

- Virus

Early quarantine, testing suggested for loss of taste, smell

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THE EDITOR-IN-CHIEF OF THE LANCET AND OTHER EXPERTS SAID HEALTH CARE WORKERS WITH LOSS OF SMELL OR TASTE SHOULD SELF-ISOLATE BECAUSE IT IS AN EARLY SIGN OF THE DISEASE

NEW DELHI: A leading UK-based scientific journal's editor-in-chief has urged front line health workers to see a sudden loss of smell and taste as early symptoms of mild coronavirus disease (Covid-19) and to get quarantined and tested as quickly as possible.

"A proposal, actually a plea, from several doctors on the front line of Covid-19. Those with a loss of smell should be advised to self-isolate and be tested. This simple manoeuvre could save lives," tweeted Dr Richard Horton, editor-in-chief of The Lancet.

"Amnesia, or the loss of smell, and, with it, the altering of the sense of taste, is a well-established symptom of Covid-19, just like dry cough, fever, and difficulty in breathing. There are very few conditions that lead to a sudden loss of smell, so it should be treated as an early sign, especially by people who risk exposure at the front lines (health workers and medical professionals) as well as those who develop it with other Covid-19 symptoms," said Dr Ajay Swaroop, chairman of the department of Ear, Nose, Throat, Sir Gangaram Hospital, New Delhi.

Health workers are at high risk of infection both from undiagnosed cases and from patients in isolation wards.

Last month, researchers from the University of California (UC) San Diego found Covid-19 patients who, with a loss of smell and taste, had a 10-fold higher risk of being hospitalised compared to those without any symptom.

"Based on our study, if you experience a loss of smell and taste, you are more than 10 times more likely to have contracted the Covid-19 infection than other causes of infection. The most common first sign of a Covid-19 infection remains fever, but fatigue and loss of smell and taste follow as other very common initial symptoms," said Dr Carol Yan, an otolaryngologist, and head and neck surgeon at UC San Diego Health.

The findings were published in the journal International Forum of Allergy & Rhinology on April 12.

The San Diego study found that among those who reported loss of smell and taste, the loss was typically profound, not mild.

The effect was, however, temporary, and both smell and taste were restored within two to four weeks of infection.

"Among the Covid-19 patients with smell loss, more than 70 per cent had reported improvement of smell at the time of the survey and of those who hadn't reported improvement, many had only been diagnosed recently," said Yan.

Covid-19 symptoms include fever, dry cough, tiredness, shortness of breath, or difficulty in breathing.

According to the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, a sudden loss of taste or smell, along with either cough or shortness of breath, should be taken as a sign of the coronavirus disease (Covid-19).