

COVID-19: Reduced sense of taste and smell lingers

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Patients with mild COVID-19 infections experience a significantly increased longer lasting reduced sense of taste and smell. This is also the case for long-term shortness of breath, although relatively few people are affected. And women and the elderly are particularly affected. This is shown by new research findings from Aarhus University Aarhus University Hospital and Regional Hospital West Jutland

The last 14 months have taught us that there are different symptoms and outcomes of COVID-19. However, the vast majority of people who fall ill with COVID-19 experience mild symptoms and get over the disease in two to three weeks.

These are precisely some of the people who have been the subject of a new study from AUH, HEV and AU. In the study, researchers have compared symptoms on a daily basis for up to 90 days in 210 healthcare workers who had tested positive and 630 with a negative [test](#).

Each day, the participants received a link to a questionnaire on whether they had experienced

one of the following symptoms within the last 24 hours: coughing, [sore throat](#), headaches, fever, muscle pain, shortness of breath and reduced sense of taste and smell.

"We saw that the prevalence of a longer lasting reduced taste and smell is significantly increased in patients with mild COVID-19 disease who did not require hospitalization. This pattern is also seen for shortness of breath, but far fewer people were affected," says Henrik Kolstad, who is behind the study.

Women and the elderly experience more symptoms

Thirty percent of those who had tested positive and almost none of the participants with a negative test reported a reduced sense of taste and smell over the full ninety days. At the beginning of the project, shortness of breath was reported by twenty percent of those who had tested positive, with the figure falling to five percent after thirty days, though without ever reaching the level of the participants who had tested negative.

Coughing, sore throat, headaches, muscle pain and fever were more common among those who tested positive than those who tested negative in the first few days, but after thirty days no increases were seen.

Woman with a positive test reported more symptoms compared to women with a negative test than was the case for men with a positive test when compared to men with a negative test. The same was true for older and younger participants. According to the researcher, this could indicate that women and the elderly are more susceptible to developing long-term COVID-19 symptoms.

"This study provides detailed knowledge of which [symptom](#) pathways you can expect after having tested positive for COVID-19 without requiring

hospitalization," says Kolstad.

More information: Kent J. Nielsen et al, Day-by-day symptoms following positive and negative PCR tests for SARS-CoV-2 in non-hospitalized healthcare workers: A 90-day follow-up study, *International Journal of Infectious Diseases* (2021).
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