

# **Long COVID or Post-COVID Conditions**

## **DEFINITION Long COVID**

Some people who have been infected with the virus that causes COVID-19 can experience long-term effects from their infection, known as Long COVID or Post-COVID Conditions (PCC). Long COVID is broadly defined as signs, symptoms, and conditions that continue or develop after initial COVID-19 infection. This [definition](#) of Long COVID was developed by the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) in collaboration with CDC and other partners.

People call Long COVID by many names, including Post-COVID Conditions, long-haul COVID, post-acute COVID-19, long-term effects of COVID, and chronic COVID. The term post-acute sequelae of SARS CoV-2 infection (PASC) is also used to refer to a subset of Long COVID.

## **What You Need to Know**

- Long COVID can include a wide range of ongoing health problems; these conditions can last weeks, months, or years.
- Long COVID occurs more often in people who had severe COVID-19 illness, but anyone who has been infected with the virus that causes COVID-19 can experience it.
- People who are not vaccinated against COVID-19 and become infected may have a higher risk of developing Long COVID compared to people who have been vaccinated.
- People can be reinfected with SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19, multiple times. Each time a person is infected or reinfected with SARS-CoV-2, they have a risk of developing Long COVID.
- While most people with Long COVID have evidence of infection or COVID-19 illness, in some cases, a person with Long COVID may not have tested positive for the virus or known they were infected.

In July 2021, Long COVID was added as a recognized condition that could result in a disability under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). Learn more: [Guidance on](#)

## [“Long COVID” as a Disability Under the ADA.](#)

### **About Long COVID**

Long COVID is a wide range of new, returning, or ongoing health problems that people experience after being infected with the virus that causes COVID-19. Most people with COVID-19 get better within a few days to a few weeks after infection, so at least four weeks after infection is the start of when Long COVID could first be identified. Anyone who was infected can experience Long COVID. Most people with Long COVID experienced symptoms days after first learning they had COVID-19, but some people who later experienced Long COVID did not know when they got infected.

There is no test that determines if your symptoms or condition is due to COVID-19. Long COVID is not one illness. Your healthcare provider considers a diagnosis of Long COVID based on your health history, including if you had a diagnosis of COVID-19 either by a positive test or by symptoms or exposure, as well as doing a health examination.

### **Science at CDC**

Scientific evidence and studies behind Long COVID

[Science behind Long COVID](#)

### **Symptoms**

**People with Long COVID may experience many symptoms.**

People with Long COVID can have a wide range of symptoms that can last weeks, months, or even years after infection. Sometimes the symptoms can even go away and come back again. For some people, Long COVID can last weeks, months, or years after COVID-19 illness and can sometimes result in disability.

Long COVID may not affect everyone the same way. People with Long COVID may experience health problems from different types and combinations of symptoms happening over different lengths of time. Though most patients' symptoms slowly improve with time, speaking with your healthcare provider about the symptoms you are experiencing after having COVID-19 could help determine if you might have

Long COVID.

People who experience post-COVID conditions most commonly report:

### **General symptoms (*Not a Comprehensive List*)**

- Tiredness or fatigue that interferes with daily life
- Symptoms that get worse after physical or mental effort (also known as “[post-exertional malaise](#)”)
- Fever

### **Respiratory and heart symptoms**

- Difficulty breathing or shortness of breath
- Cough
- Chest pain
- Fast-beating or pounding heart (also known as heart palpitations)

### **Neurological symptoms**

- Difficulty thinking or concentrating (sometimes referred to as “brain fog”)
- Headache
- Sleep problems
- Dizziness when you stand up (lightheadedness)
- Pins-and-needles feelings
- Change in smell or taste
- Depression or anxiety

### **Digestive symptoms**

- Diarrhea
- Stomach pain

### **Other symptoms**

- Joint or muscle pain
- Rash
- Changes in menstrual cycles

### **Symptoms that are hard to explain and manage**

Some people with Long COVID conditions have symptoms that are not explained by tests or easy to manage.

People with Long COVID may develop or continue to have symptoms that are hard to explain and manage. Clinical evaluations and results of routine blood tests, chest X-rays, and electrocardiograms may be normal. The symptoms are similar to those reported by people with [myalgic encephalomyelitis/chronic fatigue syndrome \(ME/CFS\)](#) and other poorly understood chronic illnesses that may occur after other infections. People with these unexplained symptoms may be misunderstood by their healthcare providers, which can result in a long time for them to get a diagnosis and receive appropriate care or treatment.

► [Review these tips](#) to help prepare for a healthcare provider appointment for Long COVID.

## **Health conditions**

Some people experience new health conditions after COVID-19 illness.

Some people, especially those who had severe COVID-19, experience multiorgan effects or autoimmune conditions with symptoms lasting weeks, months, or even years after COVID-19 illness. Multi-organ effects can involve many body systems, including the heart, lung, kidney, skin, and brain. As a result of these effects, people who have had COVID-19 may be more likely to develop new health conditions such as diabetes, heart conditions, blood clots, or neurological conditions compared with people who have not had COVID-19.

## **People experiencing any severe illness may develop health problems.**

People experiencing any severe illness, hospitalization, or treatment may develop problems such as post-intensive care syndrome (PICS).

PICS refers to the health effects that may begin when a person is in an intensive care unit (ICU), and which may persist after a person returns home. These effects can include muscle weakness, problems with thinking and judgment, and symptoms of [post-traumatic stress disorder](#) (PTSD), a long-term reaction to a very stressful event. While PICS is not specific to infection with SARS-CoV-2, it may occur and contribute to the person's experience of Long COVID. For people who experience

PICS following a COVID-19 diagnosis, it is difficult to determine whether these health problems are caused by a severe illness, the virus itself, or a combination of both.

## **People More Likely to Develop Long COVID**

Some people may be more at risk for developing Long COVID.

Researchers are working to understand which people or groups of people are more likely to have Long COVID, and why. Studies have shown that some groups of people may be affected more by Long COVID. These are examples and not a comprehensive list of people or groups who might be more at risk than other groups for developing Long COVID:

- People who have experienced more severe COVID-19 illness, especially those who were hospitalized or needed intensive care.
- People who had underlying health conditions prior to COVID-19.
- People who did not get a COVID-19 vaccine.
- People who experience [multisystem inflammatory syndrome \(MIS\)](#) during or after COVID-19 illness.

## **Health Inequities May Affect Populations at Risk for Long COVID**

Some people are at increased risk of getting sick from COVID-19 because of where they live or work, or because they can't get health care. [Health inequities](#) may put some people from racial or ethnic minority groups and some people with disabilities at greater risk for developing Long COVID. Scientists are researching some of those factors that may place these communities at higher risk of getting infected or developing Long COVID.

## **Preventing Long COVID**

The best way to prevent Long COVID is to protect yourself and others from becoming infected. For people who are eligible, [CDC recommends staying up to date on COVID-19 vaccination](#), along with improving ventilation, getting tested for COVID-19 if needed, and seeking treatment for COVID-19 if eligible. Additional preventative measures include avoiding close contact with people who have a confirmed or suspected COVID-19 illness and washing hands or using alcohol-based hand sanitizer.

Research suggests that people who get a COVID-19 infection after vaccination are less likely to report Long COVID, compared to people who are unvaccinated.

CDC, other federal agencies, and non-federal partners are working to identify further measures to lessen a person's risk of developing Long COVID. Learn more about [protecting yourself and others from COVID-19](#).

## **Living with Long COVID**

Living with a post-COVID condition can be hard, especially when there are no immediate answers or solutions.

People experiencing Long COVID can seek care from a healthcare provider to come up with a personal medical management plan that can help improve their symptoms and quality of life. [Review these tips](#) to help prepare for a healthcare provider appointment for Long COVID. In addition, there are many support groups being organized that can help patients and their caregivers.

Although Long COVID appears to be less common in children and adolescents than in adults, long-term effects after COVID-19 do occur in [children and adolescents](#).

Talk to your doctor if you think you or your child has Long COVID. Learn more: [Tips for Talking to Your Healthcare Provider about Post-COVID Conditions](#)

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