Could this village save the world?

The first European to die of Covid-19 on the Continent was from the small Italian community of Vo’ Euganeo. Now it has become a unique test-bed for scientists to learn how to combat the illness. Peter Conradi reports.
In a tiny town named Trevisan, which has half of its population of 73, the 73-year-old retired chemistry teacher Giuseppe Trevisan became Italy’s first known living victim of Covid-19. The date was 14 February, making him the source of a local outbreak of the virus.

Doctors there could not understand the diagnosis. Turetta battled long that week for breathing, and picked up in hospital. He died on Sunday. He asked if he had recently breathed, and they confirmed he had had pneumonia from Covid-19. At the same time, the 3,200 inhabitants of Trevisan, all from Padua University; Stefano Merigliano, an Italian-born professor of microbiology who is working with Crisanti. For his part, Merigliano believes: “It was really hard. We were completely isolated. The town hall and my pharmacy became a kind of hub. It was like an avalanche.”

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The hidden spread of Covid-19

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In what seems a strange example of how to stem the flow of a virus, those who tested positive to Covid-19 were told to self-isolate, on the basis of possible (but not certain) infection from their contacts. This was made easier by the village’s layout: its high density of houses and the fact that those houses are often three floors high and have a balcony. The village’s isolation and small population also made large-scale testing easier. In the early hours of Sunday, March 8, after about 10 days of isolation, those who tested positive for the virus were allowed out of the village to be reunited with their families. This was made easier because years of migration out of the area had led to the village being the recognized location for young people who could not work or who were married with families.

The results could help to explain one of the great mysteries of Covid-19: why some become seriously ill or die, while others shrug it off.

The terms had contained a special advantage: in the case of failure, the village would be reopened because they had not been fully tested for the virus. Only 353 of the village’s 400 residents had been tested and none were sick. The results of the second test, unlike the first, were disappointing. Seventeen of the 73 residents who tested positive had no symptoms. This means that the 2% rate of asymptomatic cases which had been observed in other parts of Italy was nowhere near to being established. The second test, unlike the first, showed that the village had not been successful in containing the virus.

As expected, the results showed that the more people who were tested, the more people were infected. And because the village was a unique situation, cases of asymptomatic spread were likely to be common. The village is in the province of Padua, near Venice, and is the site of one of Italy’s most successful clusters of cases. Among the 73 residents of Vo, many showed no symptoms. The hidden spread of Covid-19

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