

# Sniffing out an unusually common phenomenon in COVID-19 patients

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Credit: Petr Kratochvil/public domain

Of all the COVID-19 symptoms Benjamin Abella sees in the emergency room, the loss of smell or taste is the strangest—but not because it's caused by the virus. Other viruses are known to have the same effect.

Rather, it's because so many patients experience it and in different ways.

"We treat people afflicted by flu, cold viruses, by all sorts of viruses in the ER. And most of them do not do this," says Abella, a professor of emergency medicine at the Perelman School of Medicine. "I think it's one more example of how this virus really forces us to reexamine what we know about viruses and how they operate."

Over the last two months, anecdotal evidence, case reports, and patient testimonials have documented the smell and [taste dysfunction](#), prompting the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to recently add it to its official list of COVID-19 symptoms](#), along with five other new ones.

The emergency department staff at Penn has increasingly started to ask [patients](#) about it when they're under their care. Though it appears commonly among patients, Abella has observed that the degree of loss and the length of time it persists varies. Many notice it early on before other symptoms manifest. Some experience the loss more intensely. For others, their senses don't fully bounce back until after they've recovered.

"We find it very challenging that this virus has such a range. Some people have no symptoms, while some die within in a day or two," Abella says. "This [loss of smell](#) and taste is another way it disobeys the rules of the viruses we do know."

The search for answers continues.

Provided by University of Pennsylvania

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