NUFFIELD DEPARTMENT OF PRIMARY CARE HEALTH SCIENCES
RESEARCH & SURVEILLANCE CENTRE

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# OXFORD-RCGP RSC DIRECTOR'S MESSAGE

YOUR WEEKLY UPDATE FROM PROF. SIMON DE LUSIGNAN, DIRECTOR OF THE OXFORD-RCGP RSC

## *Virology surveillance: preparing for the new swabbing season*

Last season, practices using ICE Desktop to submit virology surveillance swabs to the UKHSA Laboratory at North Bristol submitted **more than 1,500 samples**. This was a significant achievement, particularly as the pathway was developed after the surveillance season had already begun.

**Help us maximise surveillance this season**

With the surveillance season approaching, practices are encouraged to consider how virology swabbing can be incorporated into appropriate clinical pathways for patients presenting with relevant symptoms. The North Bristol laboratory typically provides **results within 2–3 days**.

The Take-a-Test home-centric pathway also remains available, and we have lifted the 30 TATUK sample per week limit per practice. Remuneration is **£12.50 per result** for both pathways.

**Call to action**: If your practice uses ICE Desktop for virology surveillance, please ensure your team is **ready for the new season**. If you need **additional swabs**, would like to **enrol in the Take-a-Test pathway**, need support with either pathway, or believe another member of your practice should be our main contact, please contact **Dominic Dunn** or the **PLO Team**.

# New Research Explores a Potential Link Between Shingles Vaccination and Reduced Dementia Risk

Our colleagues at the Clinical Informatics Health Outcomes Group based at the University of Oxford have shared encouraging interim findings from a study examining whether the **recombinant zoster vaccine (RZV)**, which protects against shingles, **may also reduce the risk of developing dementia.**

Using a target trial emulation approach and data collected following the introduction of England's national RZV immunisation programme, the study found that adults aged 65 years and older who received the recommended two-dose course had a **33% lower risk** of developing dementia (in just over two years of follow-up time) compared with those who were not vaccinated. This reduction was statistically significant.

Please note that **RZV is not indicated for the reduction in risk of dementia**. While further research is needed to confirm these findings and to determine a causal link with RZV, the results add to the growing body of evidence suggesting that shingles vaccination may have benefits beyond preventing shingles, with the potential to contribute to dementia risk reduction at a population level. We look forward to following future developments as this important research progresses.

# Surveillance Payment Update for April-June 2026

We're pleased to let you know that we have now started processing **Q1 payments for our sampling practices.**

**Payments are being processed and should begin to appear in your nominated bank accounts shortly.**

A huge **thank you** to all our sampling practices for your continued support, patience and valuable contribution. **Your ongoing participation and commitment are greatly appreciated.**

A quick reminder: if you have recently **changed your bank account details**, or have not yet provided us with your updated details, **please send these to us** at your earliest convenience. Having the correct information will help us process your payment promptly and avoid any unnecessary delays.

# Sampling is Informing

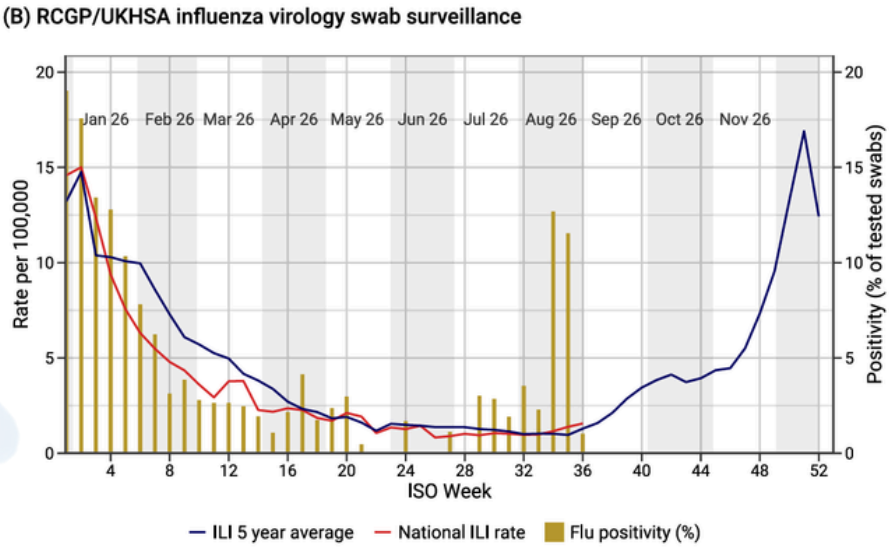
**Weekly observations from our on-team GPs**

## From Summer Heat to Autumn Flu: The Value of Virology Sampling

**by Dr Rashmi Wimalaratna, MBBS**

After such a blisteringly hot summer, the onset of a crisp and blustery September has been a welcome respite. But with the cool breezes come many a seasonal virus, and we've all observed our clinics filling up with ARI (Acute Respiratory Infection) over the past fortnight.

We can also see this reflected in the proportion of virology swabs in recent weeks, where there are sharp spikes for flu positivity seen for Weeks 34 and 35, relative to other circulating viruses. It underscores how important our network's sampling practices are in helping to allow us accurately track the temporal spread of viruses across England, and confers important information for the development of next year's flu vaccine.




As we await our vaccine deliveries for the 2026-27 season, it is helpful to be aware of the virulence of flu, both in terms of protecting our most vulnerable patients, and helping to encourage vaccine take-up in the more apprehensive cohorts. And the other **benefit of sampling** is that it does allow **confirmation of a viral infection**, which has benefits all-round in terms of antibiotic stewardship, and justification for sick days from work or school.

We are always keen to welcome more sampling, so if your practice is interested in becoming a sampling practice, please do contact our PLO team for more information.