

About half of health care workers positive for COVID-19 by serology have no symptoms

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Wesley Self, MD, associate professor of Emergency Medicine at Vanderbilt University Medical Center and lead investigator for the IVY Network. Credit: Vanderbilt University Medical Center

The IVY Research Network has completed initial studies evaluating the epidemiology of COVID-19 in health care workers and patients.

Among 249 front-line health care workers who cared for COVID-19 patients during the first month of the pandemic in Tennessee, 8% tested positive for COVID-19 antibodies by serology testing, suggesting they had contracted COVID-19 in the first several weeks of taking care of COVID-19 patients. Among these health care workers with positive serology results, 42% reported no symptoms of a respiratory illness in the prior two months. This suggests that front-line health care workers are at high risk for COVID-19 and that many health care workers with the virus may not have typical symptoms of a respiratory [infection](#). These results were published in the journal *Clinical Infectious Diseases* on July 6.

"Our results suggest that screening [health](#) care workers for COVID-19 even when they don't have any symptoms could be important to prevent the spread of the virus within hospitals," said Wesley Self, MD, associate professor of Emergency Medicine at Vanderbilt University Medical Center and lead investigator for the IVY Network.

Investigator Bo Stubblefield, MD, instructor of Emergency Medicine, added, "We are continuing to study COVID-19 in front-line [health care workers](#) across the country to better understand what may be done to decrease their risk of infection, such as using specific types of personal protective equipment."

In a separate study, the IVY investigators studied 350 patients across 11 medical centers in the U.S. who tested positive for COVID-19; 54% of these patients reported no close contact with another person known to have COVID-19 in the two weeks before getting sick.

"With over half of COVID-19 patients not identifying a clear source of their infection, this study reinforces the need for practical measures to reduce the spread of the virus, such as social distancing and the use of face coverings when out in public," Self said.

Additionally, 40% of COVID-19 patients in the study remained symptomatic two weeks after a positive COVID-19 test, showing that patients with COVID-19 tend to remain ill longer than with other respiratory infections, such as influenza. The results were published by the journal *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report* on June 30.

The IVY Network is a collaborative research group of multiple medical centers in the U.S led by Vanderbilt University Medical Center. It is funded by Centers of Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to conduct research on severe respiratory infections, including COVID-19 and influenza.

More information: William B Stubblefield et al, Seroprevalence of SARS-CoV-2 Among Frontline Healthcare Personnel During the First Month of Caring for COVID-19 Patients—Nashville, Tennessee, *Clinical Infectious Diseases* (2020). [DOI: 10.1093/cid/ciaa936](https://doi.org/10.1093/cid/ciaa936)

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