

Long COVID's toll outlined in new report

June 6 2024, by Robin Foster



Long COVID continues to plague millions of Americans as the health costs of the pandemic linger four years later, a new report warns.

In a hefty [document](#) released Wednesday, the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine, a nongovernmental group that advises [federal agencies](#) on science and medicine, detailed the damage that Long COVID has wrought.

"Diagnosing, measuring and treating Long COVID is complicated. This disease, which has existed in humans for less than five years, can present differently from person to person and can either resolve within weeks or persist for months or years," Dr. Paul Volberding, chair of the committee that wrote the report, said in a [news release](#) announcing the findings.

"Our report seeks to offer a clear summary of what research has found so far about diagnosing Long COVID, and what the disease can mean for an individual's ability to function in their daily lives," added Volberding, who is also a professor emeritus in the department of medicine at the University of California, San Francisco.

What did the report discover?

"Long COVID can impact people across the life span, from children to [older adults](#), as well as across sex, gender, racial, ethnic and other demographic groups," it stated.

And the damage it inflicts can be widespread and complicated.

"Long COVID is associated with a wide range of new or worsening health conditions and encompasses more than 200 symptoms involving nearly every organ system," the report added.

Here are some of the key findings from the committee of 14 doctors and researchers, as reported by the New York Times:

- Nearly 18 million adults and nearly 1 million children have had Long COVID at some point. Surveys showed that its prevalence decreased in 2023 but has inexplicably risen this year. As of January, data showed nearly 7% of adults in the United States had Long COVID.
- There is still no standardized way to diagnose the condition and no treatments to cure it. "There is no one-size-fits-all approach to rehabilitation, and each individual will need a program tailored to their complex needs," the report said.
- Some of the most troublesome symptoms, such as brain fog and chronic fatigue, can prevent people from returning to work and should make them eligible for disability payments. "Long COVID can result in the inability to return to work [or school for children and adolescents], poor quality of life, diminished ability to perform activities of daily living, and decreased physical and cognitive function for six months to two years or longer," the report noted.
- People who had more severe COVID are more likely to develop Long COVID. Those who were sick enough to be hospitalized were two to three times as likely to develop Long COVID. Still, "even individuals with a mild initial course of illness can develop Long COVID with severe health effects," the report said.
- Women are nearly twice as likely to develop Long COVID. Other [risk factors](#) include not being adequately vaccinated, having preexisting medical conditions or disabilities and smoking.
- Children are less likely than adults to develop Long COVID and are more likely to recover from it, but some youngsters "experience persistent or intermittent symptoms that can reduce their quality of life," the report said.
- There's some evidence that many people's symptoms do diminish after a year. But other research suggests that recovery slows down or plateaus after that first year, the report said. "Long

COVID appears to be a chronic illness, with few patients achieving full remission," the [report](#) said.

- Some symptoms mirror other conditions that emerge following infections, including [chronic fatigue syndrome](#), fibromyalgia and [postural orthostatic tachycardia syndrome](#) (POTS).
- The biological cause of Long COVID is unclear. Theories include inflammation, fragments of remaining virus and immune system dysregulation.
- Long COVID presents more obstacles for people who face [economic challenges](#) or discrimination because of their race or ethnicity, where they live or how much education they have.

More information: The CDC has more on [Long COVID](#).

National Academy of Sciences, [report](#), June 5, 2024

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