

SYNOPSIS

04/23/2020

Review of “Alterations in smell or taste in mildly symptomatic outpatients with SARS-CoV-2 infection”

Article citation: Spinato G, Fabbris C, Polesel J, Cazzador D, Borsetto D, Hopkins C, et al. Alterations in smell or taste in mildly symptomatic outpatients with SARS-CoV-2 infection. JAMA. 2020 Apr 22 [Epub ahead of print]. Available from: <https://doi.org/10.1001/jama.2020.6771>

One-Minute Summary

- This study examined the prevalence, onset and intensity of **altered sense of smell or taste** in patients with coronavirus disease (COVID-19) seen at a single hospital in Treviso, Italy.
- Patient profile (**n=202**): **median age = 56 years** (interquartile range [IQR]: 45-67); **105 (52.0%) were female**; 139 (68.8%) never smoked; 122 (60.4%) reported current alcohol drinking; 113 (55.9%) had ≥ 1 comorbidity.
- **Altered sense of smell or taste (n=202):**
 - **Reported by 130 patients** (64.4%), in whom 45 (34.6%) reported a blocked nose and 6 (3.0%) reported no other symptoms.
 - **More common in women** (72.4%) compared to men (55.7%) ($P=0.02$).
 - **Occurred before** (11.9%), **at same time as** (22.8%) and **after** (26.7%) other symptoms.
 - **Median score** for the **Sino-nasal Outcome Test 22 (SNOT-22)**—a relative severity index for smell or taste loss—was 4 (IQR: 3-5), implying severe symptoms.

Additional Information

- The study included adult (≥ 18 years) patients consecutively examined at the Treviso Regional Hospital from March 19 to 22, 2020. Patients were confirmed as COVID-19 cases by RT-PCR on nasopharyngeal and throat swabs. All patients had mild disease that could be managed at home.
- Five to six days after initial examination, the authors contacted patients by telephone to enquire of any sudden onset of altered smell or taste in the 14 days prior to the swab test. The SNOT-22 was administered by which patients **graded their alteration of sense of smell or taste as none (0), very mild (1), mild or slight (2), moderate (3), severe (4), or as bad as it can be (5)**.
- The most commonly reported clinical signs and symptoms of patients ($n=202$) included **feeling tired** (68.3%), **cough** (60.4%), **fever** (55.9%) and **loss of appetite** (54.5%).
- **Limitations** to the study include: self-reported data, relatively small sample size, limited geographic distribution, severe disease excluded, unknown disease progression beyond 6 days post sample testing, difficulty in quantifying smell and taste using SNOT-22.
- The authors suggest testing and self-isolating those with new onset of altered sense of smell or taste during the COVID-19 pandemic.

PHO Reviewer’s Comments

- The authors do not comment on the prevalence of altered sense of smell and taste in those infected with other respiratory pathogens or in those with allergies.

Citation

Ontario Agency for Health Protection and Promotion (Public Health Ontario). Review of “Alterations in smell or taste in mildly symptomatic outpatients with SARS-CoV-2 infection”. Toronto, ON: Queen’s Printer for Ontario; 2020.

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