

DX: Public health monitoring, reporting and foresight

A snapshot of Malta's Covid-19 acute and post-acute symptoms

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Background:

The end of the year 2019 saw the emergence of a novel coronavirus (Covid-19) with patients presenting with severe pneumonia in China. Infected individuals with Covid-19 were noted to present with different symptoms, if at all. Some remained with symptoms even after testing negative for Covid-

19. The aim was to explore for the most common acute and post-acute Covid-19 symptoms among adult residents in Malta.

Methods:

Using Google forms, an anonymous survey was distributed on social media (1st to 26th February 2021) targeting the adult residents of Malta. The survey assessed for previous/current Covid-19 infection and for acute and post-acute (>4 weeks after negative test) symptoms. Quantitative and qualitative analyses were performed.

Results:

Out of the 1,034 participants, 6.38% (CI95%: 5.04-8.95) reported to have been positive for Covid-19, with a female

predominance (71.21% CI95%:59.30-80.79; $p < 0.01$). Various combination of symptoms was reported. However, asymptomatic (13.64% CI95%: 7.12-24.15) dominated followed by the combination of fever, cough, headaches, fatigue, loss of taste and smell, aches and pains, and diarrhoea (10.61% CI95%:4.94-17.60). Although the majority did not report post-acute symptoms, a proportion reported the continuation of aches and pains with fatigue or the loss of taste and smell (6.06% CI95%:1.94-14.01; respectively).

Conclusions:

Although small case numbers were evaluated in this study, it is clear that Covid-19 is affecting a proportion of the population. Asymptomatic Covid-19 is common, enforcing the fact that infectivity rate is higher than reported. However, multi symptomatic representation is also common, possibility requiring medical attention. Within this cohort, post-acute symptoms did not appear to be dominating. Health system resilience is essential to continue caring for both acute Covid-19 and other conditions including long Covid-19 patients.

Key messages:

- Covid-19 community spread is higher than reported due to a substantial proportion of asymptomatic individuals.
- Preventive mitigation measures should continue to be encouraged as well as strengthening health systems to care for acute and long Covid-19 along with other co-existing conditions.