

COVID-19 recoverers appear to rapidly lose antibodies, leaving them vulnerable to reinfection within months

Infections caused by coronavirus cousins such as SARS and MERS result in antibodies that remain in the body for nearly a year, according to [The New York Times](#).

[One study], published June 16 on the preprint server [medRxiv](#), screened for antibodies in almost 1,500 coronavirus patients in Wuhan, China. The researchers compared their levels to three other groups: nearly 20,000 members of the general population; more than 1,600 patients hospitalized for reasons other than COVID-19; and more than 3,800 medical workers, whom the authors assumed had “inevitably” been exposed to the virus in its early days, meaning they should have developed antibodies.

They found that while almost 90 percent of COVID-19 patients had antibodies, roughly 1 percent to 5 percent of individuals in the others groups had them as well. The authors conclude in their paper that the remaining 10 percent of infected patients with no detectable antibodies, combined with the lack of antibodies in healthcare workers, suggest that “after SARS-CoV-2 infection, people are unlikely to produce long-lasting protective antibodies against this virus.”

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“These reports highlight the need to develop strong vaccines, because immunity that develops naturally during infection is suboptimal and short-lived in most people,” Akiko Iwasaki, a viral immunologist at Yale University who was not involved in either study, tells The New York Times. “We cannot rely on natural infection to achieve herd immunity.”

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