Chinese Notifiable Infectious Diseases Surveillance Report

Influenza
November 2023

Introduction

Influenza, often referred to as the flu, is a highly contagious respiratory illness caused by influenza viruses. It affects the nose, throat, and sometimes the lungs. Typical symptoms include fever, cough, sore throat, runny nose, body aches, headache, and fatigue. It can range from mild to severe, occasionally leading to death. There are four types of influenza viruses: A, B, C, and D. Human influenza A and B viruses cause seasonal epidemics. The virus spreads via small droplets when infected people cough or sneeze. Vaccination is the most effective way to prevent infection.
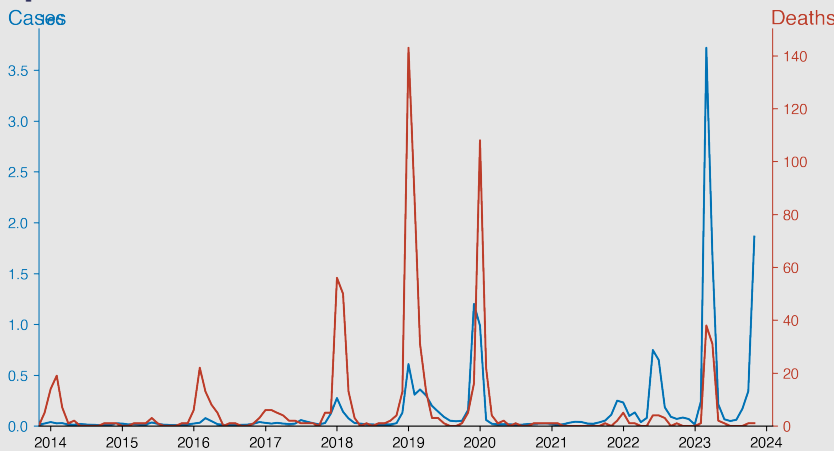
Highlights

- March 2023 saw an unprecedented surge in cases (3,721,370), which suggests a significant outbreak or a change in surveillance.
- A subsequent decline followed this peak; however, 1,863,998 cases in November 2023 indicate the continuation of a high transmission period.
- The mortality rate is low, with November 2023 recording only 1 death despite numerous cases, possibly indicating improved treatment or death under-reporting.
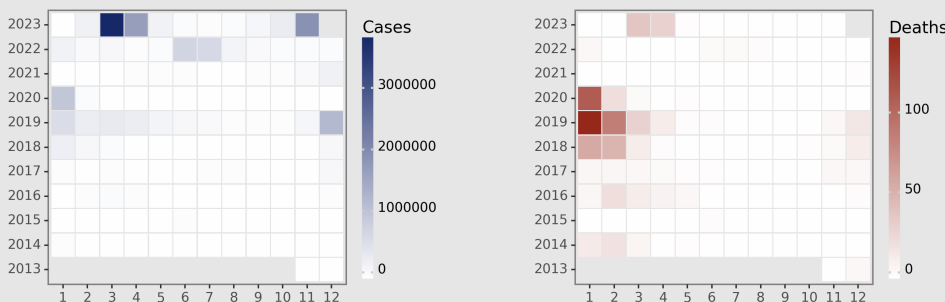- Data shows seasonality with winter spikes, reflecting typical Influenza patterns.

Temporal Trend

Cases Analysis

Influenza cases in Chinese mainland show marked seasonality, spiking primarily during colder months, from November to March. The data from 2013 through 2023 highlights interannual variability, with substantial increases in cases observed starting in December 2017. Notably, January 2019 registered the highest case count (608,511). A significant surge in March 2023 was recorded with an all-time high of 3,721,370 cases. Such trends potentially reflect viral evolution, changes in surveillance, or population-level factors.

Deaths Analysis

Death counts due to influenza in the Chinese mainland remain relatively low in comparison to the number of cases, indicating a generally low mortality rate. Throughout the years, there have been sporadic increases in deaths, notably January 2018 and January 2020, with 56 and 108 deaths, respectively. March 2023 reported the highest number of deaths (38) since the beginning of the dataset, which might reflect increased virulence or better reporting. The overall trend shows a decoupling of case and death counts, suggesting improvements in healthcare or influenza management.

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