Information

Sheet Number:

Providing support for County Councillors

for County Councillors

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| Relevant SLT Director and sign-off date:  | Professor Trudi Grant, Director of Public Health29/04/2021 |

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| Date:  | 28 April 2021 |

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| To:  | Somerset County Council Elected members, Somerset Engagement Board Members |

**Long-term health effects of COVID-19**

We have received several questions about ‘Long COVID’ so we have put together this briefing which sets out what is currently known. The research and understanding of Long COVID is still in its infancy, there is much we don’t yet know, but below is a summary of the position to date.

The [long-term health effects of Covid](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-long-term-health-effects/covid-19-long-term-health-effects) are still unclear as we move into the second year of this new disease. This disease has been referred to as Chronic Covid syndrome, Post Covid Syndrome, post-acute sequela of SARS-CoV-2, as well as Long Covid. The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence ([NICE](https://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/ng188)) have separated the symptoms of Covid and the long term-effects of Covid into three groups:

* Acute Covid: Covid symptoms that last for up to 4 weeks.
* Ongoing symptomatic Covid: Covid symptoms that last for 4-12 weeks.
* Post-Covid syndrome: Covid symptoms that last for more than 12 weeks.

Long Covid is used to describe symptoms that last for weeks or months after the initial illness. Table 1 shows the recognised symptoms to date.

The Office for National Statistics ([ONS](https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/healthandsocialcare/conditionsanddiseases/bulletins/prevalenceofongoingsymptomsfollowingcoronaviruscovid19infectionintheuk/1april2021)) has estimated that 1.1 million people in the UK reported Long Covid symptoms in the four-week period ending 6 March 2021. One of the features of Long Covid is the wide range of symptoms. Some people also have symptoms that come and go. This can make managing the disease difficult. Some people who have lots of symptoms with Covid do not end up having long-term health effects. Some people who have no symptoms with Covid can still have some long-term health effects.

**Table 1 – Summary of recognised symptoms known to date**

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| **Respiratory symptoms:**- Breathlessness- Cough | **Neurological symptoms:**- Cognitive impairment- Headache- Sleep disturbance | **Musculoskeletal symptoms:**- Joint pain- Muscle pain |
| **Cardiovascular symptoms:**- Chest tightness- Chest pain- Palpitations | **Psychological symptoms:**- Symptoms of depression- Symptoms of anxiety |
| **Peripheral neuropathy symptoms:** - Dizziness- Delirium |
| **Ear, nose, and throat symptoms:**- Tinnitus- Earache- Sore throat- Dizziness- Loss of taste and/or smell |
| **Generalised symptoms:**- Fatigue- Fever- Pain |
| **Gastrointestinal symptoms:**- Abdominal pain- Nausea- Diarrhoea- Anorexia/reduced appetite  |
| **Dermatological symptoms:**- Skin rashes |

Around 20-30% of people with Covid who were not admitted to hospital have at least one long-term symptom around one month later. At least 10% of these people still have symptoms three months later. Around 50-89% of people who were admitted to hospital with Covid have at least one symptom after two months. Some people still have symptoms after six months.

The long-term effects of Covid are seen in both men and women, all age groups, and ethnic groups. We still do not know very much about the long-term health effects of Covid, and we do not know who is more likely to have more severe symptoms. We are still learning how long the illness lasts and how it can vary in different individuals.

The number of people with Long Covid continues to increase. It is not known how new variants may change the current evidence base. We do not have all the answers yet as Covid-19 is still very new. As the pandemic progresses, more research and evidence informs our understanding of this new disease.

**Key Points:**

* Long-term symptoms after Covid-19 are common, even in people who only had mild initial symptoms.
* Some people still have symptoms six months after initial illness.
* Everyone, including young people, should be aware that Covid-19 is indiscriminate and can have long-term and potentially devastating effects.
* Long Covid is still not well understood, though our knowledge about it is growing.

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