

Long COVID

What you need to know

What is it?

Long COVID is a new and complex disease.

It also goes by the names “**post-COVID conditions**”¹ and “**post-COVID syndrome**.”²

Long COVID is not COVID-19. Long COVID is the common name for the health condition of a person who meets the following criteria:¹

1. Confirmed or plausible initial COVID-19 infection;
2. Presence of signs and symptoms more than four weeks after initial infection;
3. Persistence or appearance of signs and symptoms that cannot be explained by another condition and that did not exist prior to infection.

There are still a significant number of people suffering from long COVID in Quebec and elsewhere in the world.

The proportion of people with long COVID varies between countries and studies, due in part to variable access to screening and different definitions and diagnostic criteria for the disease.³ Recent studies estimate that **21-23% of people who contract COVID-19 continue to have symptoms beyond four weeks.**³

The following **factors increase the risk** of long COVID:

- Female sex;
- Between the ages of 40 and 60;
- Comorbidities (presence of another disease), e.g., obesity, asthma, autoimmune disease;
- Hospitalization for COVID-19;
- Initial infection: severe or many different symptoms;

However, it is important to note that long COVID can also occur in people without these risk factors, for example, children³ or young adults,⁴ and in individuals with mild symptoms³ or who are asymptomatic (no symptoms at all).⁵

Conversely, vaccination reduces the risk of long COVID by 50% in people who contract COVID-19 and significantly reduces the risk of becoming infected with the disease in the first place.⁶

Long COVID is different in everyone.

More than 200 different symptoms have been identified,⁴ and these can fluctuate over time. Some people experience flare-ups: short periods of feeling well alternating with periods of active symptoms.⁷ Here are the main signs and symptoms (the most common are in bold):¹

General	Cardiorespiratory	Neurological
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • sustained debilitating fatigue • fever • post-exertional malaise* • hypersensitivity to stimuli • loss of appetite 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • arrhythmia (irregular heartbeat), palpitations, tachycardia (rapid heartbeat) • dyspnea (shortness of breath) • cough • orthostatic intolerance (development of symptoms when standing upright) • chest discomfort or pain 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • mental fog (cognitive difficulties)** • headache (mal de tête) • delirium (in seniors) • paresthesia ((numbness), burning sensations) • sleep problems • sensory impairment (smell, taste, blurred vision, neuropathic pain, etc.) • motor disorders (difficulty in pronouncing or articulating, etc.)
Dermatological	Musculoskeletal	ENT
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • skin rashes • hair loss 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • muscle, tendon or joint pain 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • tinnitus (ringing or buzzing or ringing in the ears) • dizziness • sore throat or ears • voice changes • difficulty swallowing
Gastrointestinal	Psychological	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • abdominal pain • nausea • diarrhea • vomiting 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • symptoms of anxiety or depression • symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder 	

* **Post-exertional malaise:** Aggravation of the signs and symptoms that occur following a physical, mental or emotional effort. Post-exertional malaise usually occurs within 12-72 hours after the activity.¹

** **Mental fog:** A person's subjective perception of not being able to think as clearly as usual.¹

Symptoms of long COVID can severely affect a person's quality of life, not to mention their ability to perform their daily tasks, recreational activities, work and/or studies.³

The arrival of new variants could also change the landscape in terms of the most common symptoms and the number of people with long COVID.



There is currently no diagnostic test for long COVID.

Long COVID is a diagnosis of exclusion, based on the person having had COVID-19, not having completely recovered, having the above-mentioned symptoms, and having no other medical condition to explain the symptoms.^{3,8}

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

Nearly half of people experiencing COVID-19 symptoms for four weeks will have naturally recovered by the 12th week.⁹ Others will recover more slowly, over a period of several months. Relapse periods may occur throughout the recovery trajectory. During the year following the infection, many people with long COVID will see their symptoms disappear completely.⁴ However, some people may continue to have symptoms over the long term.

After four weeks, it is recommended to document any symptoms still present and to seek information and support to better understand and cope with the disease.

It is also important for healthcare professionals and loved ones to learn about the disease and understand how to cope as well, which will better help those affected. More and more resources are available throughout Québec. Visit the ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux (MSSS) website: www.quebec.ca/en/health/health-issues/a-z/2019-coronavirus/long-covid.

References:

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For more information about long COVID, visit the CISSS de la Montérégie-Ouest website: www.santemonteregie.qc.ca/en/west/what-long-covid

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.