

PRESS UPDATE



Global survey supports link between COVID-19 and loss of smell and taste

Stockbridge, Hampshire UK. — The founder of Hampshire-based charity [AbScent](#) has co-authored a huge crowdsourced survey of COVID-19 patients from around the world, to provide important new evidence linking smell and taste changes to COVID-19.

The loss of smell, taste and chemesthesis — or sensitivity to chemicals such as those in chili peppers — are providing important clues to the understanding of the novel Coronavirus. The findings, made by the [Global Consortium for Chemosensory Research \(GCCR\)](#) may have implications for recognising new cases of the disease, especially where none of the other recognised symptoms are present.

Based on entries from 4,039 participants representing more than 40 countries, the initial findings reveal that smell, taste and chemesthesis are significantly reduced in patients diagnosed with COVID-19. Importantly, nasal blockage does not appear to be associated with these losses, suggesting that they may be an important way to distinguish COVID-19 infection from other viral infections, such as cold or flu.

Chrissi Kelly, co-author of the study and Founder of AbScent.org said:

“The findings of this study show that COVID-19 has an effect on chemosensory function and that disruption of the three pathways of olfaction, gustation and chemesthesis should be considered an indicator of COVID-19. The results should give doctors more confidence in recommending self-distancing measures for patients who report sudden smell loss.”

Researchers in the Global Consortium for Chemosensory Research launched the survey on April 7 and queried the database 11 days later, on April 18, for the purpose of reporting initial results. The findings have appeared in [MedRxiv](#) pending peer-reviewed publication.

The researchers distributed the questionnaire globally in 10 languages — English, French, German, Italian, Japanese, Kannada, Norwegian, Spanish, Swedish and Turkish — although, as of May 7, it is now deployed in 29 languages. Responses were crowdsourced through traditional print, television and radio media; social media; flyers; professional networks; and word of mouth.

The survey measures self-reported smell and taste in participants who were diagnosed with either an objective test, such as a swab test, or as the result of clinical observations by a medical professional within the two weeks prior to completing the questionnaire.

Participants were asked to quantify their smell and taste, as well as their chemesthetic function — their ability to smell, taste and perceive cooling, tingling and burning sensations — before and during the illness. They were also asked to quantify any nasal blockages.

“Looking at the results, we noticed the kinds of changes to smell and taste that members of our patient group have been discussing for the last 2 months.” said Kelly. ***“It is satisfying to know that we are one step closer to learning more about the needs of the patients in the AbScent support group”***

The GCCR project is distinct from prior studies on sensory loss and COVID-19 in that it leverages a massive crowd-sourced, multinational approach and does so within a collaborative open-science framework.

Authors on the paper include: John Hayes, PhD, Penn State, USA; Thomas Hummel, MD, Technische Universität Dresden, Germany; Chrissi Kelly, Founder, AbScent.org, UK; Steve Munger, PhD, University of Florida, USA; Masha Niv, PhD, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Israel; Kathrin Ohla, PhD, Research Center Jülich, Germany; Valentina Parma, PhD, Temple University, USA (Chair of the GCCR); Danielle Reed, PhD, Monell Chemical Senses Center, USA; Maria Veldhuizen, PhD, Mersin University, Turkey

Link to the GCCR international survey:
<https://gcchemosensr.org/>

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Notes to editors:

- [AbScent](#) is a UK registered charity No. 1183468 started in 2018 to help people who are experiencing the distressing effects of smell loss.
- The full article for this research will follow the pre-print when peer-reviewed.
- Logos and photos can be downloaded at <https://abscent.org/resources/press-information>
- For more information on the latest available research into smell loss visit: <https://abscent.org/learn-us/latest-research-research>

- AbScent's vision is a world where smell loss is recognised by the general population as a challenging condition, where patients are fully supported by the medical community and their care circles, and where healing strategies are explored, funded and made available to the world-wide population.
- The effects of smell loss can be complex and therefore support is necessary from several areas to suit the biopsychosocial needs of the community.
- [Smell Training](#) is a supportive technique for people who have suffered smell loss and has been demonstrated in over a dozen scientific studies to be of benefit for people who have lost their sense of smell after a virus or injury.
- [Smell training](#) is not a cure, but a way of amplifying natural recovery. Every time it is done it stimulates the olfactory nerves and this encourages the nerve to regenerate. It can be likened to physiotherapy for the nose.
- AbScent consists of Founder Chrissi Kelly, Trustees Miriam Block and ENT Simon Gane of the Royal National Throat, Nose and Ear Hospital in London, and an advisory board detailed on the website.

www.abscent.org