TRENDING: CORONAVIRUS PHARMALOT FIRST OPINION BIOTECH STYLEWE

HEALTH 'We don't actually have that answer yet': WHO clarifies comments on asymptomatic spread of Covid-19

Reprints



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determined yet how frequently people with asymptomatic cases of Covid-19 pass the disease on to others, a day after suggesting that such spread is "very rare."

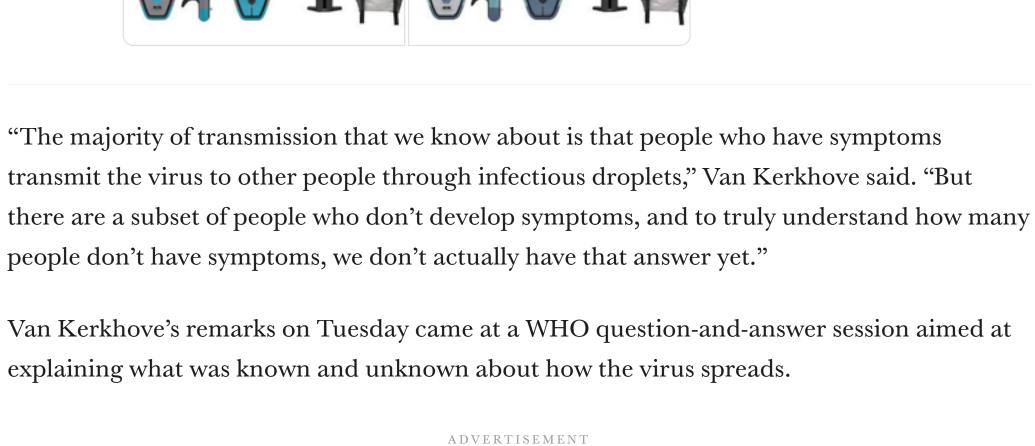
outside public health experts, who suggested the agency had erred, or at least miscommunicated, when it said people who didn't show symptoms were unlikely to spread the virus. Maria Van Kerkhove, the WHO's technical lead on the Covid-19 pandemic, made it very

The clarification comes after the WHO's original comments incited strong pushback from

top World Health Organization official clarified on Tuesday that scientists have not

clear Tuesday that the actual rates of asymptomatic transmission aren't yet known. ADVERTISEMENT $\triangleright \times$

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Some of the confusion boiled down to the details of what an asymptomatic infection actually

is, and the different ways the term is used. While some cases of Covid-19 are fully

asymptomatic, sometimes the word is also used to describe people who haven't started

become infectious before they start feeling sick, during that presymptomatic period.

many have really mild disease." There are some infected people who are "truly

showing symptoms yet, when they are presymptomatic. Research has shown that people

At one of the WHO's thrice-weekly press briefings Monday, Van Kerkhove noted that when

health officials review cases that are initially reported to be asymptomatic, "we find out that

asymptomatic," she said, but countries that are doing detailed contact tracing are "not

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finding secondary transmission onward" from those cases. "It's very rare," she said.

contribution to support our journalism. She added: "We are constantly looking at this data and we're trying to get more information from countries to truly answer this question." To some, it came across as if the WHO was suggesting that people without symptoms weren't driving spread. Some studies, however, have estimated that people without symptoms

(whether truly asymptomatic or presymptomatic) could be responsible for up to half of the

spread, which is why the virus has been so difficult to contain. Isolating people who are sick,

for example, does not prevent the possibility they already passed the virus on to others. Some

"The WHO created confusion yesterday when it reported that asymptomatic patients rarely spread the disease," an email from the Harvard Global Health Institute said Tuesday. "All of

the best evidence suggests that people without symptoms can and do readily spread SARS-

modeling studies have assumed quite widespread asymptomatic transmission.

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CoV-2, the virus that causes Covid-19. In fact, some evidence suggests that people may be most infectious in the days before they become symptomatic — that is, in the presymptomatic phase when they feel well, have no symptoms, but may be shedding substantial amounts of virus." NEWSLETTERS Sign up for Daily Recap

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Their point: People not showing symptoms can spread the virus, whether they ultimately feel sick or not. That's why wearing masks and keeping distance are so important to limiting transmission. Van Kerkhove acknowledged Tuesday that her use of the phrase "very rare" had been a miscommunication. She said she had based that phrasing on findings from a small number

of studies that followed asymptomatic cases and tracked how many of their contacts became

infected. She said she did not mean to imply that "asymptomatic transmission globally" was

Determining which routes of transmission are driving most of the spread of the virus is

and how it spreads, countries have demonstrated that the best tactics to address the

crucial so health experts can develop the right strategies to combat the virus. At the WHO

pandemic include isolating cases, contact tracing, and quarantining contacts — as well as

event Tuesday, officials stressed that even as scientists are still learning more about the virus

happening rarely, because that has not been determined yet.

With those measures, "We won't stop all transmission, but what we do is, we suppress transmission," Mike Ryan, the head of WHO's emergencies program, said Tuesday. Related: Positive Covid-19 tests kept a mom and baby apart for 55 days. Experts see it as a bigger testing problem Other unknowns the WHO experts raised Tuesday include how asymptomatic or

presymptomatic people are spreading the virus if they are not coughing — it could be that

they still expel infectious droplets through singing, yelling, or even talking — as well as the

percentage of all Covid-19 cases that are asymptomatic. One recent paper estimated that 40

to 45% of cases might be asymptomatic, though others have pegged that figure at closer to 20% or even lower. Based on what's been seen so far, asymptomatic people tend to be younger and not have other health issues, Van Kerkhove said Tuesday, though she cautioned she didn't want to

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In addition to the studies about asymptomatic transmission that Van Kerkhove referred to, the WHO has also received data from member countries that "suggests that asymptomatically-infected individuals are much less likely to transmit the virus than those who develop symptoms," according to WHO's interim guidance on masks issued last week. Outside experts have called on the WHO to release that data. Both outside experts and WHO

officials have acknowledged that detecting asymptomatic spread would be really difficult,

and just because scientists haven't seen something occurring often doesn't mean it's not

"Every question we answer, we have 10 more," Van Kerkhove said Tuesday.

andrew.joseph@statnews.com @DrewQJoseph Tags CORONAVIRUS GLOBAL HEALTH PUBLIC HEALTH

Andrew covers a range of topics, from addiction to public health to genetics.

STYLEWE W

Mark S Homan

the disease?

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home.

JUNE 12, 2020 AT 7:43 AM

JUNE 22, 2020 AT 11:46 AM

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Andrew Joseph

General Assignment Reporter

An article (DOI: 10.1056/NEJMoa2008457) published in the NEJM on 30 Apr 2020 discusses both asymptomatic and presymptomatic transmission in a skilled nursing

specimens of asymptomatic and presymptomatic residents."



How long does asymptomatic person have covid 19 virus and therefore able to transmit

Of note, the authors reported that "Ct [cycle threshold] values indicating large

quantities of viral RNA were identified, and viable SARS-CoV-2 isolated from





OLDER COMMENTS »



Reprints

Brad S. JUNE 12, 2020 AT 12:13 AM

of death.

Carl

JUNE 11, 2020 AT 8:28 PM

and yet you are still not sick? Weird isn't it.

possibly get better until that shammy is rung dry.

causing people to believe it's a far greater threat and health risk than it actually is. Additionally, the mortality numbers are inflated, as they include people with terminal illnesses and other serious existing conditions. All such people who test positive and subsequently pass on are reported as COVID mortalities, regardless of the actual cause

Apparently the government and the media don't want us to know the truth about

COVID, because 1) fear controls, and 2) good news doesn't sell; bad news sells.

The more significant issue here is that if someone who's asymptomatic tests positive,

he/she is counted as a confirmed case, yet none of the reporting includes info about

asymptomatic (the rate). The vast majority of people exposed to COVID don't have or

either 1) the number of asymptomatic cases, or 2) the percentage of cases that are

develop symptoms, so the reported number of cases is wildly high and misleading,

Virginia JUNE 12, 2020 AT 12:07 AM

Very. As is all this bobbing and weaving, singing and dancing out the NIAID, the

holding the world hostage is not going to help the situation. And, perhaps most

important to understand, there is a lot of disaster capital to be made, so it can't

WHO and CDC. I get that they "don't know." But freaking everyone out and

Imagine having so much of the virus in you that it's coming out of you when you talk

Comments are closed.

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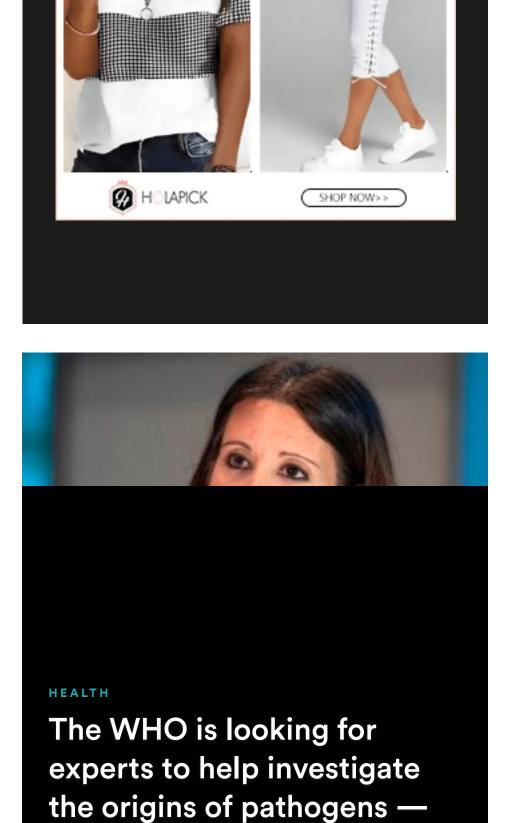
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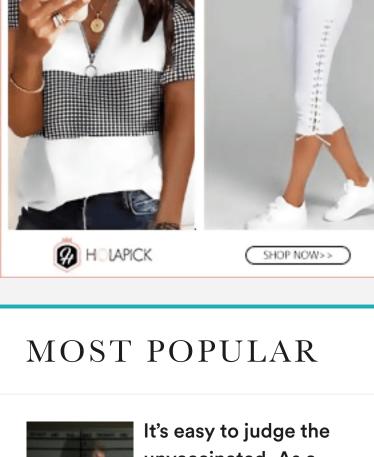
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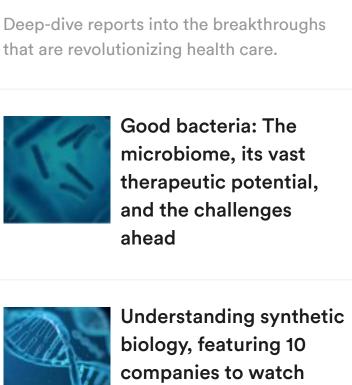
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