



## Asymptomatic Transmission (AT)

February 16, 2021

### Bottomline

- Asymptomatic transmission has never been the driver of outbreaks in respiratory disease.
- Current studies and contact tracing show that AT is not a driver of the current Covid outbreaks.
- Any study we found claiming to show AT spread was based not on data or contact tracing but on modeling / statistical analysis (no enrollment of human subjects), inference (50% of positives are AT so AT must be responsible for 50% of spread) or theoretical assumptions (“our belief is”).

### Asymptomatic Transmission (AT)

This is a big concern and the major reason for the use of masks. If asymptomatic people are not transmitting the disease then there is no need for masks, lockdowns or restrictions of healthy people.

In the past AT has not been the driver of any respiratory disease. In fact, in a January 28, 2020 [press conference](#), Dr. Anthony Fauci said, “In all the history of respiratory-borne viruses of any type, **asymptomatic transmission has never been the driver of outbreaks**. The driver of outbreaks is always a symptomatic person. Even if there’s a rare asymptomatic person that might transmit, an epidemic is not driven by asymptomatic carriers.”

Adding to that in a June 8, 2020 press conference Dr Maria Van Kerkhove, the head of the WHO’s Emerging Diseases, stated “from the data we have, it still seems to **be rare that an asymptomatic person actually transmits** onward to a secondary individual.” She further noted that “Countries doing very detailed contact tracing ...[are]...following asymptomatic cases and following contacts and **they’re not finding secondary transmission onwards**. It’s very rare. Much of that is not published in the literature. She then repeated the words “It’s very rare,” but despite her word choice of “rare,” Van Kerkhove could not point to a single case of asymptomatic transmission, noting that numerous reports “were not finding secondary transmission onward.” [Video](#) – start at 1:30 in.

### Why are some claiming that AT is the major driver of Covid spread?

The existence of transmission of SARS-CoV-2 from asymptomatic individuals has become an accepted truth among media and politicians but the evidence for this phenomenon being anything other than mistaken interpretation of false positive test results is weak. Examination of the underlying data from the most frequently-cited meta-analyses reveals that the conclusions are based on a surprisingly small number of cases (six in total globally) and, moreover, the possibility that they are all coincidental contacts with false positive results cannot be ruled out.

Additionally, several prominent papers have made claims of asymptomatic transmission simply because they had found asymptomatic individuals who had tested positive during an outbreak. However, this does not mean that they transmitted the disease just that they tested positive and had no symptoms (see our report on testing and false positives to explain the large number of AT cases). Asymptomatic transmission can only be proven by clear evidence that a patient has been infected by SARS-CoV-2 from a person who was asymptomatic. Finding positive test results in asymptomatic individuals is not evidence of transmission.

Note - It’s unclear to what extent people with no symptoms actually have the SARS-CoV-2. The only test for live virus is viral culture. PCR and lateral flow tests do not distinguish live virus. No test of infection or infectiousness is currently available for routine use. This means a person who tests positive with a current test (PCR, etc) may or may not have an active infection with live virus, and may or may not be infectious.

### What have studies of AT shown?

- A November of 2020 city-wide prevalence [study](#) of almost 10 million people in Wuhan found no evidence of asymptomatic transmission. The study notes that there **were no positive tests** amongst 1,174 close contacts of asymptomatic cases. It also notes that only 0.31% (107 of 34,424) previously recovered COVID-19 patients tested positive again.



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- A [study](#) in August 2020 CDC report shows a 16.2% transmission rate in households with symptomatic case-patients and a **0% transmission rate of household members of asymptomatic case-patients** (none had COVID-19 symptoms nor tested positive after 14 days of quarantine).
- In a December 14, 2020 [study](#) four researchers from the University of Florida Department of Biostatistics performed a meta-analysis of 54 studies looking at the household secondary attack rate of SARS-CoV-2. The researchers confirmed an 18% (1/5) secondary infection rate (passed it on to a member of the household for symptomatic cases and a **.0.7% rate for asymptomatic and presymptomatic cases**. They noted that the asymptomatic/presymptomatic rate is not statistically different from zero.
- In a May 13, 2020 [study](#) the authors traced 455 contacts of an AT patient. They analyzed epidemiological and clinical data from all 455 contacts who had been exposed to the asymptomatic patient (35 other patients, 196 family members and 224 hospital staff). The paper states “All CT images showed no sign of COVID-19 infection. **No severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2) infections was detected in 455 contacts by nucleic acid test!**”

### What other comments have been made?

Every study that we read claiming to show AT – is based on modeling or statistics. For example, in this January 7, 2021 [study](#) the authors claim that asymptomatic individuals are estimated to account for more than half of all transmission. However, the authors state that their study involved no enrollment of human subjects, and that they used a simple model to assess the proportion of transmission from presymptomatic (ie, infectious before symptom onset), never symptomatic, and symptomatic individuals across a range of scenarios in which they varied the timing of the infectious period to assess different contributions of presymptomatic transmission and the proportion of transmission from individuals who never develop symptoms (ie, remain asymptomatic). So their results are based on their model and use no actual real world data.

Additionally, several other groups have reviewed AT studies and reached similar conclusions. One such study noted, “across the studies we reviewed, a total of seven instances suggestive of asymptomatic transmission were identified, these being:

- In Italy, two asymptomatic cases allegedly passing the virus onto two others.
- In Brunei, two asymptomatic cases allegedly passing the virus onto three others.
- In China, two asymptomatic cases allegedly passing the virus onto two others.

The two Chinese papers each only claimed a single patient had contracted COVID-19 from an asymptomatic person. Luo *et al.* studied 4950 people up until March 6th 2020 who were quarantined in Guangzhou. They had up to 6 PCR tests each with a mean of 2.4. From all this testing they only claim to have found eight asymptomatic individuals. They report on a single asymptomatic individual spreading SARS-CoV-2 but do not make it clear whether they were pre-symptomatic nor what symptoms the secondary case had. Nevertheless this has been interpreted as evidence of asymptomatic spread.



**Please let us know what else we can do for you.**

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