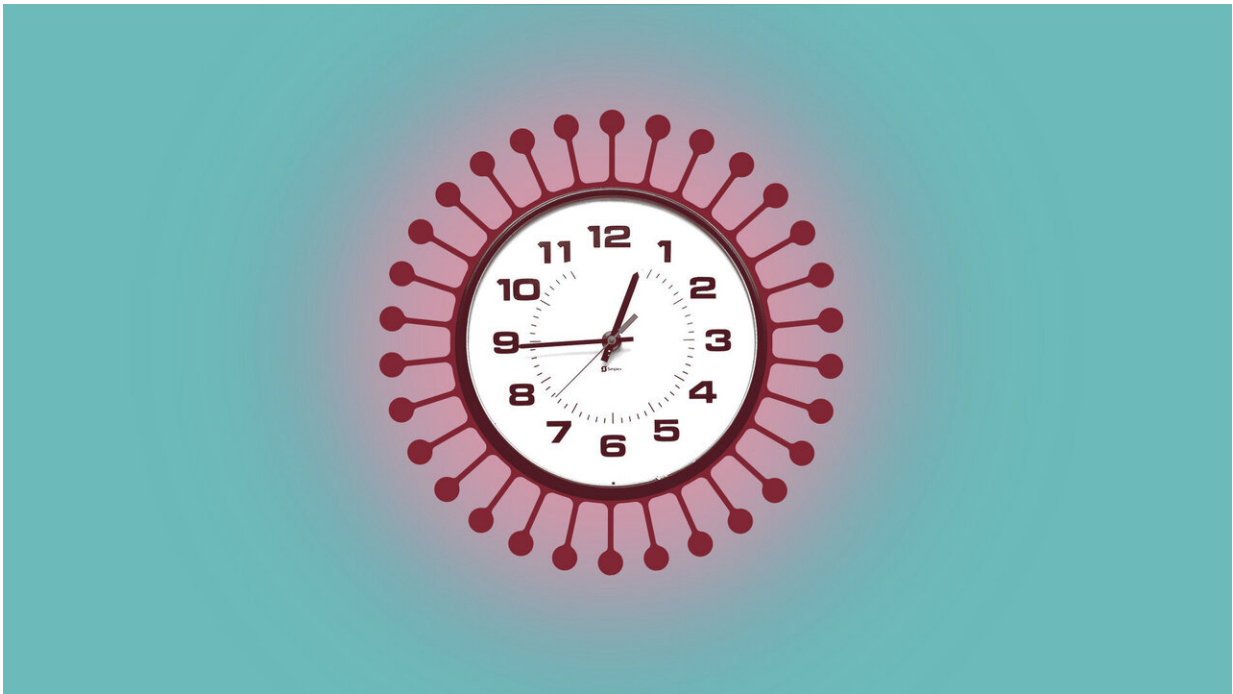


How long can I expect a COVID-19 illness to last?

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AP Illustration/Peter Hamlin;

How long can I expect a COVID-19 illness to last?

It depends. Most coronavirus patients have mild to moderate [illness](#) and recover quickly. Older, sicker patients tend to take longer to recover. That includes those who are obese, or have [high blood pressure](#) and other [chronic diseases](#).

The World Health Organization says recovery typically takes two to six weeks. One U.S. study found that around 20% of non-hospitalized individuals ages 18 to 34 still had symptoms at least two weeks after becoming ill. The same was true for nearly half of people age 50 and older.

Among those sick enough to be hospitalized, a study in Italy found 87% were still experiencing symptoms two months after getting sick. Lingering symptoms included fatigue and shortness of breath.

Dr. Khalilah Gates, a Chicago lung specialist, said many of her hospitalized COVID-19 patients still have coughing episodes, breathing difficulties and fatigue three to four months after infection.

She said it's hard to predict exactly when COVID-19 patients will return to feeling well.

"The unsettling part of all this is we don't have all the answers," said Gates, an assistant professor at Northwestern University Feinberg School of Medicine.

It's also hard to predict which patients will develop complications after their initial illness subsides.

COVID-19 can affect nearly every organ, and [long-term complications](#) can include heart inflammation, decreased [kidney function](#), fuzzy thinking, anxiety and depression.

It is unclear whether the virus itself or the inflammation it can cause leads to these lingering problems, said Dr. Jay Varkey, an Emory University infectious diseases specialist.

"Once you get over the acute illness, it's not necessarily over," he said.

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