NUFFIELD DEPARTMENT OF PRIMARY CARE HEALTH SCIENCES
RESEARCH & SURVEILLANCE CENTRE

October 2026 / ISSUE 321

OXFORD-RCGP RSC DIRECTOR'S MESSAGE

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

Come See Us in Person!

Next week, one of our Project Managers, Karin André, will be attending the RCGP annual conference in Glasgow on **29th and 30th October**. Do come and see Karin at the RCGP stand to find out more about collaborating for research and surveillance. There will be some complimentary gifts on offer.

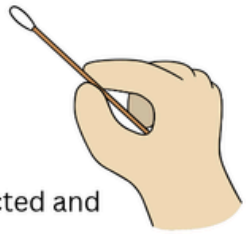
RCGP 2026 ANNUAL CONFERENCE

Friday RCGP-RSC Reminder: Swab Smart, Swab Right!

by Jhoann Miyajima,
Practice Liaison Officer

Every swab counts towards respiratory surveillance, but ensuring it's collected and submitted correctly is just as important. Let's avoid unnecessary lab rejections and make every swab count!

Swab smart, swab right!



Cold and flu season is here, and it's time to ramp up swabbing across the RSC Network!
Every swab counts towards respiratory surveillance, but it's important that swabs are collected and submitted correctly to avoid unnecessary lab rejections.

TIMING MATTERS

One of the most common reasons for swab rejection is an issue with the symptom onset date. **Remember!**

In-practice swabbing must be taken within **7 days of symptom onset**

Take-A-Test swabbing must be taken within **4 days of symptom onset**

COMPLETE LAB FORMS

Ensure all required details are included on laboratory request forms. Missing or incomplete forms can result in swab rejection.

3 IDENTIFIERS

All swab tubes must be clearly labelled with at least three patient identifiers:

1. **Full name**
2. **Date of Birth (DOB)**
3. **NHS Number**

Following these operational requirements helps ensure your swabs are successfully validated and processed by the lab, making all your hard work count.

To recognise and thank you for your participation, your surgery will receive reimbursement for every valid swab submitted.

Let's keep the swabbing momentum going this flu season!

Sampling is Informing

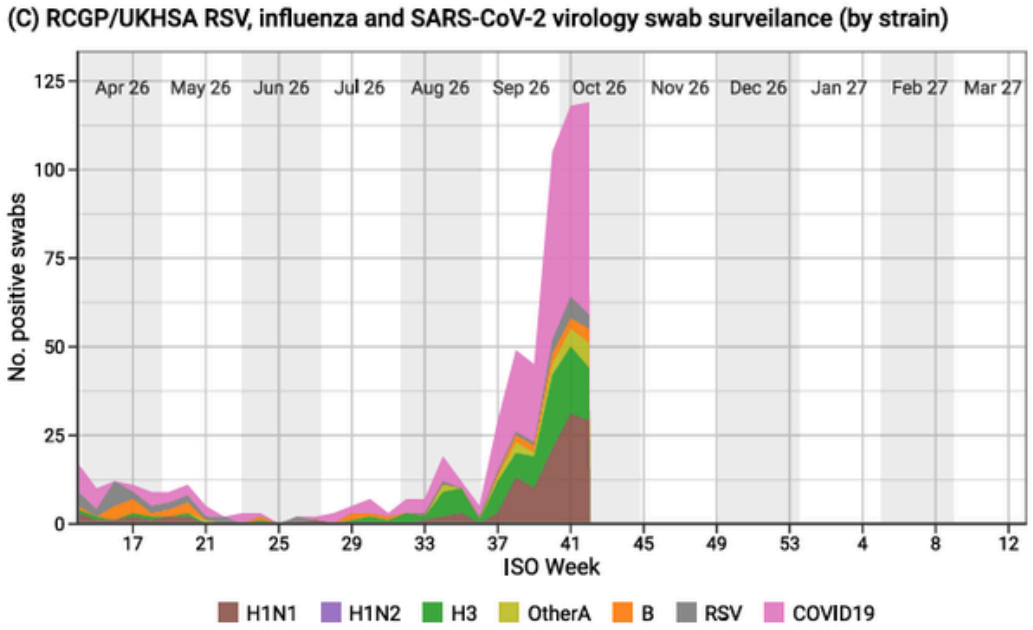
Weekly observations from our on-team GPs

What Your Swabs Are Telling Us About COVID

by Dr Gavin Jamie, BM MSc

We have not seen a lot of Covid from your swabs since the autumn of last year, but as September went on the numbers of positive swabs rose quite quickly. In absolute terms this is still not a major rise but is certainly a larger number of positive results that we have seen for about a year.

Alongside the increase in 'flu, these results help to explain the rise the incidence of acute respiratory illness as the weather becomes a little cooler and schools, colleges and universities reconvene after the summer break.

The dominant variation is the XFG strain, a descendent of Omicron. It is also sometimes known as Stratus or the American variant although, as is normal when viruses are named after places, that does not seem to reflect its true origin. It is not especially new and was first identified at the start of 2025. There is no sign that symptoms are any more severe than other variants although immunity may be waning after some time without much virus in the community.

The current vaccination programme is open to anyone who is either over the age of 75, resident in a care home or who has impaired immunity. This remains an important vaccination. We should not let the low levels of Covid over the last winter allow us to think that this winter will be the same.