

COVID-19 rapid guideline summary: managing the long-term effects of COVID-19

[Nice national guideline NG188, December 2020](#)

This rapid guideline is a [‘living’ guideline](#) - evidence may emerge that can result in changes to the original guideline. This summary was correct at the time of publication.

The stage of COVID-19 infection is determined by the duration of signs and symptoms:

- Acute COVID-19 - up to 4 weeks
- Ongoing symptomatic COVID-19 - from 4 to 12 weeks
- Post-COVID-19 syndrome - longer than 12 weeks; signs and symptoms may develop during or after an infection that are not better explained by an alternative diagnosis
- Long COVID - includes both ongoing symptomatic COVID-19 and post-COVID-19 syndrome.

Identification of ongoing symptomatic COVID-19 or post-COVID-19 syndrome

Give people with suspected or confirmed acute COVID-19, and their carers and families where appropriate, information about:

1. Common new or ongoing symptoms post-acute infection (some people, such as children and the elderly, may present with symptoms other than those listed below). Symptoms can be wide-ranging, fluctuating, change in nature over time and affect people in different ways at different times:

Respiratory symptoms

- Breathlessness
- Cough

Cardiovascular symptoms

- Chest tightness
- Chest pain
- Palpitations

Generalised symptoms

- Fatigue
- Fever
- Pain

Neurological symptoms

- Cognitive impairment ('brain fog', loss of concentration or memory issues)
- Headache
- Sleep disturbance
- Peripheral neuropathy symptoms (pins and needles and numbness)
- Dizziness
- Delirium (in older populations)

Gastrointestinal symptoms

- Abdominal pain
- Nausea
- Diarrhoea
- Anorexia and reduced appetite (in older populations)

Musculoskeletal symptoms

- Joint pain
- Muscle pain

Psychological/psychiatric symptoms

- Symptoms of depression
- Symptoms of anxiety

Ear, nose and throat symptoms

- Tinnitus
- Earache
- Sore throat
- Dizziness
- Loss of taste and/or smell

Dermatological

- Skin rashes

2. Expectations of recovery:

- symptoms usually resolve by 12 weeks
- development of ongoing symptomatic COVID-19 or post COVID-19 syndrome is not related to the severity of the acute COVID-19 infection.

3. Self-management advice (see Management of confirmed ongoing symptomatic COVID-19 or post-COVID-19 syndrome).

4. When to contact their healthcare professional.

5. Who to contact if there is concern about symptoms that are new, ongoing or worsening - especially if symptoms occur more than 4 weeks after the start of acute COVID-19.

Presentation of symptoms 4 to 12 weeks after the start of acute COVID-19 should raise suspicion for ongoing symptomatic COVID-19, or if symptoms have not resolved after 12 weeks, post-COVID-19 syndrome may be suspected. People who have been in hospital with acute COVID-19 should receive a follow-up 6 weeks post-discharge to assess for new or ongoing symptoms.

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Assessment

When assessing new or ongoing symptoms, consider: type and severity of the symptoms, including previous symptoms, relationship between the onset of acute COVID-19 and the timing and duration of symptoms, comorbidities and patients' history for confirmed or suspected cases of acute COVID-19. Discuss with the person the impact the condition has had on their daily activities and life, including work, education, well-being, mobility and independence.

Referral

If there is concern, from either the patient or the pharmacist, about new or ongoing symptoms 4 weeks or more after acute COVID-19 infection, refer patients for medical review, where they will be offered an initial consultation. Screening questionnaires, such as the [Yorkshire rehab questionnaire](#) and the [Newcastle screening tool](#), may be used as part of the initial consultation. However, none of these are validated for this use and should only be used in combination with a complete medical review.

Urgent referral to acute services is required if people have symptoms that could represent a complication of COVID-19 that is acute or life-threatening. This includes but isn't limited to:

- severe hypoxaemia or oxygen desaturation on exercise
- signs of severe lung disease
- cardiac chest pain
- multisystem inflammatory syndrome (in children).

Management of confirmed ongoing symptomatic COVID-19 or post-COVID-19 syndrome

Ensure people are aware of:

- self-management measures, such as setting realistic goals
- where to go for advice and support (eg support groups, online forums or apps)
- support that is available from other services and how to access it (eg housing, social care, employment, financial advice)
- new or continuing symptoms of COVID-19, provided to them in a format they can share with family, carers or friends

People who request vitamins or supplements for management of COVID-19 symptoms should be advised that it is unknown if these are beneficial, harmful or have no effect on treatment. The use of a tracking app or recording of goals, symptoms and recovery is recommended.

Additional support may be required for older people eg short-term care packages, support with isolation, loneliness and bereavement.

Monitoring and follow-up

People who have ongoing symptomatic COVID-19 or post-COVID-19 syndrome should:

- know how often follow-up and monitoring is required
- be aware of measuring parameters and when to seek help if they are conducting self-monitoring of heart rate, blood pressure or pulse oximetry
- be aware of new or worsening symptoms that may require them to contact their healthcare professional.