



FACTSHEET: LONG COVID

INTRODUCTION

Long COVID goes by different names. The World Health Organisation (WHO) refers to it as post-COVID-19 conditions¹. Post-COVID-19 condition, commonly known as long COVID, can affect anyone exposed to SARS-CoV-2, regardless of age or severity of original symptoms. It is defined as the continuation or development of new symptoms three months after the initial SARS-CoV-2 infection, with these symptoms lasting for at least 2 months with no other explanation. While common symptoms of long COVID can include fatigue, shortness of breath and cognitive dysfunction over 200 different symptoms have been reported that can have an impact on everyday functioning.² A post on DEVEX by Paul Adepoju on the 16 March 2023 – over 6.5 million South Africans could be affected by long COVID³

Whereas, the fewer COVID-19 most common symptoms are fever, dry cough, and tiredness. Other symptoms that are less common and may affect some patients include aches and pains, nasal congestion, headache, conjunctivitis, sore throat, diarrhoea, loss of taste or smell or a rash on skin or discolouration of fingers or toes. These symptoms are usually mild and begin gradually. Some people become infected but only have very mild symptoms and in most cases, people recover from the disease without needing hospital treatment. Similar to post-COVID-19 older people, and those with underlying medical problems like high blood pressure, heart and lung problems, diabetes, or cancer, are at higher risk of developing serious illnesses and need to seek healthcare support. Anyone can catch COVID-19 and become seriously ill. People of all ages who experience fever and/or cough associated with difficulty breathing/shortness of breath, chest pain/pressure, or loss of speech or movement should seek medical attention immediately⁴.

1 <https://www.who.int/europe/news-room/fact-sheets/item/post-covid-19-condition>

2 <https://www.who.int/europe/news-room/fact-sheets/item/post-covid-19-condition>

3 <https://www.devex.com/news/over-6-5-million-south-africans-could-be-affected-by-long-covid-105094>

4 <https://sacoronavirus.co.za/faqs/>

WHAT TO LOOK FOR	WHAT ARE THE FACTS
<p>What are the Symptoms of long COVID?</p>	<p>The most common symptoms include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shortness of breath. • Cognitive dysfunction, which people call brain fog, and fatigue. • Chest pain. • Muscle aches. • High fever. • Loss of smell and of taste. • There is higher risk of diabetes and heart disease after infection but maybe only temporarily⁵. <p>Other researchers have found more symptoms associated with long COVID such as⁶:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Heart and circulatory symptoms: • chest tightness or pain • heart palpitations • changes to heart rate <p>Mental health effects:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • symptoms of anxiety such as worrying, feeling on edge, having difficulty sleeping or trouble speaking. • symptoms of depression such as low mood, feeling helpless, having low motivation, or not enjoying usual activities. <p>Joint and muscle pain:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • muscle and joint pain • pain in the back or shoulders

5 https://www.gavi.org/vaccineswork/covid-risk-diabetes-and-heart-disease-higher-after-infection-maybe-only-temporarily?gclid=Cj0KCQjw0tKiBhC6ARIsAAOXutkcaQk9fNS4HgFHWGfTWGgXxUnkexCM8ykbor7XHX1XgNtM8y4FALK-caAnL3EALw_wcB

6 <https://www.bhf.org.uk/informationsupport/heart-matters-magazine/news/coronavirus-and-your-health/long-covid>

<p>What is the care for long COVID?</p>	<p>If a person has recently recovered from COVID, it's worth being particularly vigilant about your health. Seek medical attention if you feel something isn't right by going to your nearest hospital or clinic.</p> <p>Long Covid care takes multidisciplinary care pathways that includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A primary care provider being the local clinics. • A relevant specialist at the hospitals. • A rehab professional such as: social care workers, psychosocial workers, and mental health professionals. • There has yet to be a specific treatment because it is yet to be known why long COVID develops. More research needs to be done. • Patients are at greatest risk during the first four weeks after COVID infection, should look out particularly of pulmonary embolism and diabetes diagnoses. <p>Patients at risk of diabetes should remain on high alert for at least three months after COVID infection. They should seek help immediately:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Should go for clinical and or public health interventions to reduce diabetes risk. • Should seek advice on healthy diet. • Should seek advice of types of exercise they could do to help with the recovery.
<p>How to Manage Long COVID</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Preventing SARS-CoV-2 infection is the best way to avoid the development of post-COVID-19 conditions or long COVID. • The use of vaccines is known to reduce hospitalization and mortality. • Public health measures such as mask-wearing in the appropriate places, physical distancing, and handwashing are also essential to prevent COVID-19.

