

Long COVID

What you need to know

ÉPREUVE DE TRAVAIL

What is it?

Long COVID
is a new disease.

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

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 of signs and symptoms that cannot be explained by another condition and that did not exist prior to infection.

There are no conclusive data on the number of long COVID cases in Québec.

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;
- Presence of specific symptoms at the onset of the disease, such as fatigue, shortness of breath, headache, muscle pain, and hoarse voice.

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* 	<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 pain or tightness 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • mental fog** • headache (mal de tête) • delirium (in seniors) • paresthesia (numbness), burning sensations • sleep problems • memory or concentration problems
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"> • loss of taste or smell • tinnitus (buzzing or ringing in the ears), vertigo • odynophagia (pain when swallowing food or liquids) • sore throat or earache
Gastrointestinal	Psychological	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • abdominal pain • nausea • diarrhea • decreased or complete loss of appetite 	<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.

However, nearly half of all people with COVID-19 symptoms four weeks after the initial infection will have recovered naturally by 12 weeks.⁹ Others will recover more slowly, over a period of several months. 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. That's why people with the disease should seek out information and support to help them better understand and cope with the symptoms.

Health professionals also need to learn to recognize and adjust to this disease, in order to serve patients better. For more information about long COVID, visit the CISSS de la Montérégie-Ouest website at santemonteregie.qc.ca/en/west/long-covid.

References:

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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.