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Washington, January 3 (RHC)-- A team from the U.S. National Institutes of Health (NIH) described their research as the “most comprehensive analysis” to date of how the COVID virus spreads through the

human body.

The results were published online in a manuscript, which was submitted under review in the Nature journal. The scientists based their findings on autopsies of 44 patients who died after contracting COVID-19. The autopsies were performed between April 26, 2020 and March 2, 2021.

"Our results collectively show while that the highest burden of SARS-CoV-2 is in the airways and lungs, the virus can disseminate early during infection and infect cells throughout the entire body, including widely throughout the brain."

The viral RNA was "widely distributed" even among patients who died with asymptomatic or mild cases of COVID, the researchers wrote. In some instances, the virus stayed in "regions throughout the brain" for up to 230 days following symptom onset.

Ziyad Al-Aly, the director of the clinical epidemiology center at the Veterans Affairs St. Louis Health Care System in Missouri, told Bloomberg the study may provide an answer to why some patients suffer from so-called 'Long COVID' -- when symptoms stay persistent for months.

"For a long time now, we have been scratching our heads and asking why Long COVID seems to affect so many organ systems. This paper sheds some light, and may help explain why Long COVID can occur even in people who had mild or asymptomatic acute disease," Al-Aly said.

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