

SEASONAL DISEASES

Rotavirus, 2021

Rotavirus is a common childhood infection with a seasonal pattern, peaking during the cooler, drier months of the year. The rotavirus vaccine was introduced into the expanded programme of immunisation in August 2009 and currently, the annual rotavirus season in South Africa occurs from late June to mid-August. With the very limited and late 2020 season coupled with likely disruptions in vaccination programs in 2020 due to the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic and the restricted age range of rotavirus vaccine administration (24 weeks), the 2021 rotavirus season is expected to be larger than seen in the last few years. Diarrhoeal surveillance is conducted at three sentinel sites (Pelonomi Hospital, Free State Province; Klerksdorp/Tshepong hospitals; North West Province and Red Cross Children's Hospital, Western Cape Province) targeting all patients who present for the treatment of diarrhoea and restarted in May 2021 (week 13).

A total of 85 stool specimens has been screened with 18% (20/85) testing positive for rotavirus, currently concentrated in the Western Cape Province. The 2021 season is dominated by G2P[4] strains. Most of the rotavirus cases are in children <5 years (19/20; 95%; median age 11 months). The rotavirus cases present with vomiting and diarrhoea (median maximum number of stools in a 24 hours period is 6; range 4-15), fever in 50% of patients (10/20) and most have mild to moderate dehydration (80% 1-5% dehydration; 16/20), with all discharged after treatment. Most children had also received two doses of the rotavirus vaccine (89%; 17/19) with the remaining two children having received one dose. The single rotavirus case in individuals >5 years was in an adult female (31 years of age) who was HIV-positive and not on ARVs.

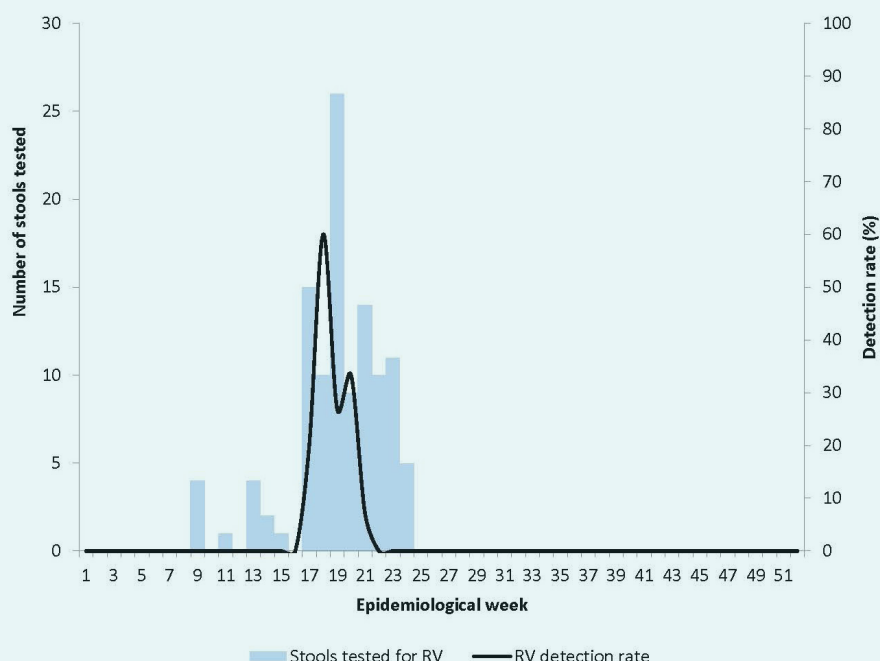


Figure 4. The total number of stool specimens collected and screened for rotavirus and detection rate by epidemiological week from three sentinel surveillance sites, South Africa, 2021