The New Coronavirus Appears to Affect the Liver

A recent analysis found that about half of people with COVID-19, the disease caused by the coronavirus, have liver enzyme abnormalities.

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People with COVID-19, the respiratory disease caused by the new coronavirus, often experience liver abnormalities or injury, Reuters Health reports. This finding from a recent small analysis suggests that health care providers should take extra precautions to protect the livers of people with preexisting disease of the organ.

Publishing their findings in The Lancet Gastroenterology and Hepatology, Fu-Sheng Wang, MD, PhD, and colleagues from the National Clinical Research Center for Infectious Diseases in Beijing analyzed data from seven published case studies of people with COVID-19. They also looked to unpublished data from The Fifth Medical Center of PLS General Hospital in Beijing as they investigated COVID-19's impact on the liver.

All told, the data set included over 1,600 cases of COVID-19. Depending on the seven subsets of data, between 2% and 11% of people with the disease developed liver abnormalities. Fifty-three percent of the people with COVID-19 developed abnormal ALT and ASL liver enzyme levels.

It appeared that those with a more severe COVID-19 disease course were more likely to experience liver dysfunction. Additionally, those who experienced symptoms of COVID-19, compared with asymptomatic individuals, were more likely to have elevated liver enzymes.

"Considering their immunocompromised status, more intensive surveillance or individually tailored therapeutic approaches is needed for severe patients with COVID-19 with preexisting conditions such as advanced liver disease, especially in older patients with other comorbidities," the study authors concluded. "Further research should focus on the causes of liver injury in COVID-19 and the effect of existing liver-related comorbidities on treatment and outcome of COVID-19."

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