

- Virus

Covid drains brains of memory

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A MILD case of Covid can cause “significant” damage to the brain and the shock extent of the neurobiological harm will be released today in the one of the biggest brain imaging studies since the pandemic hit.

Researchers compared brain scans from 785 people aged 51 to 81 before and after mostly mild infections.

The findings revealed the virus could cause shrinking of the brain in regions essential for processing smell, memory, cognition and emotion.

The study was published in the journal Nature.

Dr Susannah Tye, a senior research fellow at the Queensland Brain Institute at the University of Queensland, said the findings highlighted the need for further research into the long-term neurobiological effects of Covid-19 and how factors such as reinfection played into the level of damage.

“Long-term follow-up is also needed to determine whether these effects are reversed over time. However, this data clearly shows that even when only causing mild respiratory illness, the Covid virus can directly target and damage the brain,” Dr Tye said.

The brain expert said there was a need for sustained preventive measures to reduce the viral transmission, as well as further development of treatments that could target and protect the brain from Covid.

Professor Anthony Hannan, a NHMRC principal research fellow from the University of Melbourne said the study provided some of the strongest evidence yet that infection with the virus could affect brain function.

“Key questions arising from this new study include whether the brain and cognitive changes were directly due to the virus invading the brain, versus inflammation in the body spreading to the brain,” he said.