

Dr. Delgado COVID-19 Update 08-28-20

Moving the Goalposts?

The science is clear. Asymptomatic people can and do spread the virus.

In a rather abrupt and unforeseen switch, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) changed its COVID-19 testing guidance this week to state that being exposed to a person with the disease doesn't necessarily warrant a test if you're not in a high-risk group or showing any symptoms.

But current evidence on COVID-19 transmission has not changed: The virus continues to infect many people who don't end up developing any symptoms, and who can silently spread the disease to others.

Previously, the CDC recommended that all close contacts of people with confirmed Covid-19 needed to be tested. Their specific guidance read as follows, "Because of the potential for asymptomatic and pre-symptomatic transmission, it is important that contacts of individuals with SARS-CoV-2 infection be quickly identified, tested

and quarantined.”

It's not clear what percentage of COVID-19 cases are asymptomatic; many estimates say around 15 to 20%, but the CDC's current best estimate is that it is likely closer to 40%.

These testing recommendations make absolutely no scientific sense and are simply incongruent with the data unless there are contingency plans to demand isolation of all known contacts of COVID-19 in lieu of testing.

If each of these people post-exposure go about their daily lives, this pandemic will continue to dramatically impact our country and daily lives for the foreseeable future, regardless of the advent of any vaccine.

With schools and universities opening across the country, especially in hot spots, testing of asymptomatic people becomes even more imperative, not less. Anyone who has been or may have been near someone with COVID-19 should be able to access a test — and those tests need to be reported within 48 hours to inform infected people and their known contacts.

****Update****

The CDC director walked back the new testing guidelines addressed above just one day after the announcement due to the overwhelming backlash from the medical and scientific communities. The CDC website remains unchanged and hopefully will be updated accordingly.

I unequivocally advocate for continued testing if any known exposures occur in coordination with immediate self quarantine. The best option remains minimizing any and all exposure by continued use of facial masks, social distancing and proper hand hygiene.

Update on Testing

Abbott Labs got emergency approval from the US Food and Drug Administration for its rapid antigen test, which can detect a Covid-19 infection in about 15 minutes.

The self administered nasal swab, similar to a rapid flu

test, will allow for a rapid expansion of testing volume and availability and provide results in real time which could prove to be a game changer. This should mitigate the supply chain problems that have beset the current PCR testing methods. Abbott anticipates producing 50 million tests monthly by October.

The testing will come with an antigen card and a free mobile app that will let people who test negative display a temporary, date-stamped health pass that is renewed each time a new test is taken.

Waning Immunity

Three recent cases have confirmed what was always suspected — potential immunity is finite and reinfection is a reality.

Previously, any tests in which PCR positivity recurred after a presumed, resolved clinical course of Covid-19 was felt to be of concern. It now appears that continued positive results with repeat testing are likely just picking up tiny fragments of the viral genetic code that cannot lead to reinfection and does not reflect the actual intact viral pathogen itself and continued risk of transmission.

These new cases are different as they represent clear reinfection. In the first documented instance, a man recently returning to Hong Kong after a month in Spain had contracted the coronavirus in March with clear symptoms that necessitated 2 weeks of hospitalization. He subsequently recovered and tested negative.

Because the virus gradually mutates as it spreads around the world, different strains have very unique fingerprints. When the researchers compared the two genetic sequences that infected him they found differences in 24 positions. This confirmed that his new positive test was due to a new exposure and second infection. The discovery that antibody immunity wears off could change the math on the pandemic in profound ways. It is known that the four common coronaviruses, which cause colds, may reinfect people sometimes within months. That, along with the data detailing that antibodies to the new virus fades with time, now leads us to believe that immunity to Covid-19 will likely follow a similar pattern.

This makes achieving herd immunity much less likely due to people constantly losing the immunity, perhaps after

several months. That doesn't mean the virus will remain the danger it is today. Subsequent reinfections are likely to cause fewer symptoms and have better outcomes moving forward.

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