

Long COVID

What you need to know

What is it?

Long COVID is the common name for the symptoms and effects of the coronavirus that can last or appear more than 4 weeks after the initial infection.

Long COVID is a **new disease that we are all slowly learning about**. For that reason, information about it is bound to change. But here's what we know so far.

There are no conclusive data on the number of long COVID cases in Québec. According to the most recent international studies:¹

- In people not admitted to hospital: 20-30% have at least one persistent symptom after approximately one month and at least 10% after three months;
- In people admitted to hospital: 50-89% have at least one persistent symptom after two months;
- A significant percentage of people could have symptoms that persist for more than six months after being diagnosed with COVID-19.

Long COVID can affect healthy young people, adults, and seniors who do not have any other diseases. Even people who had mild symptoms of the disease can have long COVID.² Some recent studies also suggest that people who were initially asymptomatic (symptom-free) can develop long COVID.³ That means that the initial severity of COVID-19^{1,4} is not a predictor of the appearance of long COVID. What's more, the causes and factors that contribute to the development of long COVID are not yet known with any certainty.¹

Long COVID is different in everyone.

A wide variety of symptoms have been reported and can fluctuate over time. Some people will experience flare-ups: short periods of feeling well alternating with periods of active symptoms.¹ Here are the most frequently reported symptoms:⁵

- fatigue;
- chest or cardiorespiratory symptoms: dyspnea (difficulty breathing), shortness of breath, chest pain, cough, cardiac arrhythmia (abnormal heart rhythm);
- neurological symptoms: anosmia (loss of smell), ageusia (loss of taste), or dysgeusia (change in taste);
- headache;
- memory or concentration problems;
- mental health disorders: anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress symptoms;
- sleep disorders;
- myalgia and arthralgia (muscle and joint pain).

Other symptoms have also been reported, including gastrointestinal issues (abdominal pain, nausea, vomiting, diarrhea), hair loss, dizziness, vision problems, sore throat, runny nose, weight loss or decreased appetite, and rash.⁵

One of the disabling symptoms reported by several people with long COVID is **post exertional malaise**. This consists of an increase in symptoms, often with a delayed onset (24-72 hours after the exertion), which take several days or even weeks to disappear. In this case, it's important to get a lot of rest and to limit physical and mental exertion, not to mention exposure to emotional stressors.

There is currently no diagnostic test for long COVID.

Long COVID is a diagnosis of exclusion that's made based on the person having had COVID-19, not having completely recovered, having the above-mentioned symptoms, and having no other medical cause to explain the symptoms.⁶

Little is known about the long-term evolution of long COVID.

However, many people who develop post-infection symptoms recover on their own in the months following the infection.^{7,8} In the meantime, people with the disease should seek out information and support to help them better understand and cope with the symptoms of the disease.

Health professionals also need to learn to recognize and adjust to this disease, in order to serve patients better. The scientific community and patients with long COVID are actively involved in finding answers about this disease, which will help to develop better care and services for people with long COVID.

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If you have questions about long COVID, please email us at: readaptation.covid.cisssmo16@sss.gouv.qc.ca.

Our mission

To maintain, improve, and restore the health and well-being of the Québec population by making accessible an array of integrated and quality health and social services, while contributing to the social and economic development of Québec.

Our vision

Accessible and efficient health care and services that adapt to the needs of Québécois.

Our goals

The CISSS de la Montérégie-Ouest achieves its goals through its innovative approaches and stands apart through:

- its exemplary offer of care and integrated services based on interdisciplinarity, accessibility, and adaptability to the needs of its population;
- its willingness to question and improve its professional, clinical, and administrative practices;
- its appreciation of its personnel and the implementation of human resource management practices;
- its strong relationships with its partners.

Our values

Our actions are guided by five equal and interconnected values: compassion, collaboration, commitment, confidence and consistency.