

Coronavirus was already circulating in Italy since September 2019. Five regions infected.

The discovery of the Istituto Tumori Milano: antibodies found in a screening group for lung cancer. The coronavirus was circulating silently in Italy as early as September 2019, well before the now famous patient #1 of February 21, but also before December as indicated by the study by the Istituto Superiore di Sanità on wastewater in Milan and Turin. The proof comes from a study by the Milan Cancer Institute [Milan's Istituto dei Tumori ... a very reputable institution] and the University of Siena, who, analyzing blood samples taken between September 2019 and March 2020 from participants in a lung cancer screening, found antibodies to SarsCov2 in 11.6% of patients, of which 14% already in September. A confirmation that adds to the others emerged in recent months that the coronavirus had spread in Italy and around the world well before the official data released by China.

"Between March and April we began to ponder, also on the basis of other scientific studies, whether the coronavirus in Italy had begun to circulate before the official date. So we thought of using the blood samples collected in the "Smile" study, which had been initiated in September 2019 and then stopped in March 2020 due to the epidemic", explains Giovanni Apolone, scientific director of the Cancer Institute. 959 people between 55 and 65 years of age were screened, all smokers, 60% of whom were men and 50%, all residents of Lombardy. To the researchers' surprise, the outcome was that 11.6% (111 out of 959) of these people had coronavirus antibodies, of which 14% already in September, 30% in the second week of February 2020, and the highest number (53.2%) in Lombardy. In September the virus was already present in the samples of patients residing in 5 regions and, in the overall analysis of the samples from September to March, at least one case of positive patient from 13 regions was found. Two peaks of positivity emerged for antibodies: the first between the end of September and the second third week of October, the second in the second week of February. "The analysis conducted by the group of Emanuele Montomoli of the University of Siena, who worked with us - he continues - identified the presence of neutralizing antibodies in vivo, i.e. still capable of killing the virus, in 6 people out of 111, of which 4 already in October". In particular, according to the data published in the study, the first positive samples recorded in September belonged to people living in Veneto (3), Emilia Romagna (1), Liguria (1), Lombardy (2) and Lazio (1). Then in the following months they were also detected in volunteers from Piedmont, Campania, Friuli Venezia Giulia, Sardinia, Sicily, Tuscany, Val d'Aosta, and Puglia. "For the first cases in which antibodies were found in September — adds Apolone — the infection probably occurred in August". However, the Italian study is only the last proof, in order of time, that the coronavirus began to circulate in Italy and around the world several months before the outbreak. There is a study by the Wuhan Center for Disease Control & Prevention in April, which had detected the presence of the virus in swabs made between October 6, 2019 and January 21, 2020 in people with flu symptoms. Then the discovery at the end of April in France that the possible 'patient zero' actually dated back to December 27, and the announcement at the end of May by some Spanish virologists that they had found traces of the new coronavirus in a sample of wastewater collected in Barcelona in March 2019, and in June the study of Harvard Medical School in Boston that – based on satellite images of parking lots of 5 hospitals in Wuhan and research on the Chinese browser Baidu – concluded that the new coronavirus had been circulating in China as of August 2019.