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

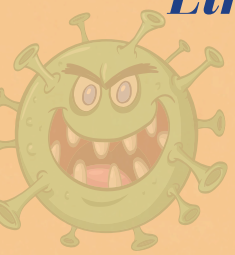
RCGP RSC at the RCGP Annual Conference 2026

Our colleagues Karin and Mike attended the RCGP Annual Conference and Exhibition 2026 in Glasgow on 29–30 October. It was a fantastic opportunity to connect with colleagues from across the primary care community, exchange ideas and hear about the latest developments in general practice and research.

It was lovely to meet those of you who attended, and we hope you enjoyed the conference as much as we did!

RCGP 2026 ANNUAL CONFERENCE

🎃 Trick or Transmission? Is Halloween Linked to Respiratory Illnesses? 🎃



by Eva Klamerus
Practice Liaison Officer

As Halloween approaches, ghosts, vampires and ghouls are preparing to emerge from the shadows. But for those of us working at the Oxford-RCGP RSC, there is another familiar autumn visitor to watch out for: respiratory viruses.

Every year, as pumpkin-related posts appear on social media, influenza, RSV and other respiratory pathogens begin their seasonal activities. We might wonder: does Halloween itself contribute to respiratory virus transmission? After all, Halloween celebrations often involve crowded indoor gatherings and increased social mixing.

Evidence from influenza outbreaks suggests that large social gatherings can facilitate transmission. However, establishing a Halloween-specific link is considerably trickier. A rise in respiratory infections following 31 October could reflect multiple factors: seasonal changes, school-term mixing, circulating viral strains, changes in healthcare-seeking behaviour among a few.

Through the Oxford-RCGP Research and Surveillance Centre, your samples help us track respiratory infections across England, providing valuable clinical and virological data to monitor circulating pathogens and emerging seasonal trends. Could there be a Halloween-related signal in these data? Perhaps. For now, the evidence doesn't suggest a direct link between Halloween and respiratory spikes.

After all, in epidemiology, the scariest thing isn't always the virus. Sometimes, it's unmeasured confounding. 👻

Happy Halloween to all our RSC practices, and thank you for helping us keep an eye on the pathogens!

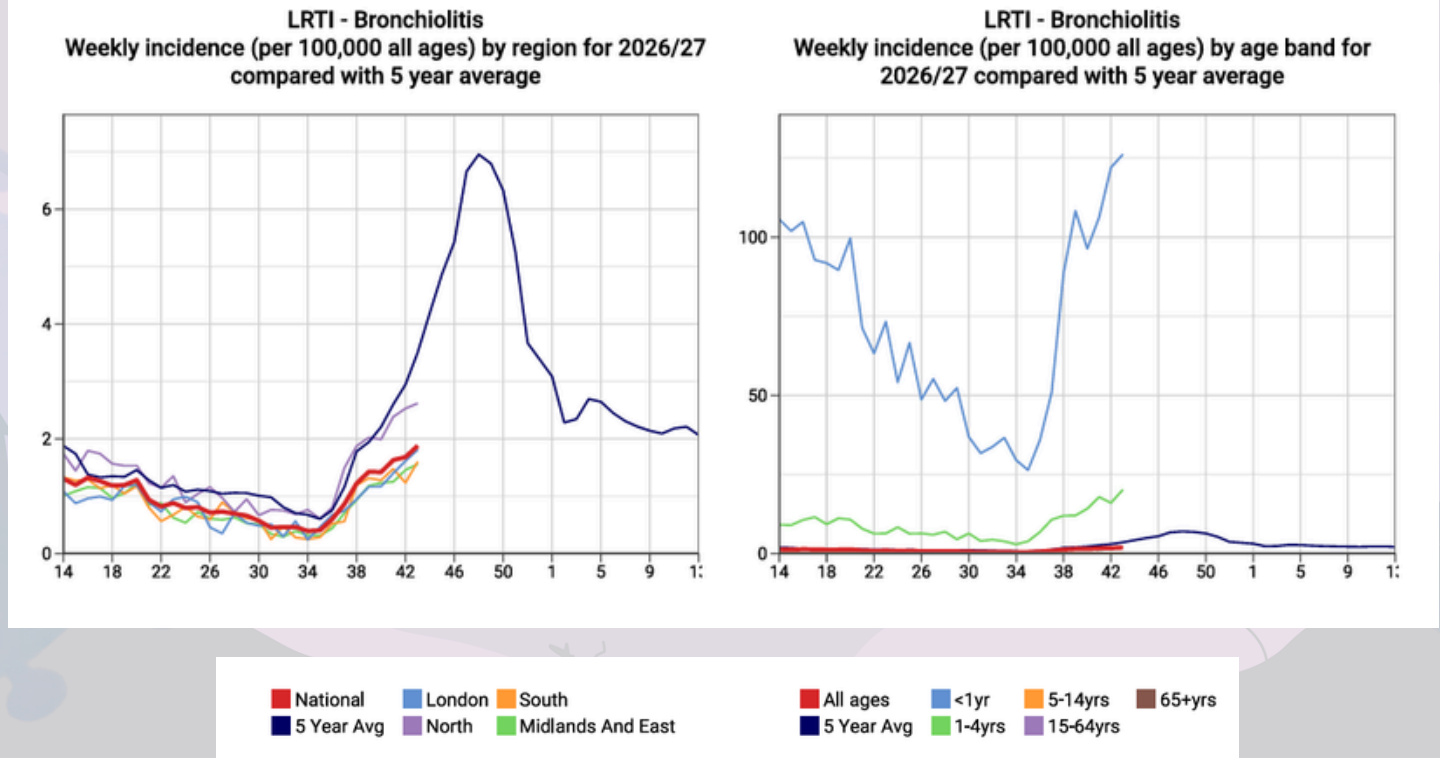
Sampling is Informing

Weekly observations from our on-team GPs

Lots going on in respiratory disease this time of year!

by Dr Gavin Jamie, BM MSc

Autumn is the season typically associated with respiratory infections our youngest patients. Bronchiolitis is a common cause of hospital admission in children under one year old. A study in 2011 estimated that nearly five percent of infants were admitted to hospital each year, although only a small number needed treatment in paediatric intensive care.

The most common viral cause is respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) and in the past swab tests have shown that about 40% of clinical cases have been positive for RSV.
We have seen very little RSV on swab tests this year but cases of bronchiolitis have continued their seasonal rise in young children. In every older age group, as we would expect, rates are very small. If we look at the long-term numbers overall are a bit below the trend, the rise is a little milder this autumn.

We have had a maternal vaccination programme over the last couple of years which passes on a passive protection to young children in the first few months of life. This could be having an effect on the number of cases. It will not prevent RSV infection later on – this is often regarded as virtually inevitable before a child's second birthday – but may reduce the need for hospital admission in the very young.