



(<http://www.ameli.fr/l-assurance-maladie/connaitre-l-assurance-maladie/getting-informed-about-health-insurance-ams>)

Understanding and managing Long COVID requires a patient-led approach

Statement by Professor Martin McKee, European Observatory on Health Systems and Policies

25 February 2021

Over the past year, we have become used to watching the daily toll of cases and deaths from COVID as they rise and fall. Yet we now know that this is only a partial picture of the effects of the pandemic. From early on, we have been hearing from people who have had COVID but, instead of making the expected full recovery, they have continued to suffer, sometimes for months. We probably should have expected this. Although many viral infections are self-limiting, making people feel unwell for only a few days before clearing up, others cause long-term problems. Early on, we realized that this new coronavirus was not just causing pneumonia. In some patients it was attacking many different body systems, such as the heart and blood vessels, the brain and the kidneys.

Inevitably, our initial efforts concentrated on saving the lives of the tens of thousands of people who were most severely ill and it took some time before we turned our attention to those who were suffering persisting problems. Indeed, we owe a debt to many of these patients, who came together to raise awareness of this condition. As a consequence, we now know much more about the condition we call "long COVID", the name given by patients. We know that about a quarter of people who have had the virus experience symptoms that continue for at least a month. About 1 in 10 is still unwell after 12 weeks. And with the passage of time we are realizing that many are suffering for much longer.

This is a condition that can be extremely debilitating. Those suffering from it describe a varying combination of overlapping symptoms. These include chest and muscle pain, fatigue, shortness of breath and what patients describe as brain fog.



25 February 2021 – Statement by Professor Martin McKee

We are beginning to understand why people get these symptoms. They include persistence of the virus in some parts of the body that are sheltered from the immune system, such as the brain; direct damage to organs, such as the heart and lungs, and also the pancreas, causing some new cases of diabetes; and blood clotting, which can cause heart attacks and strokes. However, there is a huge variety in both the pattern of symptoms and their severity.

One very important thing to note is that the likelihood of getting long COVID does not seem to be associated with the severity of the initial infection. Some people with mild symptoms at the onset still get it. However, some people seem to be at greater risk, including women, although we also know that they are less likely to die from COVID, and health workers.





This is a condition that can have a huge impact on people's lives. Many are unable to return to work or have a social life. Many have described how it affects their mental health, especially as the course of the condition is often fluctuating; just as they feel they are getting better the symptoms return. And of course it has important economic consequences for them, their families and for society.

We have published this policy brief to raise awareness of this condition. We hope it will help those responsible for health services to appreciate the complexity of long COVID and give them up-to-date information about it.

So what needs to happen now?

We need multidisciplinary, multispecialty approaches to assessment and management. We need to work with patients and their families to develop new care pathways, including rehabilitation and online support tools. We need to look at employment rights, sick pay policies and access to benefit packages for those affected. And we need much more research, again with patients fully involved in deciding what questions to ask and how to answer them.

[Policy brief – In the wake of the pandemic: preparing for long COVID \(2021\)](https://www.euro.who.int/en/about-us/partners/observatory/publications/policy-briefs-and-summaries/in-the-wake-of-the-pandemic-preparing-for-long-covid-2021) (<https://www.euro.who.int/en/about-us/partners/observatory/publications/policy-briefs-and-summaries/in-the-wake-of-the-pandemic-preparing-for-long-covid-2021>)

   (<https://feeds.feedburner.com/who/euro/obs/rss/en>) 

This site is hosted by  **World Health Organization**
Regional Office for Europe (<https://www.euro.who.int/en>)

[Contact us](https://www.euro.who.int/en/about-us/partners/observatory/admin/contact) (<https://www.euro.who.int/en/about-us/partners/observatory/admin/contact>) | [Privacy statement](https://www.euro.who.int/en/about-us/partners/observatory/admin/privacy-statement) (<https://www.euro.who.int/en/about-us/partners/observatory/admin/privacy-statement>)

© 2021 European Observatory on Health Systems and Policies