

# SARS-CoV-2 antibody seroprevalence and associated risk factors in an urban district of Cameroon

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## Article

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# SARS-CoV-2 antibody seroprevalence and associated risk factors in an urban district in Cameroon

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## 32 Abstract

33 The extent of SARS-CoV-2 circulation in many African countries remains unclear, underlining  
34 the need for antibody sero-surveys to assess the cumulative attack rate. Here, we present the results  
35 of a cross-sectional sero-survey of a random sample of residents of a health district in Yaoundé,  
36 Cameroon, conducted from October 14 to November 26, 2020. Among the 971 participants, the  
37 test-adjusted seroprevalence of anti-SARS-CoV-2 IgG antibodies was 29·2% (95%CI 24·3–34·1).  
38 This is about 323 times greater than the 0·09% nationwide attack rate implied by COVID-19 case  
39 counts at the time. Men, obese individuals and those living in large households were significantly  
40 more likely to be seropositive, and the majority (64·2% [58·7–69·4]) of seropositive individuals  
41 reported no symptoms. Despite the high seroprevalence, most of the population had not been  
42 infected with SARS-CoV-2, highlighting the importance of continued measures to control viral  
43 spread and quick vaccine deployment to protect the vulnerable.

44

## 45 Introduction

46 The 2019 coronavirus disease (COVID-19) has placed an unprecedented burden on health systems  
47 around the world. In resource-limited settings within sub-Saharan Africa (SSA), gaps in medical  
48 infrastructure, difficulties in implementing hygiene measures, and perceived public health  
49 vulnerabilities were projected to lead to overwhelming morbidity and mortality burdens.<sup>1,2</sup>

50 To date, however, official counts of COVID-19 cases and deaths suggest a relatively mild  
51 epidemic trajectory on the African continent. As of March 4, 2021, only two African countries,  
52 Egypt and South Africa, had reported more than 9 000 COVID-19 related deaths.<sup>3</sup> Cameroon,  
53 which reported its first case on March 6, 2020, had reported only 35 714 cases one year after,  
54 implying an attack rate of 1·43 cases per thousand residents (as compared with the 50·7 cases per  
55 thousand seen in the European Union).

56 Multiple hypotheses have been advanced to explain the seemingly mild trajectory of the COVID-  
57 19 epidemic in Africa: researchers have pointed to warm climate conditions across much of the  
58 continent, timely and effective preventive measures put in place by governments, the young and  
59 predominantly rural population, and cross-reactive immunity from other infections as potential  
60 mitigating factors.<sup>2,4</sup> However, the true scale of the epidemic in many African countries is still  
61 unclear, as the PCR and antigen-confirmed case counts that are commonly relied on may  
62 understate viral spread.<sup>2,5</sup>

63 In this context, the use of serological antibody tests to detect past exposure to the severe acute  
64 respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2) is valuable. Serological assays can detect  
65 evidence of SARS-CoV-2 infection from two weeks to several months after the onset of symptoms,  
66 and can reveal past infection even in asymptomatic cases.<sup>6,7</sup> They are therefore valuable for  
67 accurately assessing the cumulative attack rate—the proportion of the population that has ever  
68 been infected with SARS-CoV-2.

69 However, only a few SARS-CoV-2 antibody serosurveys have been conducted in African  
70 countries to date,<sup>8,9,10,11,12,13</sup> and the majority of sero-surveys have been conducted on healthcare  
71 workers, convenience samples of blood donors and other non-representative populations; no  
72 published surveys have been performed on a random sample of the general population in an  
73 African country. Here, we report the results of a cross-sectional, community-based sero-survey of

74 a random sample of residents in a health district of Yaoundé, the capital city of Cameroon. We  
75 aimed to estimate the prevalence of anti-SARS-CoV-2 antibodies in this population, to assess risk  
76 factors for seropositivity, and to investigate the symptoms of seropositive respondents.

## 77 Results

78 Out of the 255 households visited between October 14 and November 26, 2020, 180 (70.6%)  
79 agreed to participate, resulting in a final sample of 971 participants (full study profile in appendix  
80 1 p 1). Table 1 shows the sociodemographic characteristics of the final sample. The median age of  
81 participants was 26 years (IQR: 14–38), and 56.5% of them were female (n = 549). The majority  
82 were students (39.3%, n = 402), informal workers (21.3%, n = 218) or traders (12.6%, n = 129).  
83 A total of 112 respondents (11.5%) reported suffering from a chronic condition, mainly  
84 hypertension (3.3%, n = 32), respiratory illnesses (1.7%, n = 17) or diabetes (1.1%, n = 11).

85 Of the 971 respondents tested for antibodies, 302 (31.1%) were IgG positive, 32 (3.3%) were IgM  
86 positive, and a combined 328 (35.1%) were positive for at least one antibody type (figure 1A).  
87 The overlap between IgG and IgM seropositivity was low, with only six individuals testing positive  
88 for both antibody types. Active COVID-19 infection was uncommon: only one PCR test was  
89 positive among the 21 tests performed on suspected cases, for an implied active infection rate of  
90 0.1%.

91 The highest overall seroprevalence (IgG and/or IgM) was seen in the Briqueterie neighbourhood,  
92 where 43.8% (95% CI 30.7–57.7) of tested residents were seropositive (figure 1C). All  
93 neighbourhood-level seroprevalence estimates are reported in appendix 1 (p 3). Most households  
94 (73%, 131 of 180) had at least one seropositive resident but the range of household-level  
95 seroprevalence was broad: from 0 to 100%, with a median of 33% (IQR ± 25%). Notably, there  
96 were only two households (1.1%) in which everyone was seropositive; one of these was a single-  
97 resident household and the other had two residents. The detailed distribution of household  
98 seropositivity is reported in appendix 1 (p 4).

99 After population weighting and test performance adjustment, the overall seroprevalence of IgG  
100 antibodies was 29.2% (95% CI 24.3–34.1; table 2). Men had a higher seroprevalence than women  
101 (33.1% [27.6–40.5] versus 25.3% [20.0–31.2]), and seroprevalence increased with age, although

102 these differences were not statistically significant. The proportion of IgM-positive individuals was  
103 lower (3.3%) than the expected false positive rate of the IgM test (6.9%), so adjusted IgM  
104 seroprevalence estimates were statistically indistinguishable from zero. For this reason, IgM  
105 results were not considered in the analysis of symptoms or of seropositivity risk factors.

106 The multivariable risk factor analysis for IgG seropositivity revealed significantly higher odds of  
107 seropositivity for men (OR: 1.61 [95%CI 1.2–2.2]), residents of households with six or more  
108 residents (OR: 1.6 [1.1–2.4]; reference: households with three to five residents) and individuals  
109 with a BMI above 30 kg/m<sup>2</sup> (OR: 1.84 [1.1–3.0]; reference: 18.5–24.9 kg/m<sup>2</sup>). The highest  
110 stratified seroprevalence was seen in respondents who had been in contact with a known or  
111 suspected COVID-19 case: 45.7% (16 of 35) of these individuals were IgG positive.

112 Among the 302 IgG seropositive participants, 35.8% (n = 108) reported having had at least one  
113 COVID-19-related symptom; among the 669 IgG seronegative participants, this proportion was  
114 28.0% (n = 187) (figure 3a). The most common symptoms reported among the IgG seropositive  
115 individuals were fever (18.5%, n = 56), headache (17.6%, n = 53), cough (17.9%, n = 54) and  
116 rhinorrhoea (12.3%, n = 37), and all four were significantly more common in seropositive than in  
117 seronegative individuals (figure 3c). Surprisingly, anosmia and/or ageusia was only experienced  
118 by 4.3% (n = 13) of the seropositive respondents. Cough alone and cough plus rhinorrhoea were  
119 the two most common symptom profiles among IgG seropositive participants (figure 3b). In terms  
120 of severity, 80% of IgG seropositive respondents with symptoms (83 of 104) graded these  
121 symptoms as mild or moderate.

122 Among the 302 IgG seropositive individuals, only 27 (8.9%) consulted any healthcare services  
123 over the pandemic period (appendix 1 p 5). The most common medications taken by this group  
124 were paracetamol (19.9%, n = 60), traditional medicines (14.6%, n = 44) and antibiotics (10.3%,  
125 n = 31; appendix 1 p 6), and these were most commonly self or family-prescribed.

126 A total of 46 respondents reported having been hospitalised between March 1, 2020 and the date  
127 of survey, but only one of these was reported to be COVID-19-related, implying a hospitalization  
128 rate of 0.3% (one out of 302 IgG seropositive respondents). Over the same period, 11 of the 180  
129 surveyed households reported the death of a family member, but none of these deaths was reported  
130 to be COVID-19-linked.

## 131 Discussion

132 In this urban setting of Cameroon, the adjusted seroprevalence of SARS-CoV-2 IgG antibodies  
133 was found to be 29·2%, implying that around 126 000 of the district's 432 858 inhabitants had  
134 been infected with SARS-CoV-2 by the survey's end date, November 26, 2020. This proportion is  
135 about 323 times greater than the 0·09% nationwide attack rate implied by PCR and antigen-  
136 confirmed case counts at that time.<sup>3</sup> The large discrepancy suggests that the true cumulative  
137 incidence of COVID-19 in Cameroon may be far larger than the number of cases officially  
138 reported.

139 The underreporting of COVID-19 cases implied by our survey is not unique. In a recent systematic  
140 review, Chen et al. (2021) compared the number of infections estimated by seroprevalence surveys  
141 to the number of PCR-confirmed infections in a range of countries and found a pooled ratio of  
142 11·1 (95% CI 8·3–14·9),<sup>19</sup> meaning that for each virologically-confirmed COVID-19 case, there  
143 were at least ten undetected infections in the community. Across individual settings, this ratio  
144 varied widely, from 2·0 in a Faroe Islands study,<sup>20</sup> to 103·0 in a study of Indian villages.<sup>21</sup> Taken  
145 together, these findings and ours suggest that PCR-confirmed case counts are poor proxies for the  
146 true attack rate of SARS-CoV-2, and that cross-national comparisons based on such case counts  
147 may be misleading.

148 We found that men and obese individuals (BMI > 30 kg/m<sup>2</sup>) were significantly more likely to be  
149 seropositive, and we also observed higher seropositivity, although non-significant, among older  
150 age groups. It is uncertain whether the raised seroprevalence in these groups represents a greater  
151 risk of SARS-CoV-2 infection per se, or a greater probability of antibody detection. Older, male  
152 and obese individuals are known to experience more severe COVID-19 symptoms,<sup>22</sup> and severe  
153 illness is linked to stronger and longer-lasting antibody responses.<sup>23</sup> As a result, serosurveys  
154 performed several months after infection may detect antibodies more frequently in these groups  
155 because they experienced more severe illness and stronger antibody responses, not because they  
156 were infected at higher rates.

157 Alternatively, the physiological factors that predispose men, the obese and the elderly to more  
158 severe disease may also make them more susceptible to initial infection. Some studies have  
159 suggested that adults may be more likely to be infected with SARS-CoV-2 than young children,<sup>24,25</sup>



160 and a few point prevalence studies have found slightly raised viral attack rates in men.<sup>26,27</sup> If the  
161 risk factors for infection and those for severe illness overlap, then surveillance and prevention  
162 measures that focus on the higher-risk groups may be particularly appropriate, especially in  
163 contexts where stringent population-wide measures are not feasible.

164 The rate of asymptomatic infection in our study is higher than usually described; approximately  
165 70% of the IgG positive individuals in the sample did not report any COVID-19-related symptoms.  
166 In a recent meta-analysis by Byambasuren et al.,<sup>28</sup> the measured asymptomatic rate was much  
167 lower—a pooled estimate of 17% (95%CI 14%–20%). COVID-19-related hospitalisation was also  
168 relatively uncommon in our sample (0·3% among the IgG seropositive individuals), and no  
169 COVID-19-linked deaths were reported in any of the surveyed households.

170 These favourable outcomes could reflect the relatively young population in the region of study. As  
171 COVID-19 severity increases exponentially with age, the overall burden of disease in young  
172 populations is expected to be less severe.<sup>22</sup> Cameroon's median age of 18·6 years, and the African  
173 median of 19·7,<sup>29</sup> are therefore noteworthy, and may explain the limited COVID-19 mortality  
174 impact here as compared with the other regions; the median age in Europe, for example, is 40·2  
175 years.<sup>29</sup>

176 However, caution should be exercised in interpreting the low hospitalisation and death rates  
177 implied by our study. The surveyed households reported a total of 46 hospitalisations and 11 family  
178 member deaths over the pandemic period. While only one hospitalisation and none of the deaths  
179 were known to be COVID-19-related, it is possible that the factors limiting testing in the general  
180 population also applied to those who were hospitalised and dying. Thus, we cannot rule out the  
181 possibility that some of these hospitalisations or deaths were actually COVID-19-linked. Of note,  
182 a study of deceased patients in a hospital morgue in Lusaka, Zambia found that 15% of those who  
183 died between June and September 2020 had COVID-19 at the time of death, although only 9% of  
184 these deceased individuals were tested for SARS-CoV-2 before death.<sup>30</sup> Further investigations are  
185 therefore required to assess the number of undiagnosed COVID-19-related deaths in countries  
186 within the SSA region.

187 Our study has several major strengths. This is one of the first studies to assess SARS-CoV-2  
188 antibody seroprevalence in a random sample of residents in an African city. Our random selection  
189 procedure ensures representativeness of the target population and minimizes the risk of bias. The

190 study also demonstrates the feasibility of performing a geo-sampled door-to-door serological  
191 survey in an African city—a simple, effective study design that can be applied widely. Finally, we  
192 validated the performance of the chosen antibody test on local pre-pandemic sera, thus ruling out  
193 concerns about low test specificity in African populations.<sup>31</sup>

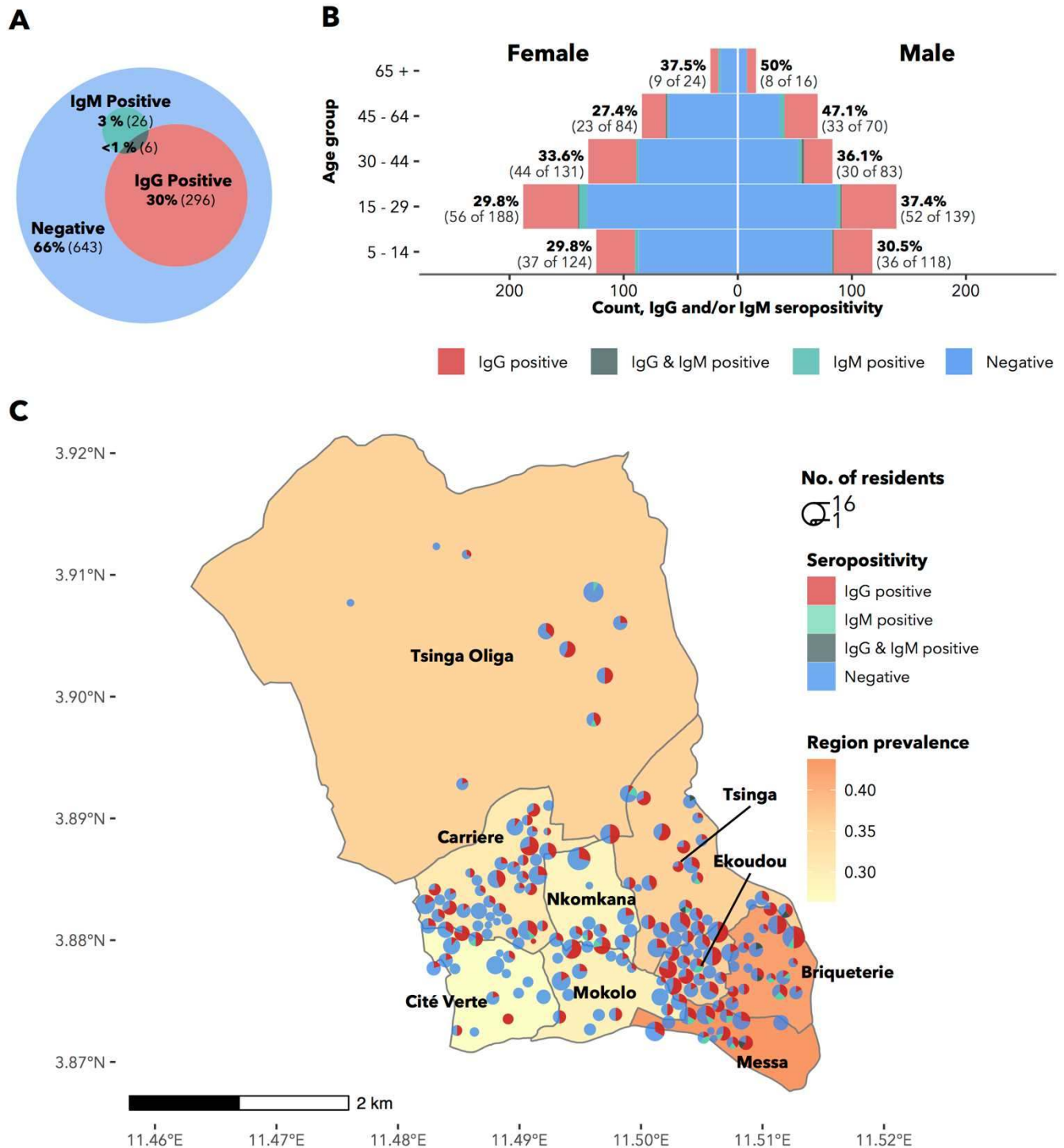
194 The study was also subject to a number of limitations. We registered a household refusal rate of  
195 24%, which may be a source of bias if household refusal was correlated with seropositivity.  
196 Secondly, we asked participants to recall symptoms experienced over a period of seven to eight  
197 months, a possible source of recall bias. This long time interval also means that we were unable to  
198 directly link reported symptoms to COVID-19 infection: many of the reported symptoms may have  
199 been caused by other illnesses experienced over the same time period. Lastly, we were unable to  
200 validate the sensitivity of the antibody tests on local samples of known COVID-19 cases, relying  
201 instead on a validation study from a European population.

202 In conclusion, our sero-survey indicates that nearly one in three individuals in Yaoundé, Cameroon  
203 was exposed to SARS-CoV-2 by November 26, 2020. Together with similarly high seroprevalence  
204 estimates from other SSA studies—24·5% in Niger state, Nigeria,<sup>8</sup> 25·1% in Abidjan, Ivory  
205 Coast,<sup>13</sup> 19·7% in Brazzaville, Congo,<sup>32</sup> among others—these findings point to extensive and  
206 under-reported circulation of SARS-CoV-2 in settings across the African continent. As men, obese  
207 individuals, and those living in large households were found to be significantly more affected, it  
208 may be valuable to tailor public health interventions toward these groups. Despite the high  
209 seroprevalence, the data indicate that in Yaoundé, as in most other surveyed regions in Africa, the  
210 majority of the population has so far avoided SARS-CoV-2 infection, highlighting the importance  
211 of continued mitigation measures, tracing and testing, and quick vaccine deployment to curb  
212 further spread.

213 **Figures and Tables**

214 **Table 1:** Sociodemographic characteristics of the participants in the final sample of 1007 study  
 215 participants. N is the number of individuals in each stratum. IQR: Interquartile range. BMI: Body mass  
 216 index

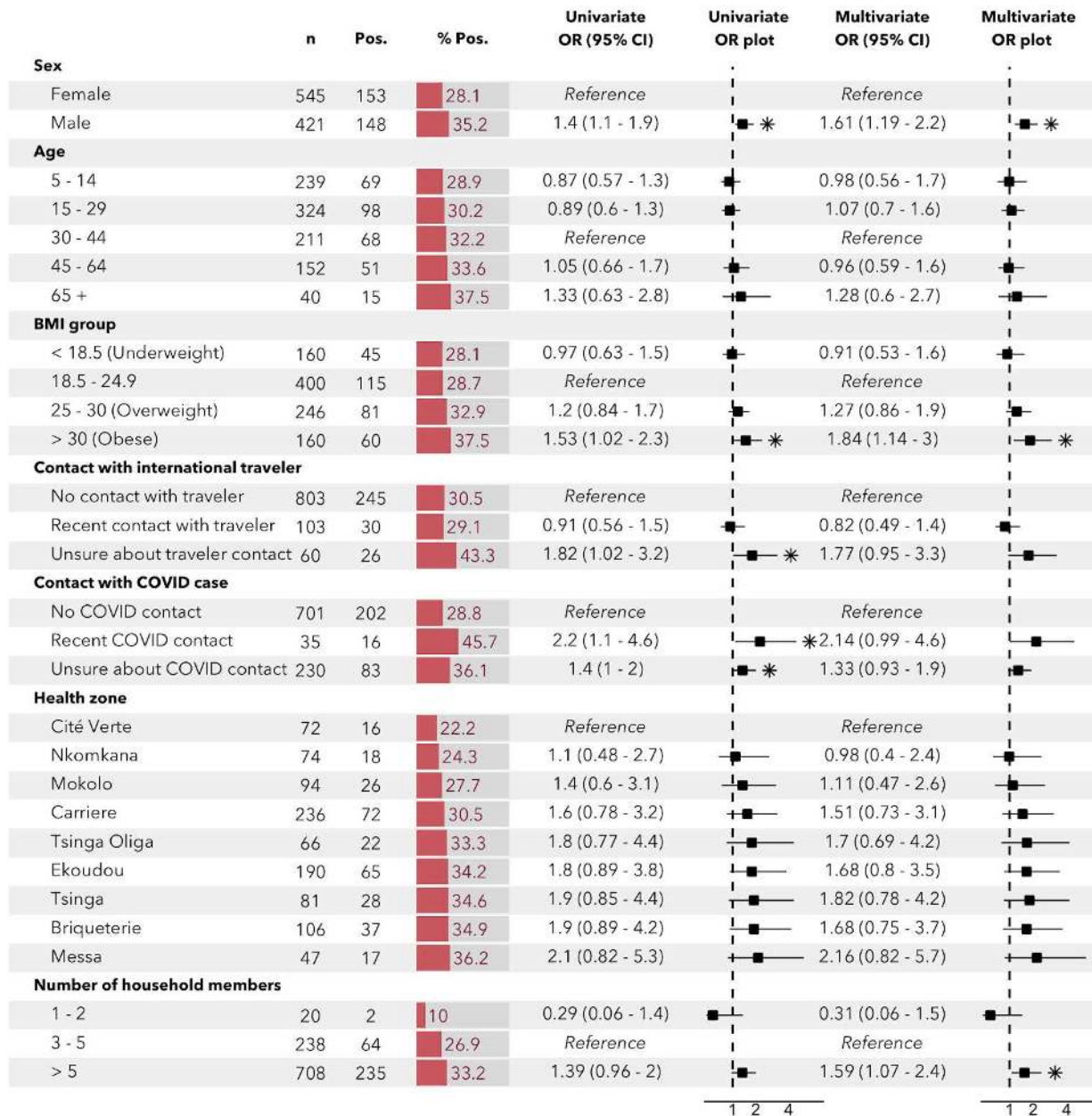
<b>Characteristic</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>Age groups (years)</b>		
5 - 14	241	24.8
15 - 29	325	33.5
30 - 44	212	21.8
45 - 64	153	15.8
65 +	40	4.1
<b>Sex</b>		
Female	549	56.5
Male	422	43.5
<b>BMI (kg/m<sup>2</sup>)</b>		
< 18.5 (Underweight)	160	16.5
18.5 - 24.9	400	41.2
25 - 30 (Overweight)	247	25.4
> 30 (Obese)	160	16.5
Unknown	4	0.4
<b>Education Level</b>		
Secondary	433	44.6
Primary	318	32.7
University	145	14.9
No formal instruction	52	5.4
Doctorate	17	1.8
Other	6	0.6
<b>Profession</b>		
Student	402	39.3
Informal worker	218	21.3
Trader	129	12.6
Home-maker	74	7.2
Unemployed	70	6.8
Salaried worker	54	5.3
Retired	32	3.1
Other	43	4.2
<b>Chronic conditions</b>		
Hypertension	32	3.3
Respiratory illness	17	1.7
Diabetes	11	1.1
Other	52	5.3



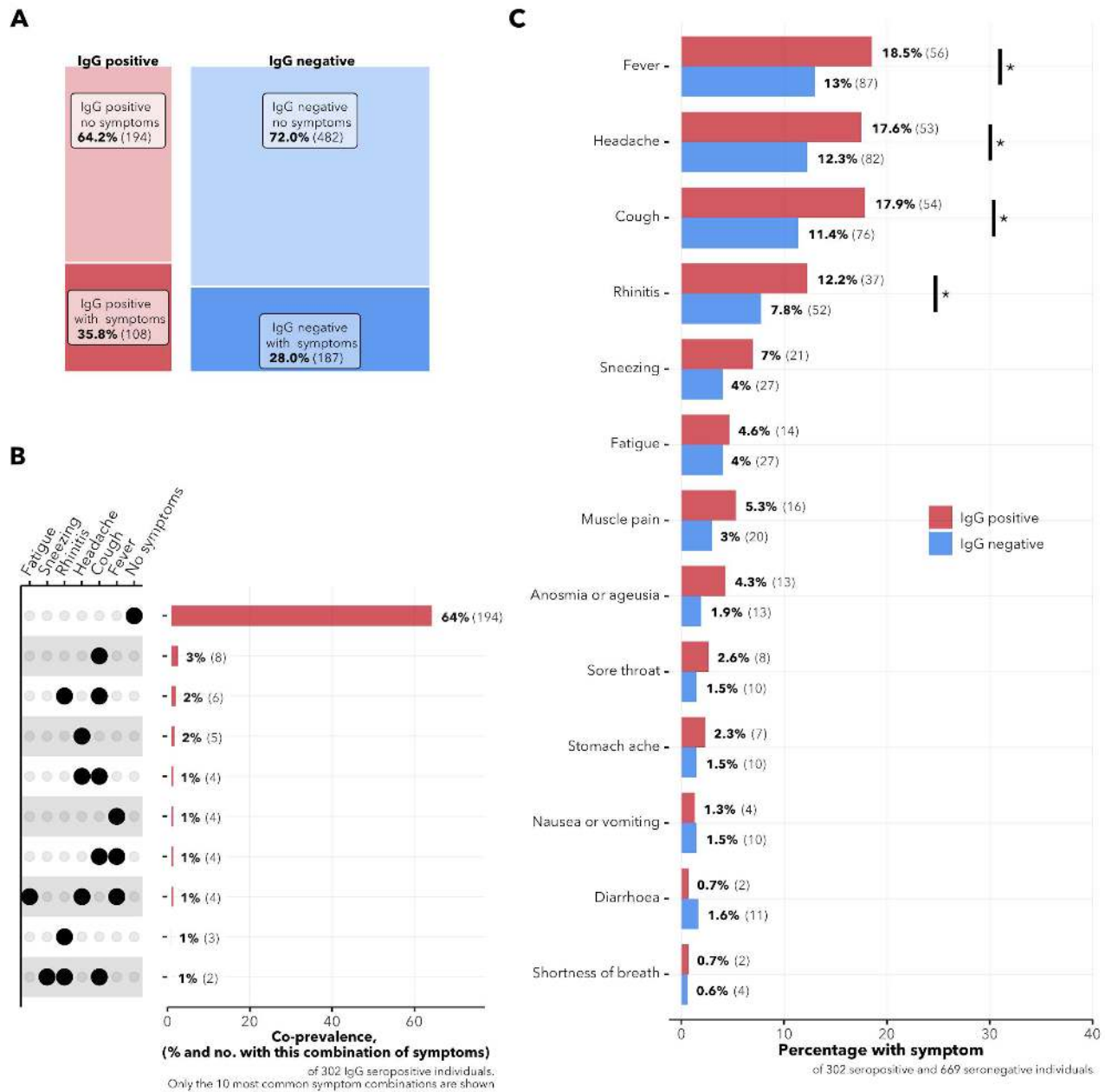
217 **Figure 1: Crude IgG and IgM seroprevalence:** A. Euler diagram showing seropositivity of respondents  
 218 by antibody test. B. Seropositivity of respondents by antibody test and age-sex stratum. Percentage labels  
 219 indicate the proportion of each stratum that is IgG and/or IgM seropositive. C. Household and geographic  
 220 variation in seropositivity. Fill colour indicates the neighbourhood seroprevalence (IgG and/or IgM). Pie  
 221 charts indicate household size, household location and the proportion of the household that is seropositive.  
 222 Pie charts are dodged and jittered to avoid overlap and to preserve location anonymity. Five households are  
 223 not shown due to improperly-coded or missing coordinates.

224 **Table 2:** Age-sex weighted and test-adjusted seroprevalence estimates for anti-SARS-CoV-2 IgG  
 225 antibodies. When a variable was stratified it was removed from the weights. Confidence intervals  
 226 for test-adjusted estimates are Lang-Reiczigel intervals, which take into account the sample size  
 227 of the antibody test validation study. Other confidence intervals are Wilson score intervals.

	n	Pos.	Seroprevalence (95% confidence interval)		
			Crude	Population-weighted	Population-weighted, test-adjusted
Total	971	302	31.1% (28.3 - 34.1)	31.3% (28.4 - 34.3)	29.2% (24.3 - 34.1)
Female	549	154	28.1% (24.5 - 32.0)	28.0% (24.4 - 31.9)	25.3% (20.0 - 31.2)
Male	422	148	35.1% (30.7 - 39.7)	34.6% (30.2 - 39.3)	33.1% (27.6 - 40.5)
5 - 14	241	69	28.6% (23.3 - 34.6)	28.7% (23.3 - 34.7)	26.1% (18.9 - 34.1)
15 - 29	325	98	30.2% (25.4 - 35.4)	30.7% (25.9 - 35.9)	28.5% (21.4 - 35.1)
30 - 44	212	69	32.5% (26.6 - 39.1)	32.7% (26.7 - 39.3)	30.8% (22.9 - 39.5)
45 - 64	153	51	33.3% (26.4 - 41.1)	34.1% (27.0 - 41.9)	32.5% (22.8 - 41.8)
65 +	40	15	37.5% (24.2 - 53.0)	39.4% (25.8 - 54.8)	38.7% (20.5 - 55.8)



228 **Figure 2: Risk factor analysis for IgG seropositivity n = 966.** Based on logistic models with  
 229 household random intercepts. Asterisks indicate significance at a 0.05 alpha level. OR: Odds  
 230 ratio. 41 individuals (4%) were dropped due to missing covariables. Recent contact indicates  
 231 contact since March 1st, 2020. A “COVID case“ is a confirmed or suspected COVID-19 case.  
 232 Variables that were found to be not significant at a 0.30 alpha level, and which were not  
 233 controlled for in the multivariable regression, include presence of comorbidities, breadwinner  
 234 status, adherence to social distancing rules, household neighbourhood and presence of children in  
 235 the household.



236

237 **Figure 3: COVID-compatible symptoms of survey participants.** Participants reported any  
 238 COVID-compatible acute symptoms (all shown in panel C), which were experienced between  
 239 March 1, 2020 and the date of survey. **A.** Matrix plot showing the intersection of symptomatology  
 240 with IgG seropositivity. The area of each rectangle is proportional to the number of respondents  
 241 in the category. **B.** The ten most common symptom profiles among IgG seropositive individuals.  
 242 **C.** Comparison in frequency of symptoms between IgG seropositive and seronegative individuals.  
 243  $\chi$ -square: \*  $p < 0.05$

## 244 **Methods**

### 245 **Population and sampling**

246 The study was conducted in Cité Verte, a health district of Yaoundé, Cameroon with an estimated  
247 population of 432 858 inhabitants.

248 Based on power calculations with an assumed prevalence of 20%, a precision of 5% and a  
249 confidence level of 95%, we estimated a required sample of 245 participants. The final target  
250 population was increased to 1000 people (250 households) to further increase statistical power.

251 Households were randomly selected from a pre-processed set of residential buildings based on  
252 OpenStreetMap data (full procedure in appendix 1 p 7).<sup>14</sup> Data collection took place between  
253 October 14 and November 26, 2020 (sampling timeline in appendix 1 p 2). In the field, each  
254 sampled household was visited by study investigators, who either interviewed residents on the first  
255 meeting, or arranged an appointment for a future interview if household members were not all  
256 present.

257 In each household, all individuals between five and 80 years of age were included if they (a) had  
258 been present in the household for at least 14 days prior to the survey, and (b) could give written  
259 informed consent (or had an adult guardian who could give consent).

### 260 **Testing procedure**

261 The Abbott Panbio™ COVID-19 IgG/IgM Rapid Test Device was used to screen for SARS-CoV-  
262 2 IgG and IgM antibodies in capillary blood collected from a finger prick. This is an  
263 immunochromatographic, lateral flow test for the qualitative detection of IgG and IgM antibodies  
264 to the nucleocapsid (N) protein of SARS-CoV-2. Test results were classified into one of five  
265 categories: negative, IgG positive alone (indicating past infection), IgM positive alone (indicating  
266 recent infection), IgG and IgM positive (also indicating recent infection), or invalid/inconclusive.  
267 Invalid/inconclusive results were repeated and classified accordingly.

268 The test has a manufacturer-estimated sensitivity and specificity of 95·8% and 94% respectively.  
269 However, since test specificity varies across populations, externally-assessed specificity values



270 may be misleading. Thus, we also validated the test specificity on a panel of 246 pre-pandemic  
271 (2017) samples from individuals living in Yaounde. The IgG test correctly diagnosed 230 of these  
272 samples (93·5% specificity), while the IgM test correctly diagnosed 229 samples (93·1%  
273 specificity). For IgG sensitivity, an estimate of 91·5% was used, as obtained from a validation  
274 study on hospitalized COVID-19 patients 14–56 days post symptom onset.<sup>15</sup>

275 Alongside serological testing, a questionnaire was administered on disease symptoms experienced  
276 since March 1, 2020, and on health-seeking behaviour over the same pandemic period.

## 277 **Data analysis**

278 To arrive at final seroprevalence estimates, crude proportions were re-weighted to match the age-  
279 sex distribution of the Yaounde population, as sourced from the 2018 Cameroon DHS.<sup>16</sup> We used  
280 the Rogan-Gladen formula to adjust IgG seroprevalence estimates to account for test  
281 performance,<sup>17</sup> and we used Lang-Reiczigel intervals for confidence intervals around these  
282 estimates.<sup>18</sup> We did not apply test performance corrections to the IgM seroprevalence estimates  
283 due to the inherently uncertain sensitivity of IgM tests; as IgM antibodies decline rapidly after  
284 infection, sensitivity varies widely with time since infection.

285 For the seropositivity risk factor analysis, we used logistic regression models with household  
286 random intercepts to account for within-household clustering. The following risk factors were  
287 analysed: sex, age (categorised as 5–14, 15–29, 30–44, 45–64 or 65+ years), highest education  
288 level (no formal instruction, primary, secondary, university, doctorate), BMI group (< 18·5, 18·5–  
289 24·9, 25–30 or > 30 kg/m<sup>2</sup>), contact with an international traveller since March 1, 2020 (recent  
290 contact, no contact or unsure about contact), contact with a suspected or confirmed COVID-19  
291 case since March 1, 2020 (recent contact, no contact or unsure about contact), presence of  
292 comorbidities (combining hypertension, respiratory illness, diabetes, tuberculosis, HIV,  
293 cardiovascular illness and/or “other illnesses” which were not explicitly listed in the  
294 questionnaire), whether or not the respondent was the breadwinner, adherence to social distancing  
295 rules (“Yes”, “No”, or “Partly”), location of the household (one of nine neighbourhoods), number  
296 of household members, and whether or not there were children in the household. Each variable  
297 was first analysed in a univariate model. A Wald chi-square test was then carried out on each  
298 univariate model, and all variables below a relaxed p-value cut-off of 0·30 were entered into the

299 multivariable analysis. This full multivariate model was presented. Individuals with missing  
300 covariables were not included in the regression analysis.

301 Data were processed and analysed using R version 4.0.2.

## 302 **Ethical considerations**

303 The study protocol obtained the ethical clearance (N°2020/09/1292/CE/CNERSH/SP) and the  
304 administrative authorization of the Ministry of Health of Cameroon (N°D30-  
305 845/L/MINSANTE/SG/DROS). Every adult participant (21 years or above) signed an informed  
306 consent form and, for minors, a person with parental authority was asked to sign the consent form.  
307 Minors who were able to sign were also asked to sign a special assent form. In cases where active  
308 COVID-19 was suspected (based on the result of the IgG antibody test and self-reported  
309 symptoms), a nasopharyngeal swab test was offered to the respondent and sent for analysis at the  
310 study reference laboratory, the Chantal BIYA International Reference Centre (CIRCB) in  
311 Yaoundé. All members of the survey team were trained in health research ethics and good clinical  
312 practice.

## 313 **Role of the funding source**

314 The sponsors of the study had no role in study design, data collection, data analysis, data  
315 interpretation, or writing of the report.

## 316 **Data availability**

317 The anonymized participant data can be shared with investigators upon signing of a data access  
318 agreement. Requests should be addressed to the corresponding author.

## 319 **Code availability**

320 The code used to generate all tabular, graphical and other analytic outputs in the paper is  
321 available at the following repository: [https://github.com/kendavidn/yaounde\\_serocovpop\\_shared](https://github.com/kendavidn/yaounde_serocovpop_shared)

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## 336 **Author contributions**

337 LC, FW and EC conceived and designed the study. FW, LM, AT and JM participated in data  
338 collection. NR designed the spatial sampling methodology. KN and EO analysed and interpreted

339 the data and produced the output figures. KN and JF wrote the initial manuscript, and all authors  
340 contributed to subsequent revisions and approved the final version submitted for publication. LC,  
341 EM and FW had full access to all the data in the study and KN and LC had final responsibility for  
342 the decision to submit for publication.

## 343 **Declarations of interests**

344 The authors declare no competing interests.

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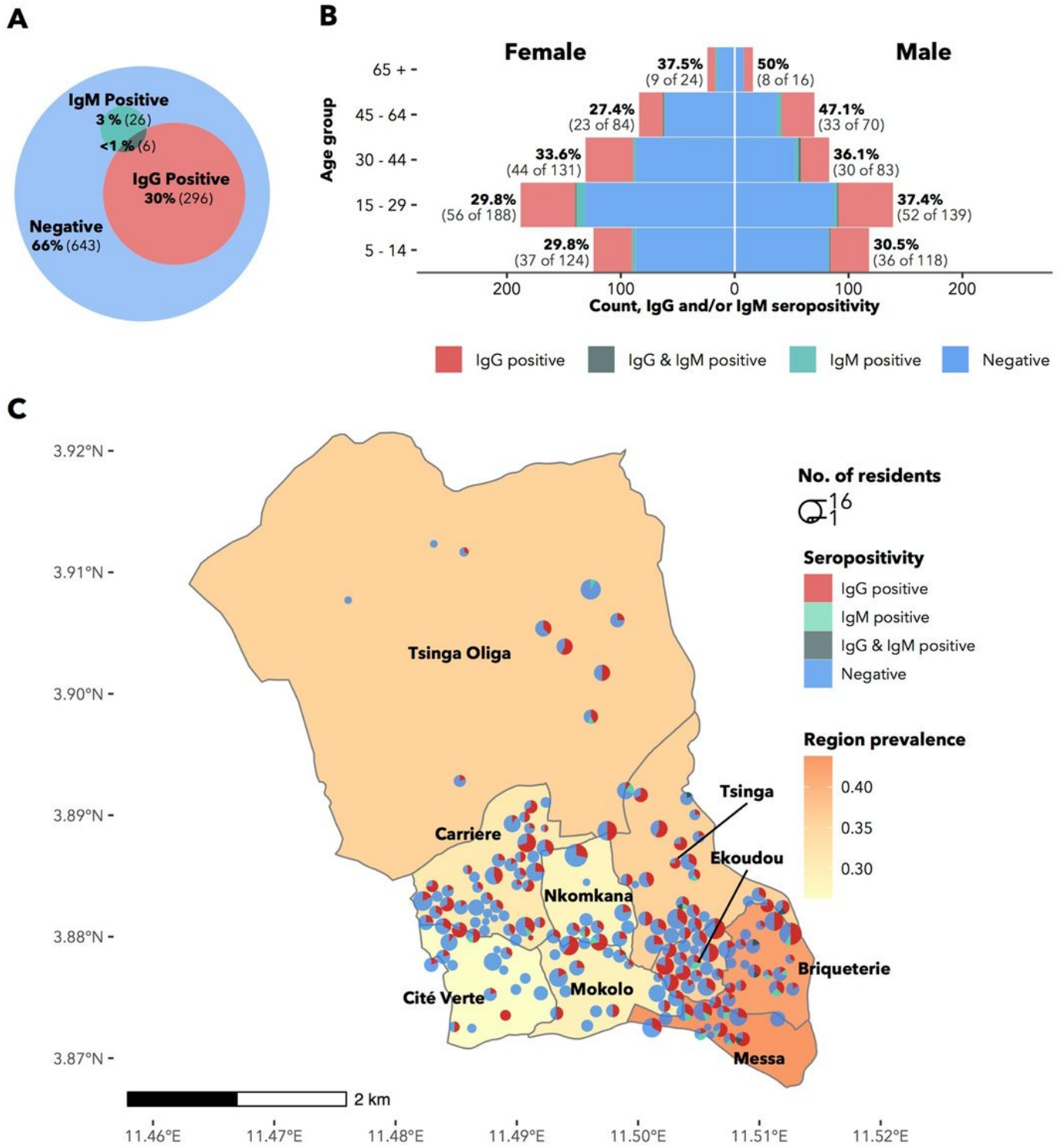
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# Figures



**Figure 1**

Crude IgG and IgM seroprevalence: A. Euler diagram showing seropositivity of respondents by antibody test. B. Seropositivity of respondents by antibody test and age-sex stratum. Percentage labels indicate the proportion of each stratum that is IgG and/or IgM seropositive. C. Household and geographic variation in



seropositivity. Fill colour indicates the neighbourhood seroprevalence (IgG and/or IgM). Pie charts indicate household size, household location and the proportion of the household that is seropositive. Pie charts are dodged and jittered to avoid overlap and to preserve location anonymity. Five households are not shown due to improperly-coded or missing coordinates.

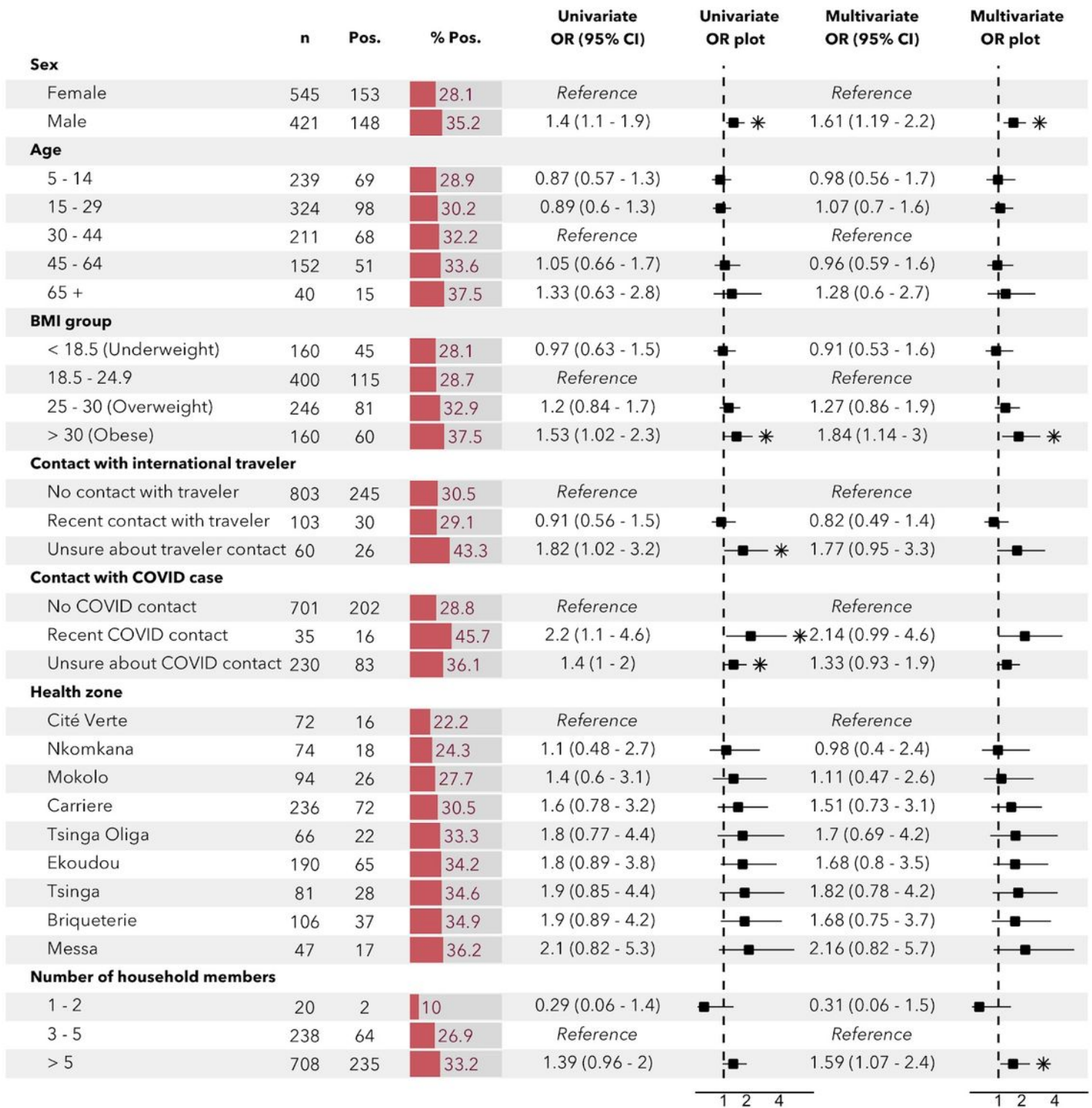


Figure 2

Risk factor analysis for IgG seropositivity n = 966. Based on logistic models with household random intercepts. Asterisks indicate significance at a 0.05 alpha level. OR: Odds ratio. 41 individuals (4%) were dropped due to missing covariables. Recent contact indicates contact since March 1st, 2020. A "COVID case" is a confirmed or suspected COVID-19 case. Variables that were found to be not significant at a 0.30 alpha level, and which were not controlled for in the multivariable regression, include presence of comorbidities, breadwinner status, adherence to social distancing rules, household neighbourhood and presence of children in the household.

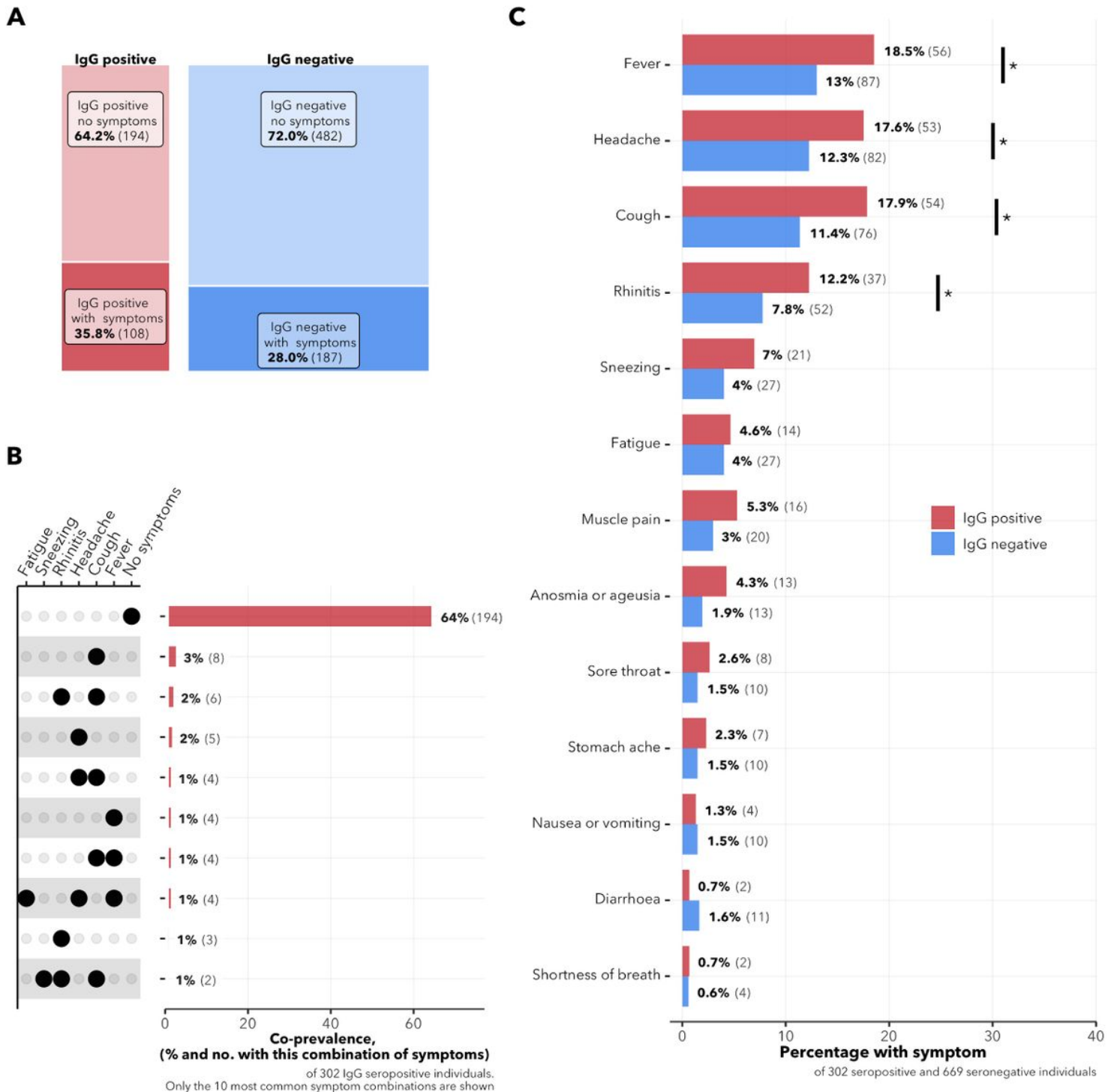


Figure 3

COVID-compatible symptoms of survey participants. Participants reported any COVID-compatible acute symptoms (all shown in panel C), which were experienced between March 1, 2020 and the date of survey. A. Matrix plot showing the intersection of symptomatology with IgG seropositivity. The area of each rectangle is proportional to the number of respondents in the category. B. The ten most common symptom profiles among IgG seropositive individuals. C. Comparison in frequency of symptoms between IgG seropositive and seronegative individuals.  $\chi^2$ -square: \*  $p < 0.05$

## Supplementary Files

This is a list of supplementary files associated with this preprint. Click to download.

- [Appendix1.pdf](#)