

COVID-19: Waiting for the Vaccine. What Needs to be Done

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ABSTRACT

An increase of confirmed asymptomatic COVID-19 patients emerges from the second phase of the COVID-19 pandemic. Waiting for the vaccine, the employment of large-scale testing to identify and isolate asymptomatic individuals is the only solution to contain and control the spread of the disease.

Keywords: Coronavirus-19 disease (COVID-19); SARS-CoV2; Vaccine

SHORT COMMUNICATION

Asymptomatic patients play a crucial role in the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. The percentages of asymptomatic patients with COVID-19 infection range from 40%-45% [1]. They can transmit the virus to others for a prolonged period, perhaps longer than 14 days, and may develop the disease [2].

A World Health Organization (WHO) report based on COVID-19 in China, states that “the proportion of truly asymptomatic infections is unclear but appears to be relatively rare and does not appear to be a major driver of transmission”[3]. Discrepancies emerge from the data of the second phase of the COVID-19 pandemic in Italy with respect to the literature data and WHO report: first, an increase in asymptomatic patients, with significantly higher rates than both symptomatic patients and COVID-19 infections reported and secondly, asymptomatic patients are an important source of transmission of the disease [4].

In the light of the increased and high risk of silent spread by asymptomatic subjects, it is absolutely essential to identify as early as possible the highest number of asymptomatic individuals who are an important source of the disease, in order to block the spread of the virus.

Current virus containment policies have not been sufficient to limit the spread of the disease. Based on the South Korean and Vo' Euganeo experience, the employment of large-scale testing to identify and isolate asymptomatic cases that can unintentionally transmit the virus is the only strategy to contain the spread of infection [2,5].

The main limitation of the above strategy is the cost for the high number of swabs or molecular tests to be subsequently performed. However, these high costs would be significantly lower, when measured in terms of lives saved and reduction of intensive care units admissions. Psychological, social and economic problems deriving from lockdown period could be avoided.

To conclude, waiting for the vaccine, the employment of a program for large-scale testing of the entire population is the only imperative measure to identify asymptomatic COVID-19 patients in order to control the spread of the virus and the pandemic.

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