

Early COVID-19 hotspots like New York City and northern Italy may be edging towards herd immunity

There are reasons to think the novel coronavirus began spreading earlier than previously understood, raising the possibility that herd immunity is closer than we think.

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[The Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai](#) recently performed Covid-19 antibody tests on blood samples taken from New York City patients in February and March. They found 1.4% to 3.2% of emergency-room patients... tested positive for antibodies. Since antibodies can take a few weeks to develop, that suggests some New Yorkers were already infected by early February or even late January.

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Recent studies have also found that many people with mild or no symptoms who test positive for Covid-19 later don't show antibodies when tested. Patients with mild symptoms produce a weaker antibody response than those who get more severely ill... These people, however, have been found to have long-lasting, potent T-cells that can ward off future infection. A small study last month from France found that [six of eight close family contacts](#) of sick patients didn't develop antibodies but did develop Covid-19-specific T-cells.

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In short, antibody tests may significantly underestimate the number of people who have already been infected with Covid-19, especially if they had a milder strain. If so, it's possible that some early hot spots, like New York City and northern Italy, already have a degree of herd immunity. The same may be true of other places soon.

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