SARS-CoV-2 In northern Italy

Date: Monday 24th February 2020
Sources: Several, see below.

Cases in northern Italy (1)
As of Monday morning, there were 205 confirmed cases in northern Italy with 4 deaths. About 50,000 residents in the towns under lockdown have been told to stay home and avoid social contact, while schools, shops and businesses, apart from chemists, have been closed and festivities and sporting events, including Serie A football matches and the final two days of the Venice carnival have been cancelled.

Two cases in Milan suburbs (2)
The Corriere della Sera reported this morning two cases in Milan or close to Milan, one admitted in San Rafaele Hosp. in Milan for a week (It is not clear if it it was realised he had nCoV) from Sesto San Giovanni, a suburb to the northeast, and one admitted in Pavia San Matteo from a southern suburb of Milan (Mediglia). None have known contacts to China or other countries with SARS-CoV-2 transmission. One fatal case has been reported from Cremona Hospital (3).

Milano: Public gatherings cancelled (4)
The governor of Lombardy, Attilio Fontana, has announced “the suspension of events or initiatives of any nature, of events and of any form of meeting in a public or private place, including cultural, recreational, sports and religious, even if carried out in closed places open to the public.”
Coronavirus Milan: schools, cinemas, theatres and museums are closed. All public gatherings suspended. Only public offices are open.

Italy introduce “exordinary measures” to control outbreak (5)
Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte announced the emergency plan as the number of cases rose to more than 100.
The measures were imposed after two Italian citizens were confirmed to have died from the virus. A dozen towns in the northern regions of Lombardy and Veneto have been effectively quarantined under the plan. Around 50,000 people from towns in two northern regions have been asked to stay at home by authorities.

Coronavirus: Venice Carnival closes as Italy imposes lockdown (6)

Sources:

   https://www.repubblica.it/

3. Fourth person dies from coronavirus in Italy. The Guardian. 24th Feb. 2020


EITaF comment
The outbreak in Italy is concerning as it has not been possible to link “patient zero” to anyone with a recent travel history to China. Thus how the virus was introduced to northern Italy is currently unknown. Swift measures to prevent transmission have been introduced including in Milan, just an hour’s drive from the epicentre.

What are the implications?

First. The outbreak shows that the current case definition, which include contact to China or other countries known to have SARS-CoV-2 circulating, will probably not work because it fails to identify risk factors which we are not aware of. Thus it is our recommendation that all patients admitted to hospital with severe acute respiratory infections, SARI, should be tested for SARS-CoV-2. This is also a measure which will help protect health care workers caring for patients with respiratory failure. Testing for SARS-CoV-2 should be included in the panel of test performed on every patient with SARI.

Second. With the emerging knowledge that infected people may shed virus early in the course of the disease, surveillance and isolation of symptomatic people with have a moderate effect only. Thus social distancing, i.e. cancelling mass gatherings like meetings, football matches, religious events and reduce travel is the best we can do.

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