

# *Study shows Italian boy infected with COVID-19 one month earlier than China's first case*

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Rome, December 16 (RHC)-- A new study conducted by research fellows from the University of Milan has found evidence of COVID-19 in a boy from the Milan area as early as the end of November 2019, one month before the first identified coronavirus disease case in Italy and also earlier than the outbreak in Wuhan city, central China.

Local media said that the testing can detect the virus RNA (Ribonucleic Acid) genome, which means the result is more accurate than that from other testings. The finding that was done in September this year analyzed 39 throat swabs collected from last September to February this year, with one testing positive.

This specimen came from a four-year-old boy living in Milan, and he had had no history of traveling abroad. He began to develop symptoms of coughing and rhinitis since November 21, 2019 and was sent

to emergency on November 30th for shortness of breath and emesis. Later he was denied to have suffered from measles (a disease common seen among children with similar symptoms) by his doctors.

Mario C. Raviglione, one of the paper authors for the finding, also a professor at the university, said the boy's symptoms match with those of the COVID-19, which means he had been infected with the virus one month earlier than the case first reported in China's Wuhan.

"In reality, when you go back and you find the presence of the RNA genome of the virus, then you can conclude that those symptoms are also those of COVID-19. Therefore, the conclusion is that was one case of COVID-19. A year ago, this child started having symptoms on the November 21st, which means that assuming there is an incubation period of three to four days, sometime around the middle of November he was infected by someone and we don't know," the professor said.

Pro. Raviglione and his team believed that although Italy announced its first lab-identified case in February 2020, sporadic cases may exist at the end of last year; and the outbreak will emerge when the virus transmission accelerates, which gives an explanation of why the first wave of the epidemic in Lombardy, a region that includes Milan, spread fast at the beginning of this year.

Once served as director of the Global TB Program at the World Health Organization (WHO), Pro. Raviglione spoke highly of China's response to the epidemic, saying anti-coronavirus measures taken in the country are effective and have offered control and prevention experiences to the rest of the world.

"And if you look at the peak of the epidemic in China, you see that it was extremely well controlled in a way because with all the major lockdown that is probably not easily done outside of China because we know the way China acts when they decide to act. So that is a sign of capability really to do the thing. I don't want to praise China. I mean I'm objective. So I'm no interest in praising China or praising Italy or to say what it is. But my opinion is that China did a great job in containing this epidemic," he added.

Italy's Ministry of Health on Friday reported 1,805,873 million infections with an increase of 18,727 confirmed cases over the past 24 hours, and deaths related to the disease were 63,387 after additional 761 patients died.

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