

Testing for Novel Covid-19 antibodies: a necessary adjunct

Marco Daverio¹, Angela Amigoni¹, Maria Elena Cavicchiolo²

¹Pediatric Intensive Care Unit, Department of Woman's and Child's Health, University Hospital of Padova, Italy

²Neonatal Intensive Care Unit, Department of Woman's and Child's Health, University Hospital of Padova, Italy

Corresponding author:

Dr. Marco Daverio, Department of Woman's and Child's Health, Pediatric Intensive Care Unit, University Hospital of Padova, Italy.

phone: +393401850391; email: marco.daverio.va@gmail.com

We read with interest the article of Cowling and Aiello about the use of proactive Public Health measures in order to partially reduce the speed of the novel coronavirus SARS CoV 2 spread all over the world.(1) The size of this pandemic and the exorbitant increase in number of patients seems to have become unstoppable. More than 200 countries are now involved in this emergency, about 1.3 million of people tested positive and more than 70,000 patients have died as of April 5th, 2020. (2)

It seems now clear that the implementation of such measures has, unfortunately, not been sufficient to contain the outbreak considering that these dramatic numbers developed only a few months from the first case in Wuhan, China. (3)

This new endemic disease has proven itself not only a worldwide clinical disaster, but also an economic disaster. It caused the lockdown of economic activities and the collapse of the world-wide markets. (4)

Furthermore, the numbers of individuals infected are difficult to estimate, due to the presence of both SARS CoV 2-positive asymptomatic individuals and symptomatic, self-isolating people, who did not obtain nasal swabs. Many experts estimate that the real number of SARS CoV 2-positive individuals is underreported by up to ten folds. (5,6)

The problem of asymptomatic individuals spreading SARS CoV 2 is critical. Knowing the number of truly infected people is important not only for epidemiological reasons but also in order to restart the world economy, that would otherwise be blocked until an uncertain date in the future.

The most feasible solution in order to know the number of people who have actually been infected lies in the possibility of carrying out large scale serosurveys , evaluating antibody titers in individuals who have not been assessed through nasopharyngeal swab viral RNA testing, particularly in heavily infected areas.

It may seem a waste of resources but knowing people's serological status regarding SARS CoV 2 could allow previously infected people to return to work and restart the world economy before the entire pandemic is over. The revenues obtained from a recovery of the economic system would by far exceed the expenses needed to support the "antibody search" policy.

We therefore suggest, in association with all the public preventive measures that are necessary, performing target testing for SARS CoV 2 antibodies in particular subpopulations, e.g. the young and healthy people who can actively work. This strategy could accurately reveal the number of previously infected individuals who could return to work. In this way the economy could be relaunched while minimizing the risk of worsening the epidemic.

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