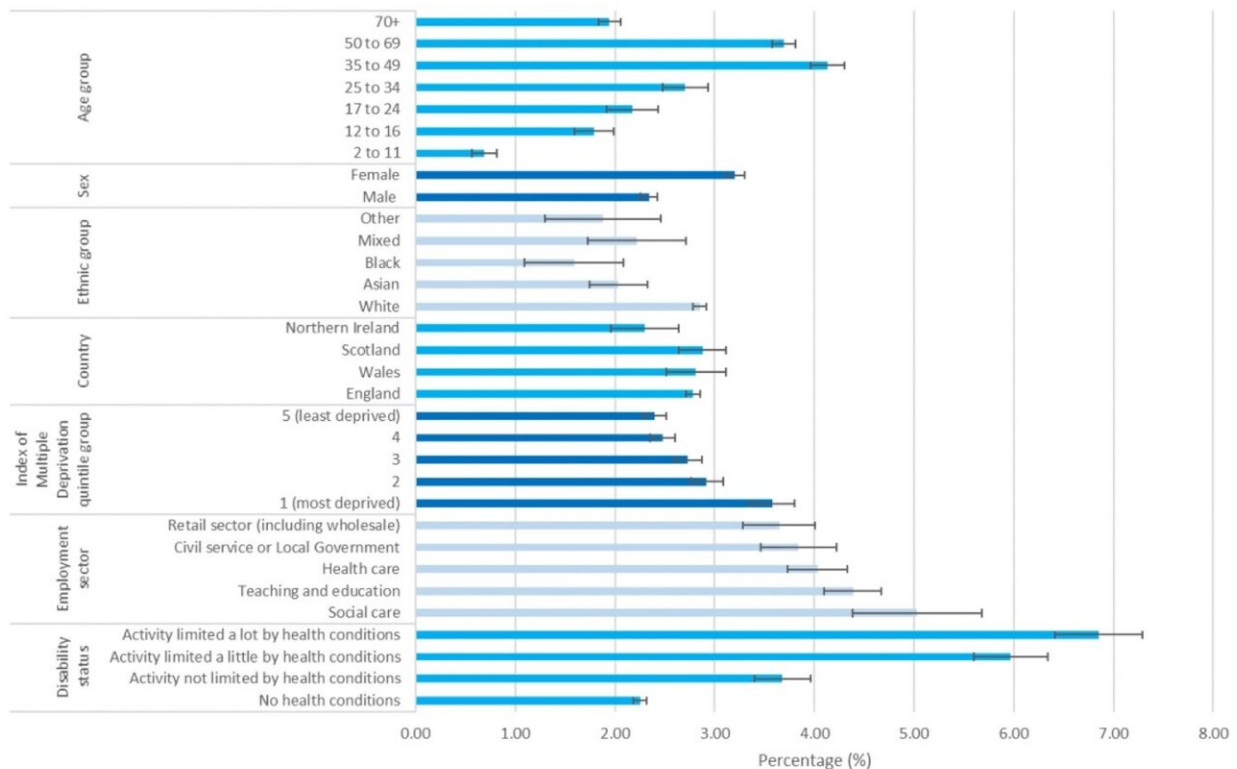


A third of long COVID patients suffer persistent smell loss, finds survey

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Estimated percentage of people living in private households with self-reported long COVID of any duration. UK Coronavirus Infection Survey: 4-week period ending April 3, 2022. Credit: *International Forum of Allergy & Rhinology* (2022). DOI: 10.1002/alr.23103

Smell loss is one of the most prevalent symptoms of long COVID

according to a new study from the University of East Anglia.

New research published today reveals that almost a third of long COVID patients suffer persistent smell loss, with almost a fifth experiencing loss of taste.

The team say that Christmas in particular can be a difficult time for people who have lost their sense of smell and taste—who will be missing out on smells like the Christmas tree and mulled wine, or being able to taste their Christmas dinner, mince pies and chocolates.

The research team investigated the prevalence of long COVID, and particularly ear, nose and throat related symptoms such as smell loss and parosmia—where people experience strange and often unpleasant smell distortions.

Lead researcher Prof Carl Philpott, from UEA's Norwich Medical School, said, "Long COVID is a complex condition that develops during or after having COVID, and it is classified as such when symptoms continue for more than 12 weeks.

"Symptoms include headache, myalgia, fatigue and loss of taste and smell. Parosmia can persist for months after [initial infection](#), alongside brain fog and memory loss.

"We wanted to find out more about the prevalence of long COVID, and particularly ear, nose and throat related symptoms such as smell loss and parosmia."

The team looked at results from the U.K. Coronavirus Infection Survey and analyzed information from over 360,000 people in March 2022.

A total of 10,431 participants identified as suffering from long COVID,

and were asked about the presence of 23 individual symptoms and the impact of the condition on their day-to-day activities.

Self-reported long COVID was defined as symptoms persisting for more than four weeks after the first suspected coronavirus infection but not explained by another condition.

Prof. Philpott said, "We found that almost three percent of the participants self-identified as having long COVID, and if we scale this up to reflect the U.K. population, it would equate to around 1.8 million people.

"We found that fatigue was the most common symptom, whilst ENT-related symptoms included a loss of smell and taste, vertigo, shortness of breath, wheezing and a sore throat.

"Almost a third of self-reported long COVID patients were suffering persistent smell loss, and almost a fifth were still experiencing loss of taste.

"This is really significant because we know that loss of smell and taste really impacts people's lives. Our previous research has shown that people who have lost their [sense of smell](#) also report high rates of depression, anxiety, isolation and relationship difficulties.

"It can disrupt almost every aspect of life—from everyday concerns about personal hygiene to a loss of sexual intimacy and the break-down of personal relationships.

"Christmas in particular can be a difficult time. So much of our celebration is based around festive smells and tastes—from the smell of the tree and mulled wine to tasting Christmas dinner, mince pies and chocolates.

"Long COVID is a growing problem in the U.K. and we need to focus resources on supporting people with loss of smell and taste after COVID infection," he added.

This research was led by the University of East Anglia in collaboration with the charity Fifth Sense which represents those with smell and [taste](#) disorders.

Duncan Boak, CEO and founder of Fifth Sense, said, "Fifth Sense continues to provide support to large numbers of people experiencing ongoing smell loss and parosmia as part of Long COVID symptoms. People tell us they've received little information or support from their doctors and are sometimes spending money on unprescribed and ineffective treatments they have read about online.

"Fifth Sense is growing our engagement with health and social care professionals to help them understand the significant impact that [smell](#) dysfunction has on so many aspects of people's lives. We want to see greater recognition across the healthcare profession as well as research into new treatments."

"The growing burden of long COVID in the United Kingdom—insights from the UK Coronavirus Infection Survey" is published in the journal *International Forum of Allergy and Rhinology*.

More information: Shyam Ajay Gokani et al, The growing burden of long COVID in the United Kingdom: Insights from the UK Coronavirus Infection Survey, *International Forum of Allergy & Rhinology* (2022).
[DOI: 10.1002/alr.23103](https://doi.org/10.1002/alr.23103)

Provided by University of East Anglia

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