

Questions and Answers About Long COVID

A Guide for Outreach Workers



About This Guide

This guide will help you understand Long COVID. It contains common questions and answers about the condition. All information is taken from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and other health authorities. However, scientists are still studying Long COVID, and the information here might change as they learn more.

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What is Long COVID?

Long COVID is when COVID-19 causes **health problems** that last for **more than a month** after a person was first infected.

What are the symptoms of Long COVID?

Long COVID can have many different symptoms. Some of these symptoms are **similar to the symptoms** of COVID-19, such as:

- Fever
- Cough
- Trouble breathing
- Fatigue
- Headache
- Chest pain
- Joint or muscle pain
- Change in smell or taste, and
- Diarrhea or stomach pain

Other symptoms are **different**:

- Difficulty thinking or remembering
- Trouble sleeping
- Pounding heart
- Depression or anxiety
- Dizziness when you stand up
- Pins-and-needles feelings in your skin
- Rashes
- Changes in menstruation

Some people with Long COVID also develop a condition where they are **extremely fatigued**, no matter how much they rest.

People with Long COVID often have **different combinations** of symptoms, but not all of them. Symptoms may get worse after physical activity.

How long does Long COVID last?

Long COVID can last for **months** or possibly years.

Who can get Long COVID?

Anyone who has had COVID-19 can get Long COVID.

This includes people who **didn't get very sick** from COVID-19 when they were infected and people who had **no symptoms at all**.

Children and young people can get Long COVID too, though it is less common.

Are certain people more likely to get Long COVID?

Scientists are still trying to figure this out. At the moment, they think that people who have had more severe COVID-19, people with health conditions, and people who have not had the COVID-19 vaccine **may** be likely to get Long COVID.

How common is Long COVID?

Long COVID seems to be **fairly common**. A **low** estimate is that **1 out of 10** people who have had COVID-19 will get Long COVID. A **high** estimate is that **1 out of 5** will.¹

Does the COVID-19 vaccine protect me from Long COVID?

The COVID-19 vaccine means you are less likely to get sick and die from COVID-19. Scientists are still trying to figure out how much it protects you from Long COVID. However, early studies show that **the vaccine does help protect you from Long COVID**.

¹ World Health Organization: [https://www.who.int/news-room/questions-and-answers/item/coronavirus-disease-\(covid-19\)-post-covid-19-condition](https://www.who.int/news-room/questions-and-answers/item/coronavirus-disease-(covid-19)-post-covid-19-condition)

My health problems started after I recovered from COVID-19. Could they still be Long COVID?

Yes. Long COVID can **appear in different ways**. Some people may recover from COVID-19 at first, then get Long COVID symptoms later. Other people simply don't recover from COVID-19 for a long time.

My health problems come and go over time. Could they still be Long COVID?

Yes. Sometimes Long COVID symptoms will **get better**, or go away completely, **and then come back**.

Is Long COVID contagious?

No. Long COVID does not mean that there is still virus in your body. It happens because the virus affects your body in certain ways. You **cannot pass those effects on** to someone else.

Is there a test for Long COVID?

Unfortunately, no. Long COVID can be hard to identify because there are so many different symptoms, and because many other things could also cause these symptoms.

Sometimes, doctors will do blood tests or heart tests on patients with Long COVID, and the results will come back normal. That's why it is very important to **tell a healthcare provider if you have had COVID-19** at any point.

What should I do if I think I have Long COVID?

Talk to a healthcare provider. Before you go, the CDC suggests that you write down (or think about) these things so you can share them during your appointment:

- Your symptoms
- When you had COVID-19
- When the symptoms started
- Any other tests you've had for these symptoms, and the results
- Any treatments you've had for these symptoms, and the results
- How often the symptoms occur
- What makes the symptoms better or worse
- How the symptoms affect your life and work

Is there a treatment or cure for Long COVID?

Unfortunately, there is **no specific treatment** for Long COVID. However, a healthcare provider may be able to **help you with your symptoms.**

Will I recover from Long COVID?

Your recovery will depend on what symptoms you have. Studies show that people with Long COVID can **improve over time.** However, scientists are still studying this question.

I don't know if I can afford to see a healthcare provider for Long COVID. What should I do?

Many areas have community and migrant health centers. These health centers are free or low-cost, depending on your income. You do not have to have insurance to go to a health center. Additionally, you will not be turned away, even if you can't pay. Community and migrant health centers may even provide transportation.

What else can I do to protect myself and my family against Long COVID?

The best way to protect yourself and your family from Long COVID is **not to get COVID-19**. You should continue to **practice prevention**, including by getting all doses of the COVID-19 **vaccine** and wearing a mask in crowded areas.

It is also possible that **Paxlovid** – a medicine that helps symptoms for people with severe COVID-19 – **lowers the risk** of Long COVID. If you do get COVID-19, talk to your doctor about whether Paxlovid is a good choice for you.

What if Long COVID affects my ability to work?

The U.S. government recognizes that Long COVID can be a **disability**. A disability is when a condition makes it **harder to do normal activities**, such as walk or concentrate, or when it affects your body in a major way. It can be permanent or temporary.

This means that if you have Long COVID, you may have certain legal protections.

For example, if you are still **able to do your job**, but you need a little extra **support** (for example, you need a chair to sit down in when you're tired, or you need to switch to different task on the farm) **your employer is required to provide it**.

This extra support is called an "**accommodation**."

Your employer is not allowed to discriminate against you because you have a disability -- **regardless of your immigration status**. This means that, even if you are undocumented, your employer is required to provide you with an accommodation.

It may be helpful for a healthcare provider to **document your condition** before you ask for an accommodation.

If you are not able to work, you may be eligible for **disability benefits**. However, this often **does depend on your immigration status, as well as many other factors**. Talk to a lawyer specializing in workplace rights to learn more.

Tips and Strategies for Outreach Workers

1. Mental health care

People with Long COVID may struggle emotionally as well as physically. Talk with them about mental health care, and answer any questions they have about who it's for and how it can help. You can learn more about mental health care [here](#).

Find out about free and low-cost mental health care in your area. Some health centers offer it, and it may be covered under Medicaid and Affordable Care Act plans. You can also call the NAMI hotline at any time to speak to a trained mental health professional: 800-950-NAMI. The hotline is free and available in both English and Spanish.

2. Getting a Long COVID Diagnosis

Long COVID is hard to diagnose because there is no single test. As a result, people with Long COVID may have to go to multiple appointments to get their diagnosis. This can be difficult if they can't afford to miss work, or if they don't have transportation.

Find out if the health centers in your area offer appointments after work or on the weekends. Ask if the health centers offer transportation support, or if there is a mobile health clinic.

It can also be hard to diagnose Long COVID because there are so many different symptoms. Offer to help patients answer the questions on page 5 of this guide, going over all of the symptoms of Long COVID together. This will help them give the healthcare provider a more accurate picture of their illness.

3. Affording Medical Care for Long COVID

Because Long COVID is a long-term or chronic condition, it can become expensive. One solution is to help patients become familiar with their local community or migrant health center, where care is free or low-cost.

You can also connect patients to a health insurance navigator to see if they are eligible for health insurance through the Affordable Care Act (ACA) or Medicaid. Health insurance does

not cover all the costs of medical care, but it usually means patients don't have to pay as much at one time. You can learn more about health insurance [here](#). Everyone who is authorized to be in the United States, except DACA recipients, is eligible for ACA health insurance. Undocumented immigrants are not.

4. Managing Long COVID

Even though there is no cure for Long COVID, there are many things we can do to make the lives of Long COVID patients easier. When you talk to someone with Long COVID, ask about other kinds of assistance that might be helpful, besides medical assistance. Do they need support with childcare? Transportation? Rent? Once you've determined this, you can connect them to the appropriate resources in your community.

Sources

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