



Guidance
November 2021

**Long Covid in Children
and Young People**



Issue:

It is becoming increasingly apparent that many children and young people with both symptomatic and asymptomatic COVID-19 are experiencing long-term health effects, some for many months after the initial infection.

Preliminary findings from the children and young people with Long Covid (CLOcK) study, suggest that as many as one in seven (14%) may still have symptoms 15 weeks later¹

We have much to learn about the long-term effects of COVID-19 and the prognosis for those who develop long COVID. This guideline is based on what is known at this time.

Audience:

School nurses and education staff



Intro: What is Long COVID?

Whilst there is a World Health Organisation definition for [Long Covid in Adults](#) there has not as yet been one for children and young people. The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) has developed a [COVID-19 rapid guideline: managing the long-term effects of COVID-19](#) NICE have developed a set of definitions used to distinguish three phases following infection consistent with COVID-19, and to define the term 'long COVID' in all ages². These phases are defined below.

Acute COVID-19

Signs and symptoms of COVID-19 for up to four weeks.

Ongoing symptomatic COVID-19

Signs and symptoms of COVID-19 from four weeks up to 12 weeks.

Post-COVID-19 syndrome

Signs and symptoms that develop during or after an infection consistent with COVID-19, continue for more than 12 weeks and are not explained by an alternative diagnosis. It usually presents with clusters of symptoms, often overlapping, which can fluctuate and change over time and can affect any system in the body. Post-COVID-19 syndrome may be considered before 12 weeks while the possibility of an alternative underlying disease is also being assessed.

Long COVID

In addition to the clinical case definitions, the term 'long COVID' is commonly used to describe signs and symptoms that continue or develop after acute COVID-19. It includes both ongoing symptomatic COVID-19 (from four to 12 weeks) and post-COVID-19 syndrome (12 weeks or more).

How does/might it impact children and young people?

The preprint, unpublished non-peer reviewed data, from the CLoCK study has examined the physical and mental health of children and non-hospitalised young people three months after SARS-CoV-2 infection³. The study explores the symptoms experienced by young adults aged between 12 and 17, after a positive test for COVID in the early part of this year, compared to a cohort of adolescents who tested negative. The study demonstrates that Long COVID in young people is not solely a result of anxiety related to the pandemic, but a very real physical condition resulting from infection with SARS-COV2⁴.

The most common symptoms reported in the preprint CLoCK study are:

- Headaches
- Tiredness
- Sore throat
- Loss of taste

The charity [Long Covid Kids](#) is a patient-led advocacy and support group for families of children with Long Covid. They have produced a [Short Film](#) on the long-lasting symptoms of Covid in children which include many other self-reported symptoms by children and young people:

- Chronic fatigue
- Muscle pain
- Memory loss
- Brain fog
- Stress and anxiety
- Dizziness
- Nausea
- Diarrhoea
- Tummy ache
- Rashes



What treatments are available?

On the 15th of June 2021, NHS England announced [15 Long Covid Hubs](#) for children and young people struggling to recover from COVID-19 infection. The hubs bring together expert clinical teams, including paediatricians, physiotherapists, nurses and occupational therapists. The teams offer specialist advice to family doctors, community nurses and others seeing COVID patients aged up to 18 so that they can get the help they need close to home. The hubs will also see and treat the complicated cases directly or refer them into other specialist services.

Any child with symptoms lasting longer than four weeks can be referred to the local paediatrician by the GP or school nurse. If the local team are unable to support, they can refer the child to the nearest Long COVID Hub.

Long COVID Hubs for children and young people can be found at:

- The Newcastle upon Tyne Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust
- South Tees NHS Foundation Trust
- Sheffield Children's NHS Foundation Trust
- Leeds Children's Hospital
- Hull University Teaching Hospitals NHS Trust
- Alder Hey Children's NHS Foundation Trust
- Royal Manchester Children's Hospital
- Birmingham Women's and Children's NHS Foundation Trust
- University Hospitals of Leicester NHS Trust
- Cambridge University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust
- Bristol Royal Hospital for Children
- Oxford University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust
- Queen Alexandra Hospital, Portsmouth
- University Hospital Southampton NHS Foundation Trust
- London hub led by the Evelina, Imperial, University College London Hospital (UCLH) and Great Ormond Street Hospital for Children (GOSH)



Role of school nurses in supporting children and young people to recover

School nurses in their work in schools and the community can identify and respond holistically to children and young people with Long COVID. They are also able to provide support with the associated impact of the pandemic on their families and communities. School nurses support many children and young people with other health conditions. They are experienced in providing a personal holistic assessment of need; co-producing with children, young people and their family tailored support and advice with personal plans to maximise well-being⁵. In particular school nurses can support with the following:

- Managing uncertainty
- Personal coping strategies
- Alert signs and symptoms – red flags for medical treatment
- Symptom management
- Health promotion
- Assessing and managing the activities of daily living
- Referral and co-working with the Paediatric Multi-Disciplinary Team
- Collaborative care with the child or young person's school

The [Long COVID Kids and Friends Charity](#) is also a useful source of information and provides advocacy and networking support for families. The charity has compiled an easy to follow flow chart named the [cautious tortoise](#) that aims to gently guide parents and guardians through the early steps of their child's recovery while supporting them to preserve energy to aid ongoing recovery⁷.



Role of schools in supporting children and young people to recover

Children who experience long COVID will need support at school. Children and young people should not be penalised in any way for non-attendance. Rather, it is recommended that a collaborative care approach is utilised to support recovery with health professionals and education staff working jointly together. The child or young person's GP or consultant paediatrician can provide health advice for individual health care plans. School Nurses can advise education staff on suitable adjustments for children and young people. Suggested helpful adjustments and approaches include⁶:

- Allow a flexible attendance schedule with rest breaks to minimise fatigue.
- Support symptom management with available 'over the counter' pain relief in school.
- Reduce physical activity and minimise exposure to overstimulating environments to prevent fatigue and headaches.
- Modify the workload. This might include, for example, removing non-essential work, providing alternative work.
- Provide extra time to complete work and tests so a child or young person with 'brain fog' can process information.
- Develop an emotional support plan for the pupil in school to prevent anxiety and depression. This might include identifying an adult at school to talk with if the child or young person feels overwhelmed, or providing a support group for students to discuss their experiences and recovery.
- Encourage the child or young person to explore alternative extracurricular activities that are non-physical and not a high intellectual activity e.g. art activities.
- Gradually withdraw adjustments as the child or young person recovers with the caveat that if symptoms deteriorate, then adjustments should resume.

References

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