

## **Loss of taste and smell is an important symptom for COVID-19**

The latest analysis of data from the COVID Symptom Tracker app suggests a loss of sense of taste and smell may be the best way to tell whether someone has COVID-19.

The app, which was developed by a King's College London team in association with the Guy's and St Thomas' NHS Foundation Trust, NIHR Biomedical Research Centre and a healthcare start-up ZOE Global LTD, asks users to log their symptoms (or lack thereof) daily. By the end of March, 1.8 million users in the UK had signed up to log their symptoms daily.

The most common symptoms of COVID-19 are dry cough, tiredness and fever. Some people may develop more severe forms of the disease, such as pneumonia. The best way to confirm if you have the virus producing COVID-19 disease is with a laboratory test. You cannot confirm it with this breathing exercise, which can even be dangerous.

Between 24-29 March, 26% of the 1.5 million app users reported one or more symptoms; 1,702 of this 26% reported having been tested for COVID-19, with 579 positive results and 1,123 negative results.

In addition, 59% of those patients who tested positive for COVID-19 reported a loss of taste and smell, compared with just 18% of those who tested negative for the disease.

Despite not yet being added to the World Health Organization's COVID-19 symptom list, lead researcher Tim Spector said: "When combined with other symptoms, people with loss of smell and taste appear to be three times more likely to have contracted COVID-19 according to our data, and should, therefore, self-isolate for seven days to reduce the spread of the disease."

### **4. The jury is out on whether coronavirus is airborne or not**

As COVID-19 has spread across the globe, researchers have been trying to figure out exactly how it is transmitted between people. The World Health Organization says that the virus is transmitted through droplets that are sneezed or coughed out, much in the same way that the common cold is spread, with current public advice reflecting that.

However, some researchers argue that there is preliminary evidence that the virus spreads in particles that are much smaller than droplets known as aerosols, which are less than 5 micrometres in diameter (more than 12 times smaller than the average diameter of a single human hair). They are advising increased ventilation indoors and in confined spaces as a precaution as aerosols can linger in the air for long periods of time and travel further than droplets.

The jury is out on whether COVID-19 is airborne or not, but many researchers agree that gathering conclusive evidence for airborne transmission could take years. In the meantime, increasing ventilation and wearing masks (with priority going to healthcare workers, those with symptoms and vulnerable populations) could be beneficial.