

Health care costs add up in months after COVID-19 hospital stay, study finds

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Millions of Americans have needed hospitalization for COVID-19 since

the pandemic began, including hundreds of thousands in the recent Omicron surge.

And on top of the bills for their [hospital care](#), a new study suggests that many of them could face hundreds or thousands of dollars in costs after they leave the hospital.

The new study comes just a month after a previous one from the same team showed that getting hospitalized for a serious case of COVID-19 could mean hospital bills averaging \$1,600 to \$4,000 for many patients.

Now, the team has looked at costs for the health care that patients needed in the six months after their first COVID-related hospitalization. On average, patients with [private insurance](#) had bills just under \$290, and those with Medicare Advantage were asked to pay around \$270, suggesting that most patients had modest costs.

But for nearly 11% of privately insured patients and 9.3% of people covered by Medicare Advantage, the first six months after a COVID-19 hospitalization brought bills totaling \$2,000 or more.

For people hospitalized in 2021 and 2022, these costs were likely higher, the researchers note. That's because the data come from 2020, before [insurance companies](#) rolled back temporary voluntary waivers that had protected patients from out-of-pocket costs for COVID-related hospitalizations, including COVID readmissions.

Writing in the *American Journal of Managed Care*, the team of [health care](#) researchers from Michigan Medicine, the University of Michigan's academic medical center, and Boston University Questrom School of Business describe findings from their analysis of out-of-pocket costs billed to patients hospitalized for COVID-19 in March through June 2020. Bills through December 2020 were included.

For both the privately insured and Medicare Advantage populations, out-of-pocket costs for post-discharge were driven by additional hospitalizations, procedures, and prescription drugs.

The authors also looked at post-discharge bills among a comparison group of patients hospitalized for non-COVID pneumonia during this same time. The pneumonia patients actually had slightly higher out-of-pocket costs, potentially because most insurers waived out-of-pocket costs for COVID-19 readmissions in 2020.

"Although post-discharge out-of-pocket costs were modest for most COVID-19 survivors, about 10% of patients paid more than \$2,000. These costs will be on top of the large bills for COVID-19 hospitalization that patients are now getting, owing to the expiration of insurer cost-sharing waivers. The collective [costs](#) of hospitalization and care after discharge could result in financial toxicity for thousands of Americans," said Kao-Ping Chua, M.D., Ph.D., the study's lead author and an assistant professor of pediatrics at the U-M Medical School.

The authors call on insurers to reinstate waivers for COVID-related hospitalizations, to reduce the financial toll on [patients](#) and reduce the chance that people with COVID-19 will avoid seeking care out of cost concerns.

More information: Kao-Ping Chua et al, Out-of-Pocket Spending for Health Care After COVID-19 Hospitalization, *American Journal of Managed Care* (2022). www.ajmc.com/view/out-of-pocket-spending-for-health-care-after-covid-19-hospitalization

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