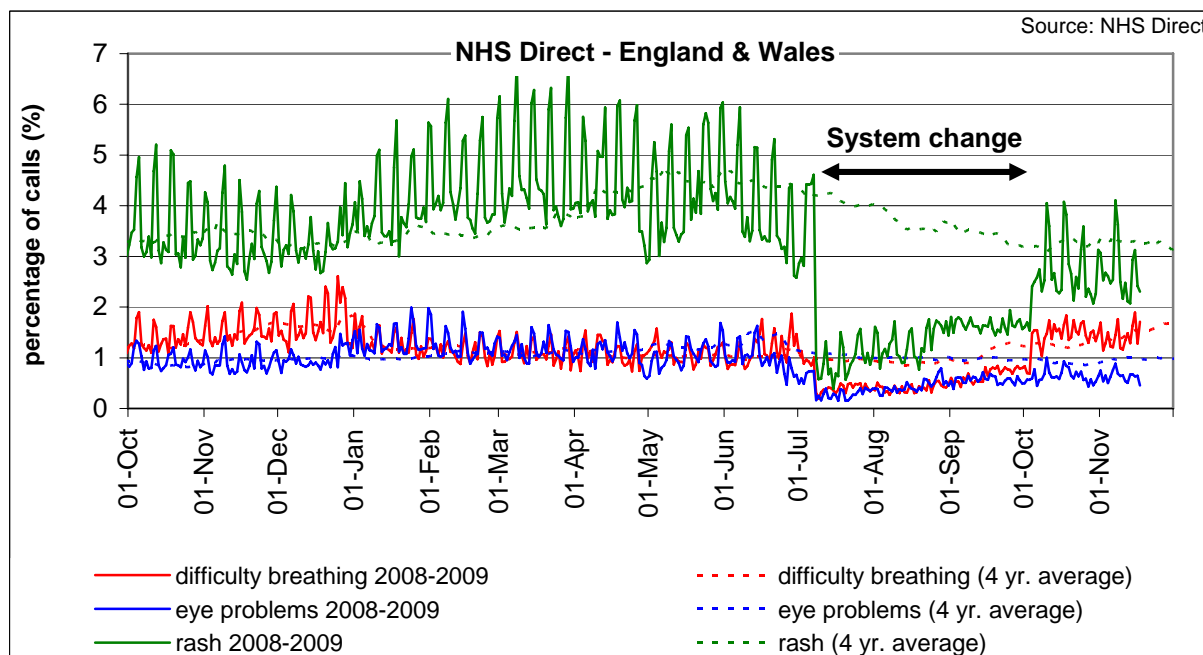


Figure 4 – Daily 'rash', 'difficulty breathing' and 'eye problems' calls as a proportion of total calls (2008-09), compared with 4-year averages.



NOTES

- Owing to the launch of the National Pandemic Flu Service (NPFS) on 23rd July, the majority of calls to NHS Direct related to influenza are redirected through NPFS and not through the NHS Direct 'Core Service'. As a result of this development we will not be able to report on the cold/flu-related syndromes from NHS Direct until after the end of the pandemic.
- The NHS Direct system change that was introduced on Saturday 4th July to deal with the increased call volumes experienced due to swine flu has been discontinued over the weekend of 3-4 October (as illustrated in figures 2-4 above). As a result of this change all syndromic indicators saw a sharp increase in their proportions and therefore should be interpreted with caution.
- Note: There was a change in the syndromic coding system for difficulty breathing calls during November 2006 which resulted in a 20% increase in calls for this syndrome.

- *NHS Direct calls about 'lumps' and 'double vision' are also inspected every day. Graphs will be presented if significant trends emerge.*

This bulletin will be disseminated every week unless the data suggest more regular updates are required. Daily updates of the data are inspected by Real-time Syndromic Surveillance Team (Regional Epidemiology Unit, HPA West Midlands).

The bulletin is produced by the HPA Real-time Syndromic Surveillance Team (HPA West Midlands)/ Centre for Infections (HPA), NHS Direct, and the NHS Direct National Operations Centre. Contact: HPA (Paul Loveridge, 0121 352 5562).

The following bulletins can be downloaded at the websites below which contain more information about primary care surveillance:

NHS Direct syndromic surveillance bulletin: HPA website

<http://www.hpa.org.uk/hpr/infections/primarycare.htm>

Further information on the HPA's real-time syndromic surveillance team can be found at:

<http://www.hpa.org.uk/webw/HPAweb&Page&HPAwebAutoListName/Page/1201767910606>