Author’s response to reviews

Title: Epidemiology of influenza in West Africa after the 2009 influenza A(H1N1) pandemic, 2010-2012.

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Author’s response to reviews:

Dear Editor and Reviewer,

On behalf of the authors of manuscript INFD-D-16-01439R2, I would like to thank you for the feedback following review of our manuscript “Epidemiology of influenza in West Africa after the 2009 influenza A(H1N1) pandemic, 2010-2012”. We have addressed the comments below accordingly.

Editor (comment): We would be grateful for clarification in your 'Ethics and consent to participate' section if any form of ethical approval (or other permission) was required to access this data. If this data is freely available and ethics approval was not needed please state this. In addition please clarify the consent sought from participants. At present you state you obtained this but we don't think this can be correct as you are using data from existing surveillance systems rather than contacting patients yourself. Could you clarify this?

Answer: Thank you for this comment. We have added the following sentence to the “Ethics and consent to participate” section:

“We invited Ministries of Health, influenza reference laboratories and/or WHO NICs to participate in this study. Participation in this study was voluntary and in-country representatives shared their data willingly. Ethics approval was not required to access these data.” Please, see edits made in the ‘Ethics and consent to participate’ section (lines 21-24, page 14).

With regards to consent; consent was sought verbally from each patient (or parent/guardian consent for children) presenting to surveillance facilities and who met the case definitions. This was mandatory in each country who participated in the study prior to nasopharyngeal and/or oropharyngeal specimens collection. Any patient (or parent/guardian of children) who refused to provide verbal consent was not enrolled and no specimen (and no epidemiological data) was collected. Please, see edits made in the ‘Methods’ section (lines 26-28, page 6).

Reviewer (comment): This is a second referee report on the paper "Epidemiology of influenza in West Africa after the 2009 influenza A(H1N1) pandemic, 2010-2012." The paper is clearly written, and the referee thanks the authors for the additional analyses that they’ve performed. The only remaining suggestion if to augment the surveillance data by the counts of the number of patients seen by the participating medical practitioners before the first 4 (or 5) ILI cases were detected - this way one would obtain a crude estimate of the weekly percent ILI among all patients, which is an important component of influenza surveillance.
Answer: We agree with the reviewer that weekly percent ILI among all patients would be a useful measure to include in the manuscript. Unfortunately, the total number of patients seen by week for each of the surveillance sites is not available and we are unable to carry out these calculations.

On behalf of my co-authors I thank you for your consideration of our work. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you need additional information.

Sincerely,

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