

we expect further studies on infection control and prevention in dialysis facilities and on the effectiveness of Lixelle-DHP in treating patients with COVID-19.

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Seroprevalence of SARS-CoV-2-Specific Antibodies, Faroe Islands

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We conducted a nationwide study of the prevalence of severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 infection in the Faroe Islands. Of 1,075 randomly selected participants, 6 (0.6%) tested seropositive for antibodies to the virus. Adjustment for test sensitivity and specificity yielded a 0.7% prevalence. Our findings will help us evaluate our public health response.

The magnitude of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic is unknown because of a relatively large proportion of presumably asymptomatic persons (1–3). Reported infection rates, which mostly rely on PCR-based testing of symptomatic persons, may underestimate underlying infection rates. Analysis of severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2)-specific antibodies is required to

more accurately guide COVID-19 response and calibrate public health efforts.

In the Faroe Islands, a geographic isolate of 52,154 inhabitants, the first COVID-19 case occurred on March 3, 2020. From early in the pandemic, the Faroe Islands adhered to the official recommendations by the World Health Organization of an active suppression strategy with high numbers of testing, contact tracing, and quarantine of infected persons and close contacts (M.F. Kristiansen et al., unpub. data). We aimed to estimate the population prevalence of SARS-CoV-2 infection by serotesting for antibodies in a nationwide sample of randomly selected inhabitants of the Faroe Islands (Appendix, <https://wwwnc.cdc.gov/EID/article/26/11/20-2736-App1.pdf>).

From the Faroese Population Registry, we randomly sampled 1,500 persons and invited them by letter to a clinical visit at 1 of 6 study sites around the islands mainly during week 18 (April 27–May 1, 2020) independently of previous positive PCR test result. To persons unable to attend a testing site, we offered home visits. Nonresponders received a follow-up phone call. We obtained informed consent from all participants; parents signed the consent form for their children <18 years of age. The Faroese Ethical Committee and the Data Protection Agency approved the study.

We conducted SARS-CoV-2-specific antibody (IgG, IgM) analyses on serum samples by using the commercial Wantai SARS-CoV-2 Ab ELISA kit (Beijing Wantai Biologic Pharmacy Enterprise, <http://www.ystwt.cn>), according to the manufacturer's instructions. We estimated the 95% CI for crude prevalence using exact binomial models and for prevalence

adjusted for test performance as reported by the producer (sensitivity [94.4% [95% CI 90.9–96.8]] and specificity [100% [95% CI 98.8–100.0]] using bootstrap methods (4). We used SPSS Statistics 25 (IBM, Inc., <https://www.ibm.com>) for the analysis.

Of 1,500 persons invited to the study, 1,141 (76.1%) provided consent and 1,075 (71.7%) were tested (Figure). Mean age of participants was 42.1 years (SD \pm 23.1, range 0–100 years); 50% were women (Table). The study sample was representative of the entire population (Table) regarding geography, sex, and age; the representativeness of the youngest (0–9 years) participants and participants 60–69 years of age was slightly less. Nonparticipants were more often men and significantly younger than participants (32.6 [SD \pm 26.7] vs. 42.9 years [SD \pm 23.2]; $p < 0.01$), and geographic distribution was comparable ($p = 0.7$).

Six persons (3 women, 3 men) tested positive for SARS-CoV-2-specific antibodies (0.6% [exact binomial 95% CI 0.2%–1.2%]). One of the 6 positive persons had previously confirmed infection by PCR; the others had not been tested, although 2 reported symptoms. After adjustment for test sensitivity and specificity, the prevalence of SARS-CoV-2-specific antibodies was 0.7% (bootstrap 95% CI 0.3%–1.3%).

The crude seroprevalence of SARS-CoV-2 antibodies (0.6% [adjusted 0.7%]) in our randomly selected population-based sample corresponds to 313 SARS-CoV-2-seropositive persons in the population, which is somewhat higher than the number of confirmed infections (187 cases [crude prevalence 0.4%]) in the Faroe Islands on June 6 (5). The number of active COVID-19 cases peaked on March 23 when the prevalence was 196 cases/100,000 persons, and the last locally transmitted case was diagnosed April 22. The low number of undetected cases found in this study supports the effectiveness of the extensive testing regime, contact tracing, and quarantining in mitigating the virus. The exact seroprevalence levels from the few published studies included in a recent meta-analysis are highly region-dependent; levels ranged from 2.8% to 31.5% (J. Levesque, D.W. Maybury, unpub. data, <https://doi.org/10.1101/2020.05.03.20089201>). Contrary to the other studies, the participants in our study sample were unselected and representative of the background population with respect to age, sex, and geographic area, making selection bias an unlikely explanation of our results.

Major strengths of our study include the high participation rate and the representativeness of

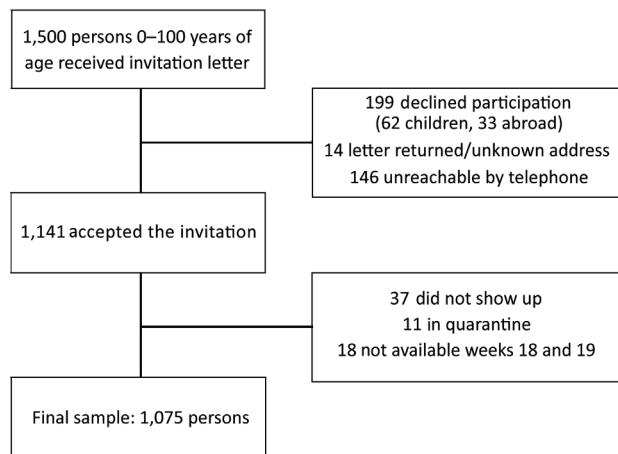


Figure. Study participation and reasons for dropout in a seroprevalence analysis of severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2–specific antibodies, Faroe Islands, 2020.

Table. Comparison of study participants and the entire population in a seroprevalence analysis of severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2–specific antibodies, Faroe Islands, April 27–May 1, 2020

| Characteristic | No. (%) | Population distribution, no. (%) | No. seropositive | Crude prevalence for antibody % (exact binomial 95%CI) |
|-------------------|------------|-------------------------------------|---------------------|---|
| Entire sample | 1,075 | 52,154 | 6 | 0.6 (0.1–1.2) |
| Sex | | | | |
| M | 538 (50.2) | 26,987 (51.7) | 3 | 0.6 (0.1–1.6) |
| F | 537 (49.8) | 25,167 (48.3) | 3 | 0.6 (0.1–1.6) |
| Age group, y | | | | |
| 0–9 | 92 (8.6) | 7,164 (13.7)* | 0 | 0 |
| 10–19 | 150 (14.0) | 7,335 (14.1) | 1 | 0.7 (0.0–3.7) |
| 20–29 | 116 (10.8) | 5,966 (11.4) | 1 | 0.9 (0.0–4.7) |
| 30–39 | 126 (11.7) | 6,298 (12.1) | 0 | 0 |
| 40–49 | 148 (13.8) | 6,522 (12.5) | 0 | 0 |
| 50–59 | 154 (14.3) | 6,718 (12.9) | 1 | 0.6 (0.0–3.6) |
| 60–69 | 151 (14.0) | 5,665 (10.9)* | 1 | 0.7 (0.0–3.6) |
| 70–79 | 98 (9.1) | 4,201 (8.1) | 2 | 2.0 (0.2–7.2) |
| 80–89 | 30 (2.8) | 1,848 (3.5) | 0 | 0 |
| ≥90 | 10 (0.9) | 437 (0.8) | 0 | 0 |
| Geographic area | | | | |
| Streymoy | 530 (49.3) | 24,926 (47.8) | 3 | 0.6 (0.1–1.6) |
| Eysturoy | 251 (23.3) | 11,782 (22.6) | 1 | 0.4 (0.0–2.2) |
| Norðoyggjar | 114 (10.6) | 6,206 (11.9) | 0 | 0 |
| Vágar | 74 (6.9) | 3,366 (6.5) | 1 | 1.4 (0.0–7.3) |
| Sandoy og Suðuroy | 106 (10.0) | 5,874 (11.2) | 1 | 0.9 (0.0–5.1) |

*Significant difference, $p < 0.05$.

the randomly selected study sample, although the youngest children were slightly underrepresented. Rather than a flow immunoassay test, we used the ELISA that performed best of 9 commercial SARS-CoV-2 immunoassays (R. Lassaunière et al., unpub. data, <https://doi.org/10.1101/2020.04.09.20056325>). However, we acknowledge that our estimates could change with new information about test accuracy of kits used, and cross-reactivity with other infections might be a challenge in antibody testing, but evidence on serologic testing is limited. Although antibodies might be undetected during early stages of the disease (6), our sample collection occurred 5–10 days after the last case in the Faroe Islands was detected, which makes this possibility unlikely in explaining the low proportion tested seropositive.

Our findings will help us evaluate the effect of public health efforts in the Faroe Islands. In addition, our findings will help guide the COVID-19 response moving forward, ensuring the previously held belief that few undetected cases were present in the Faroe Islands.

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Appendix

Short Information Regarding Descriptive Epidemiology of COVID-19 in Faroe Islands

The Faroe Islands, a small geographically isolated island population situated between Iceland, Norway, and Scotland with 52,428 inhabitants, had its first confirmed case of COVID-19 on March 3, 2020, and the last confirmed case diagnosed on April 22 and recovered on May 8, i.e., COVID-19 is currently eliminated. In total, 187 cases have tested positive, corresponding to 357 per 100,000 which as of May 8 was the 12th highest confirmed cases per capita (<https://www.worldometers.info/coronavirus/#country>).

The strategy of the Faroe Islands followed the recommendations of the World Health Organization (WHO), with an active suppression strategy. The initial exponential growth diminished during the weeks after lockdown, etc., to a slow linear growth during early and mid-April and subsequently elimination. Of note, the Faroe Islands tested at a very high frequency, with the number of tests now equaling 27% of the population, and on May 8 when the last case recovered the Faroe Islands had the highest number of tests conducted per capita in the world (<https://corona.fo>). This large test capacity was due to a fast adaptation of the Faroese Food and Veterinary Authority (<https://www.hfs.fo>) to accommodate diagnostic real-time PCR resources normally used in salmon farming to test for COVID-19. Patients, including those with mild symptoms, are referred by medical doctors and general practitioners to drive-in testing facilities at all 3 Faroese hospitals. The threshold for testing was initially high the first days of the Faroese COVID-19 epidemic, but quickly the Faroe Islands lowered the testing threshold to comply with the WHO recommendations. Thus, the Faroe Islands have been very successful with their strategy in dealing with the COVID-19 epidemic and is the first in the Western Hemisphere to have eliminated the disease. The successful strategy was following the suggestions by the WHO with 1) maximum testing for COVID-19, 2) isolation/quarantine of COVID-19–positive persons and their close contacts, and 3) society lockdown/social distancing.

Of the 187 positive cases, 53% were in women and mean age was 40 years ranging from 0 to 92 years. The most common symptoms among the 187 cases were fever, headache, and cough, while 11.2% were asymptomatic. The proportion of asymptomatic cases seemed to vary by age, with 25 and 30% asymptomatic cases in the age groups 0–17 and ≥ 65 years, respectively, and only 6% asymptomatic cases in the age group 18–64 years. However, numbers of asymptomatic cases are small ($n = 21$ cases reported asymptomatic in total), and therefore should be interpreted with caution. Eight patients were admitted to hospital, but there were no fatalities or admissions to intensive care unit (M.F. Kristiansen et al, unpub. data).