



Press release from ENT UK and British Rhinological Society

Lost sense of smell as marker of COVID-19 infection

There has been a rapidly growing number of reports of a significant increase in patients with COVID-19 infection presenting with loss of smell in the absence of other symptoms. Evidence from South Korea, China and Italy suggests that significant numbers of patients with COVID-19 have developed anosmia/hyposmia. In Germany, it is reported that more than two thirds of cases have anosmia. In South Korea, where testing has been more widespread, 30% of patients testing positive have had anosmia as their major presenting symptom in otherwise mild cases.

Iran has reported an increase in cases of isolated anosmia, and many colleagues from the US, France and Northern Italy have had the same experience. Professor Claire Hopkins reports personally seeing four patients this week who were asymptomatic except for the recent onset of anosmia; usually no more than about one are seen per month. These patients may be some of the hitherto hidden carriers that have facilitated the rapid spread of COVID-19. Unfortunately, they do not meet current criteria for testing or self-isolation.

If anosmia was added to the current symptom criteria used to trigger quarantine, and any adult with anosmia but no other symptoms was asked to self-isolate for seven days, we might potentially be able to reduce the number of otherwise asymptomatic individuals who continue to act as vectors, not realising the need to self-isolate. It would also be an important trigger for healthcare personnel to employ full PPE and help to counter the higher rates of infection found among ENT surgeons compared to other healthcare workers.

Yours sincerely,

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