

Caregiver and COVID-19

What you need to know

What is it?

Most people with COVID-19 recover within two to four weeks. In some people, however, COVID-19 can cause symptoms or complications that persist or appear beyond this period. This is known as long COVID.

There are many symptoms of long COVID, including fatigue, shortness of breath, and even cognitive and mental health issues. The symptoms can be different for each person. They can also fluctuate from one day to the next and change over time. The symptoms of long COVID can also make everyday activities difficult and negatively affect quality of life.

The CISSS de la Montérégie-Ouest has developed **information sheets** to help people struggling with long COVID to better manage their symptoms. As an informal caregiver or a patient attendant, your close relationship with your person can play a role in improving their condition. In addition to helping the person ease back into their regular activities, you can also identify situations or changes in their condition that may need medical attention.

Helping your person ease back into their routine

As a general rule, daily physical, cognitive, and social activities help people to stay active and feel better. This is especially true for seniors, who need to guard against deconditioning.

However, in a person with long COVID, overexertion can make the symptoms worse. As an informal caregiver or a patient attendant, it's important that you help your person pace themselves in their physical and mental activities, and in their exposure to emotional stressors. In other words, it's important to find a balance between them staying active and not overdoing it, in order to prevent relapses (appearance/increase in symptoms) as much as possible.

Listening to your person will help you to cue into their limits and preferred activities. For example, they might prefer to do social or recreational activities instead of exercise.

Here are some examples of strategies you can use with your person

- Encourage them to participate actively in their everyday activities (e.g., washing, dressing, preparing meals), **but only within their limits**;
- Offer to break up their activities throughout the day to allow them to rest in between;
- Make sure they eat and drink enough, even if they don't feel hungry or thirsty;
- Suggest enjoyable activities that don't require a lot of energy, but that otherwise keep them active (e.g., playing games, drawing, listening to music).



When to consult?

Some symptoms require medical attention.

You'll need to be on the lookout for one or more of these symptoms:

- Sudden, temporary state of confusion;
- Diarrhea;
- Nausea;
- Fever (oral temperature above 37.8° or 1° above the usual temperature);
- Loss of or decreased appetite;
- Dehydration (e.g., dark urine, dry mouth, decreased sweating, thirst, decreased skin elasticity);
- Falls;
- Pressure ulcers (sores on the genitals, buttocks, tailbone, backs of upper thighs, or lower back);
- Severe physical inactivity;
- Signs of venous thrombosis (blood clot in the leg): heat, pain, swelling, often in the calf.

If one of the following symptoms appears suddenly or worsens significantly, this could be a medical emergency; call 911 immediately.

- Sudden, severe headache with nausea or vomiting;
- Severe vertigo;
- Loss of consciousness or seizures;
- Sudden weakness on one side of the body;
- Numbness;
- Problems speaking;
- Vision problems with headache;
- Balance problems.

If your person has a neurocognitive disorder (e.g., Alzheimer's disease), your role as an informal caregiver or patient attendant is even more important because they won't necessarily be able to tell you they're not feeling well.

Signs and symptoms to watch for:

- Behavioural signs: new behaviour or disappearance of an existing behaviour (e.g., unusual agitation, aggression, or irritability, or conversely, barely reacting);
- A change in level of autonomy (e.g., more trouble washing themselves, taking their medication, walking or making transfers, appearance of incontinence);
- Deviations from their daily routine (e.g., generalized weakness, loss of stamina, rapid onset of fatigue during everyday activities, altered sleep, significant loss of appetite, loss of interest in regular activities);
- Other signs of pain or intolerance to effort (e.g., frequent cough, unusual sweating, wincing in pain).

References:

CISSS de la Montérégie-Ouest (2021).
Recommandations intérimaires pour une réactivation
sécuritaire des personnes souffrant de la COVID longue.

If your person has one or more of the above-mentioned signs, seek medical attention quickly.

If you have questions about long COVID, please email us at: readaptation.covid.cisssmo16@ssss.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.