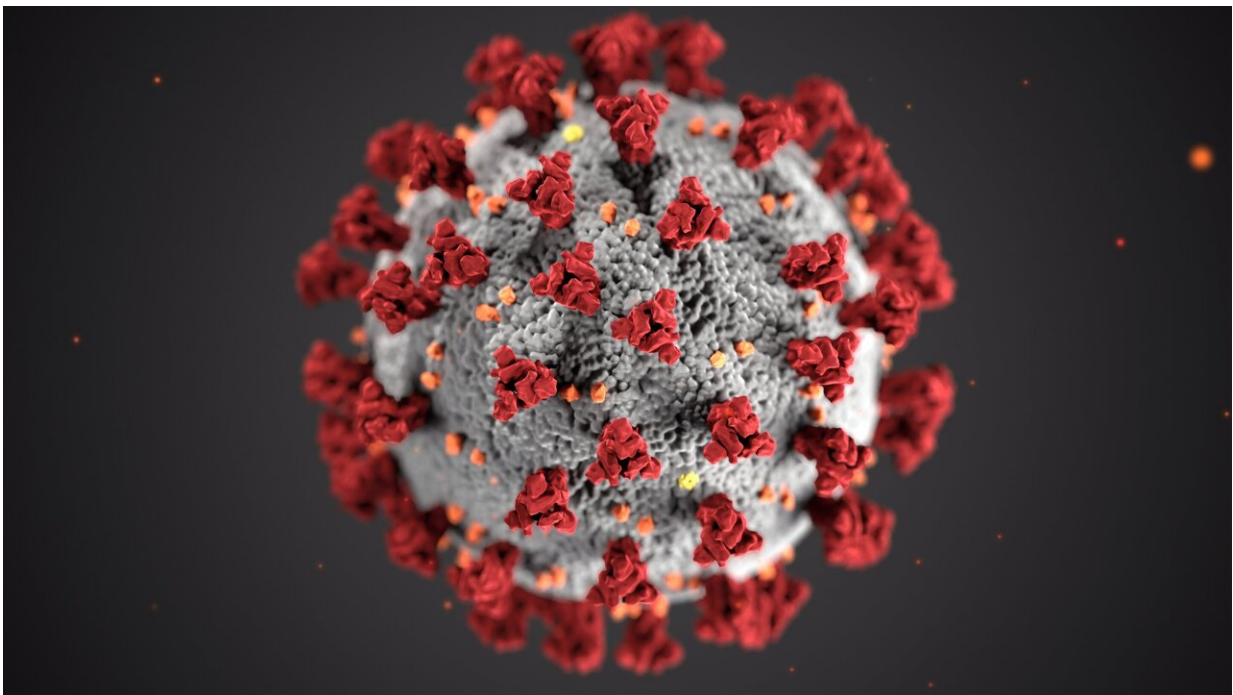


# Researchers call for loss of smell to be recognized globally as a symptom of COVID-19

October 1 2020

---



Credit: Unsplash/CC0 Public Domain

Four out of five people experiencing the recent loss of smell and/or taste tested positive for COVID-19 antibodies—and of those who tested positive, 40 percent did not have cough or fever, reports a new study in *PLOS Medicine* by Prof. Rachel Batterham at University College London

and colleagues.

COVID-19 can cause loss of taste and [smell](#), but the prevalence of COVID-19 antibodies in people reporting these symptoms is unknown, and the significance of loss of smell and/or taste as a predictor of COVID-19 is not well understood. To estimate the seroprevalence of SARS-CoV-2 antibodies in people with acute loss of their sense of smell and/or taste, researchers enrolled 590 people self-reporting a loss of taste/smell in the previous month. Following verification of symptoms via a telemedicine consultation, 567 participants with smell and/or taste loss participants underwent a SARS-CoV-2 antibodies test.

78% had SARS-CoV-2 antibodies, and participants with loss of smell were almost 3 times more likely to have SARS-CoV-2 antibodies compared to those with loss of taste, suggesting that a loss of smell is a highly specific [symptom](#) of COVID-19. Of the 78% of participants testing positive for antibodies, 40% had neither cough nor fever. While the study had limitations, such as the self-reporting of smell/taste changes and the lack of a control group, the researchers believe the evidence indicates that loss of smell should be taken into greater consideration in COVID-19 public health measures such as testing, case isolation, and treatment strategies.

These findings also have significant implications for policy makers globally, as most countries do not recommend self-isolation and testing based on acute loss of smell/taste. This study suggests that an over-reliance on cough and fever as the main symptoms of COVID-19 may be flawed and that loss of smell needs to be urgently recognized globally as a key symptom of COVID-19.

Prof. Rachel Batterham, who led the study, said "Early self-recognition of COVID-19 symptoms by the members of the public, together with rapid self-isolation and PCR testing are vital in order to limit spread of

the disease. Currently, most countries around the world do not recognize sudden loss of smell as a symptom of COVID-19.

78% of participants in our community-based study with sudden onset loss of smell or [taste](#) had SARS-CoV-2 [antibodies](#). The vast majority had mild symptoms and 40% did not report having a fever or cough. Our findings suggest that people who notice a loss in their ability to smell every day house-hold odors such as garlic, coffee and perfumes should self-isolate and seek PCR testing. Loss of sense of smell needs to be recognized globally by [policy makers](#) as a key symptom of COVID-19."

**More information:** Makaronidis J, Mok J, Balogun N, Magee CG, Omar RZ, Carnemolla A, et al. (2020) Seroprevalence of SARS-CoV-2 antibodies in people with an acute loss in their sense of smell and/or taste in a community-based population in London, UK: An observational cohort study. *PLoS Med* 17(10): e1003358.  
[doi.org/10.1371/journal.pmed.1003358](https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pmed.1003358)

Provided by Public Library of Science

Citation: Researchers call for loss of smell to be recognized globally as a symptom of COVID-19 (2020, October 1) retrieved 29 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2020-10-loss-globally-symptom-covid-.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.