

Long COVID, Explained

October 28, 2022

This document was prepared on October 28, 2022 by Natalie Garrison. Natalie works for North Yorkers for Disabled Persons as an Outreach Communication Facilitator, Information Referral and Resources Support. She can be reached at natalie.nydp@gmail.com.

For most people, mild or moderate COVID-19 lasts about two weeks ([source](#)). However, for many people, COVID-19 causes chronic illness and other health issues, which can last for months, even years, after they stop testing positive for the illness ([source](#)).

Long COVID, also known as Long Haul COVID or Post COVID-19 Condition, refers to physical or psychological symptoms that persist more than 12 weeks after getting COVID-19 ([source](#)).

Long COVID is a complex condition with more than 100 reported symptoms or difficulties with everyday activities ([source](#)). This article will be just a simple overview. At the bottom of this document, there is information about an upcoming Long COVID information session (Nov. 8) where you learn about it in more detail and discuss specific questions with a doctor!

What is Long COVID?

It's **not** COVID-19. Long COVID symptoms can be quite different from those experienced during the initial infection ([source](#)). People with Long COVID are **not** contagious and cannot spread COVID-19 even though they may appear to have COVID-19 symptoms ([source](#)).

For some people, Long COVID symptoms don't show up until weeks after their initial infection ([source](#)). To be diagnosed with Long COVID, symptoms must last at least four weeks after they are no longer infected ([source](#)).

What are common symptoms of Long COVID?

Long COVID can affect both adults and children differently. Click [here](#) for more information.

For Adults

People can have other symptoms, but the most common ones that we know of in adults are:

- fatigue
- memory problems
- sleep disturbances
- shortness of breath
- anxiety and depression

- general pain and discomfort
- difficulty thinking or concentrating
- posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) ([source](#)).

Based on early reports in 2020, the World Health Organization estimates that at least 10% to 20% of people who had COVID-19 had 1 or more symptoms for 12 weeks or longer after they were initially diagnosed ([source](#)). These symptoms may be new or have continued since their initial COVID-19 infection ([source](#)).

More recent research shows that about 30% to 40% of people who had COVID-19 but weren't hospitalized still report symptoms beyond 12 weeks ([source](#)).

For Children

People can have other symptoms, but the most common ones that we know of in children are:

- fatigue
- shortness of breath
- lack of concentration, cognitive difficulties or delirium (confused or disoriented mental state)
- headaches
- abdominal pain
- muscle aches and pains or joint pains
- sleep problems ([source](#)).

There's still a lot that we don't know about Long COVID in children ([source](#)). Research about how often it occurs in children is still being collected, and we currently only have a small number of studies to analyze ([source](#)). These estimates will become more precise as further studies are conducted and new evidence is found ([source](#)).

Does Long COVID affect your mental health?

Many people with Long COVID commonly report impacts on their mental health, including anxiety, depression and PTSD ([source](#)). Talk to your health care provider if you are worried about your mental health ([source](#)). They can help you get the support you need ([source](#)).

If you want mental health support, but you aren't connected to a health care provider and don't know where to look for one, click [here](#) for advice from the Canadian Mental Health Association. Also, there are a number of crisis lines across Ontario. Click [here](#) and [here](#) to search for resources in your area. Click [here](#) for the Canada Suicide Prevention Service.

If you feel overwhelmed by the number of resources, call ConnexOntario, and they can help you navigate the system and provide information about counselling services and support services in your community. Click [here](#) to check it out!

Who is likely to get Long COVID?

We don't know why some people get Long COVID and others do not ([source](#)).

According to the Government of Canada, people who have been hospitalized or who needed intensive care during their recovery from COVID-19 appear to have a higher risk of experiencing it ([source](#)). However, you can still get it even if you didn't have symptoms or had only mild to moderate symptoms during the initial COVID-19 infection ([source](#)).

Early evidence suggests that being vaccinated with 2 or more COVID-19 vaccine doses may help reduce the risk of developing Long COVID if infected ([source](#)). The Government of Canada continues to monitor new developments to learn more about other preventive measures that can be taken ([source](#)).

Can it be treated?

There is currently no specific treatment for long COVID ([source](#)).

The best way to reduce your risk is to avoid getting COVID-19 by staying up-to-date with vaccines plus any booster dose(s), and continuing to follow public health measures whenever possible ([source](#)).

What is the Government of Canada doing about this?

The federal government is continually reviewing studies on Long COVID to identify:

- which symptoms are most common
- what puts people at risk of getting it
- how to prevent it
- how many individuals (adults and children) are having difficulties with regular activities and daily living ([source](#)).

The Public Health Agency of Canada also collaborated with Statistics Canada on a new population-based Canadian COVID-19 Antibody and Health Survey launched in April 2022 ([source](#)). The survey was sent to 100,000 randomly selected Canadians aged 18 years and older across the 10 provinces, and will be used to:

- estimate the percentage of Canadian adults who are living with Long COVID
- learn about symptoms, including severity, duration and impact on daily activities
- identify common factors of people who developed Long COVID ([source](#)).

This in-depth data blog is the first in a series of products related to this survey planned for winter and spring 2023. Results will further our knowledge about longer-term COVID-19 symptoms. Click [here](#) to check it out!

Also, if you are a Canadian suffering from Long COVID and you are unable to work because of your symptoms, you may be eligible for support through:

- Employment and Skills Development Canada's employment insurance (EI) program (click [here](#))
- Canada Pension Plan Disability benefits (click [here](#))

Upcoming Live Webinar on November 8: Long Haul COVID

Remember that Long Haul COVID (Post-COVID Conditions) are just other names for Long COVID.

Join Scarborough Centre for Healthy Communities' live Zoom webinar with guest speaker Dr. Alexandra Rendely, a physical medicine and rehabilitation physician at the University Health Network's Toronto Rehab and a clinician in quality and innovation at the University of Toronto. Bring your questions because there will be a live Q&A discussion period!

This live webinar with Dr. Alexandra Rendely will explain in greater detail what the research says on Long Haul COVID. This presentation will include: the difference between COVID and Long Haul COVID, how to reduce or prevent Long Haul COVID, and what support is out there for people impacted.

This is happening on Tuesday November 8, 2022 from 6:00 p.m. to 7:00 p.m.

Participants who complete the session evaluation will be entered into a draw to win a 50\$ gift card! Click [here](#) to register on Eventbrite.

Final Thoughts

If you are interested in more information, check out these resources:

Publications and information

- [CANCOV: Patient resources](#)
- [World Health Organization: Clinical long-term effects of COVID-19 \(PDF\)](#)
- [COVID Long Haulers: Report on Pan-Canadian Long COVID Impact Survey \(PDF\)](#)
- [Provincial Health Services Authority \(British Columbia\): Post-COVID-19 care and recovery](#)
- [Post COVID-19 Condition \(Ontario\): Guidance for Primary Care \(PDF\)](#)

If you have Long COVID, it's important to remember that you are not alone! Here is a list of online support groups where you can find support from other people who are going through similar experiences.

- [Long COVID Canada](#)

- Facebook group: Long COVID Kids (for children)
- COVID Long-Haulers Canada (provincial and territorial support groups are available)
- Facebook group: COVID Long-Haulers Support Group Canada
- Survivor Corps
- Long COVID Kids
- Long Covid SOS
- C19 Recovery Awareness

—

If you think you may be experiencing symptoms of COVID-19, take the self-assessment at www.ontario.ca/coronavirus. Follow all directions from your medical provider or your local health unit at the following phone numbers:

Telehealth Ontario: 1-866-797-0000

Toronto Public Health: 416-338-7600

Peel Public Health: 905-799-7700

Durham Region Health Department: 905-668-7711

York Region Public Health: 1-877-464-9675