

Long COVID

Symptoms, support and how to protect yourself

Learn about the symptoms of 'long COVID', where to seek support, and how to protect yourself.

What is long COVID?

COVID-19, like many other viruses, can cause ongoing symptoms.

Long COVID is defined by the World Health Organisation as:

An illness that occurs in people who have a history of probable or confirmed SARS-CoV-2 (COVID-19) infection; usually within 3 months from the onset of COVID-19, with symptoms and effects that last for at least 2 months.

There is no test for long COVID. Diagnosing it means doctors have to rule out other conditions with similar symptoms.

Many people have ongoing symptoms for a few weeks after having COVID-19, such as cough or fatigue. However, most people do not develop long COVID.

What are some of the symptoms of long COVID?

Long COVID symptoms include:

- fatigue
- shortness of breath, or difficulty breathing
- memory, concentration or sleep problems
- a persistent cough
- chest pain
- difficulty speaking
- muscle aches
- loss of smell or taste
- depression or anxiety
- fever.

In children, symptoms predominantly include:

- mood symptoms
- fatigue
- sleep disorders.

Long COVID symptoms can be mild or severe, and people may experience one or more symptoms.

It can be difficult to tell the difference between long COVID and similar conditions, such as chronic fatigue syndrome, heart or neurological problems. So, it is important that you speak with your doctor if you experience symptoms you are concerned about.

How likely is it that someone will get long COVID?

It is not known how many people develop long COVID. However, it is likely less than one in 20 people.

There are many things that can change a person's risk of getting long COVID:

- **Vaccination** – it is less likely that a vaccinated person will develop long COVID.
- **The variant of COVID-19** – different variants of COVID-19 can affect a person's chances of getting long COVID. For example, the Omicron variant is less likely to result in long COVID than the Delta variant.
- **Your age and sex** – younger people and males are less likely to develop long COVID.
- **Underlying health conditions** – people with certain pre-existing conditions, such as hypertension, diabetes, obesity and asthma, are more likely to develop long COVID.

How long does long COVID last?

The average duration of long COVID is about 3 to 4 months, but this can vary.

A small number of people may develop long COVID that has an ongoing effect on their lungs, heart, blood clotting, or cause diabetes.

How do I get health care for long COVID?

Long COVID affects everyone differently. So, it's important you speak to a doctor.

A doctor will guide you on how to manage symptoms at home or will refer you to a specialist.

How can I protect myself from long COVID?

The best way to help protect yourself from long COVID is by trying not to get infected with COVID-19.

You can help protect yourself by practising COVID safe behaviours:

- stay up to date with vaccinations
- get tested if you have symptoms
- catch up with friends and family outdoors or in well-ventilated spaces
- wear a mask in public places where you can't maintain physical distancing
- wash or sanitise your hands regularly.