



# North Cumbria Communicable Disease Control Newsletter



Issue 15

[www.ncbugs.com](http://www.ncbugs.com)

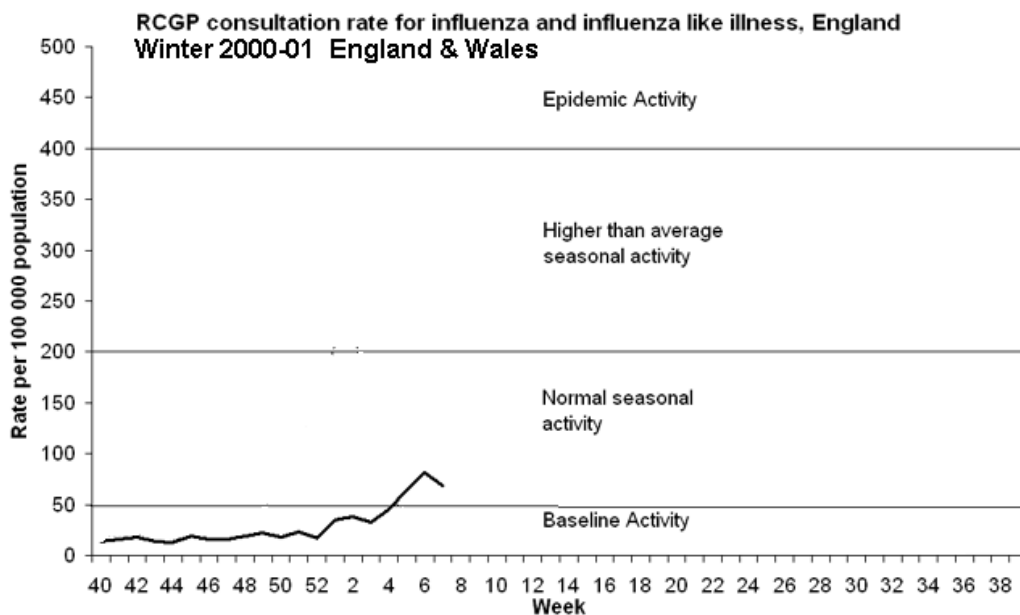
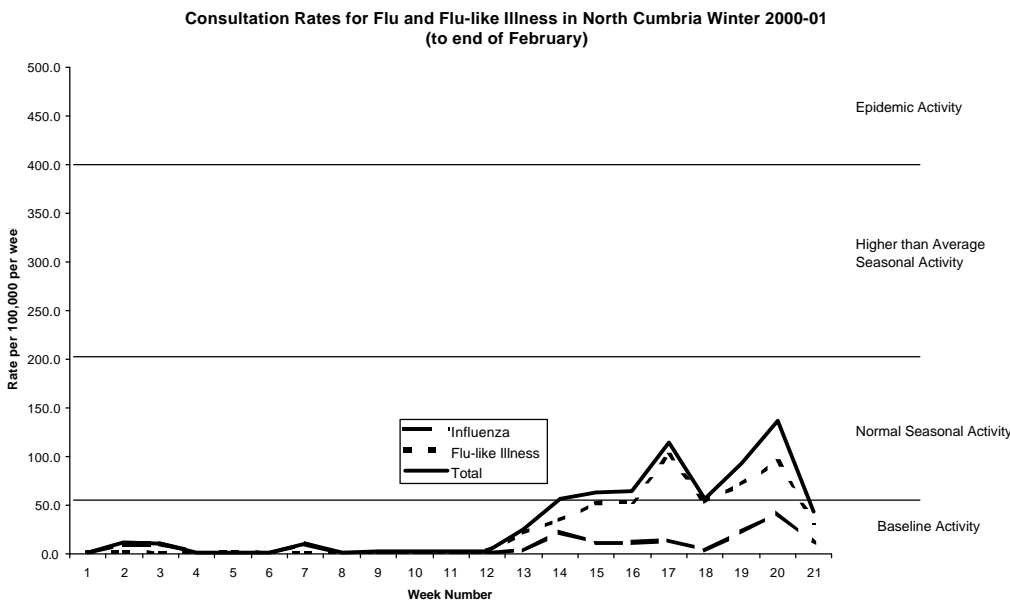
February/March 2001

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## Influenza and Flu-like Illness Consultations

The local flu and flu-like illness consultation rates appear to have started to fall this week. The total consultation rate has fallen from 136 per 100,000 during the week beginning 12th

February to only 43 for the week beginning 19th February. The majority of these consultations relate to flu-like illness rather than influenza (upper graph). The national figures have been slightly lower (although figures for the North of England and for Scotland have been similar to ours) and these are shown in the lower graph. Levels of flu and flu-like illness are well within the expected range for this time of year and certainly a long way short of epidemic levels.



Once again I would like to thank colleagues in CueDoc and the James Street Practice, Workington for their help with this project. Full details of the methods used are available on the [www.ncbugs.com](http://www.ncbugs.com) website.

## National Foot and Mouth Epidemic

Foot and Mouth disease is a highly infectious viral condition that can affect a number of animals including cattle, pigs and deer. Human cases, although documented, are extremely rare and the condition is nothing whatever to do with the "hand foot and mouth" disease that sometimes affects young children in nurseries, playgroups and schools. The following notes have been produced by the Public Health Laboratory Service and may be of interest to readers.

- The recent outbreak of foot-and-mouth disease in pigs and cattle has raised the question whether there have ever been cases of this infection in humans. Although there are rare documented cases of human infection, overall the number of cases is extremely small, in relation to the regular exposure of humans to infection through the widespread epidemics in livestock that have occurred in the past, and in other parts of the world.
- Overall, the risk of human infection is extremely small, and in those rare documented cases where it has occurred, the symptoms have been mild and self-limiting.
- The last human case reported in this country with laboratory evidence of foot-and-mouth disease occurred in 1967. There were other reports of cases prior to that. However, in many of the reported cases it is unclear whether or not the patient's illness was foot-and-mouth disease or some other condition with similar symptoms.
- Symptoms in reported human cases have principally been uncomfortable tingling blisters on the hands. Other symptoms reported have included fever, sore throat, blisters also on the feet and tongue. The infection, if not symptomless, is usually mild and transient. It is not dangerous and there is no evidence of human-to-human transmission, or of transmission through the consumption of meat.
- By far the most important aspect of the present outbreak is to prevent animals from becoming infected, and further animal to animal transmission. Information on the outbreak and foot and mouth disease in animals can be obtained on the Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food (MAFF) web-site at [www.maff.gov.uk/animalh/diseases/fmd/qa1.htm](http://www.maff.gov.uk/animalh/diseases/fmd/qa1.htm)
- People who are involved in handling infected animals can minimise any possible risk to themselves by maintaining good personal hygiene (such as handwashing and face-washing) and by wearing appropriate protective clothing.
- Foot-and-mouth disease should not be confused with the human disease called "hand, foot-and-mouth" disease. This is an unrelated and usually mild viral infection principally affecting children and due to an entirely different virus. Foot-and-mouth disease is due to an animal pi-cornavirus while human hand, foot-and-mouth disease is due a human enterovirus, most commonly a coxsackie A virus

One of the ways that the infection can be spread is on contaminated car tyres, wellington boots etc. and the government is considering restricting public movement. "Infected Place" signs have been erected on affected farms and most farmers will have put "Straw barriers" in place. These consist of straw liberally soaked in an approved disinfectant and spread across the farm entrance.

We would advise community staff who need to visit a farm to phone ahead and ensure that disinfectant is available. MAFF advise that vehicles should be left outside the premises if possible. A list of approved MAFF-disinfectants is available on the [www.ncbugs.com](http://www.ncbugs.com) website.

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### ncbugs.com



The communicable disease control website appears to be going down well. During February 2001 (until noon on 27th at any rate) there were 903 sessions served. A session is a single visit to the site, and can include views of several pages. We get a lot of phone calls from health professionals with queries about vaccinations. Sending an email is a simple alternative and can be done via the website. Please don't include any confidential patient details though - email is not secure.