

## Debate Pack

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# General Debate on the impact of Long Covid on the UK Workforce

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## Summary

A backbench business debate on the impact of Long Covid on the UK Workforce will take place in the House of Commons Chamber on Thursday 24 March 2022.

# 1

## Background

The [latest data from the Office for National Statistics](#) (ONS) estimates that 1.5 million people in the UK (2.4% of the population) were experiencing long Covid as of the end of January. This is based on self-reporting of Covid symptoms persisting for over four weeks.

71% of those reporting long Covid first had (or suspected they had) Covid-19 at least twelve weeks prior to the study. 65% of those reporting long Covid said that it adversely affected their day-to-day activities.

Fatigue is the most common reported symptom of long Covid (reported in 51% of cases), followed by shortness of breath (35%).

Reported long Covid was most common in those aged 35-49, females, people living in more deprived areas, those employed in education or health and social care, and people who already had another health condition or disability that limits their day-to-day activities.

## 1.1

### What is long Covid?

Covid-19 is an infectious disease caused by the SARS-CoV-2 virus.

Covid-19 commonly presents with symptoms such as a high temperature, a new continuous cough and a loss or change to sense of smell or taste.<sup>1</sup> For most people, this will last no longer than 12 weeks.

The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence's (NICE) rapid [clinical guidance on managing the long-term effects of Covid-19](#) uses the following clinical case definitions to categorise Covid-19 disease according to the duration of symptoms:

**Acute COVID-19;** Signs and symptoms of COVID-19 for up to 4 weeks.

**Ongoing symptomatic COVID-19;** Signs and symptoms of COVID-19 from 4 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

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<sup>1</sup> NHS, [Main symptoms of coronavirus \(Covid-19\)](#), accessed 21 March 2022

before 12 weeks while the possibility of an alternative underlying disease is also being assessed.<sup>2</sup>

In addition to these clinical case definitions, people who experience symptoms for a long period after the initial Covid-19 infection might be said to be experiencing 'long Covid'. NICE defines long Covid as a term commonly used to describe signs and symptoms that continue or develop after acute Covid-19.<sup>3</sup>

Long Covid symptoms commonly include:

- extreme tiredness (fatigue)
- shortness of breath
- chest pain or tightness
- problems with memory and concentration ("brain fog")
- difficulty sleeping (insomnia)
- heart palpitations
- dizziness
- pins and needles
- joint pain
- depression and anxiety
- tinnitus, earaches
- feeling sick, diarrhoea, stomach aches, loss of appetite
- a high temperature, cough, headaches, sore throat, changes to sense of smell or taste
- rashes<sup>4</sup>

There is no standard test for long Covid; it is a diagnosis of exclusion meaning that healthcare professionals will test for and eliminate other possible causes of illness before diagnosing long Covid. This is reflected in the World Health Organisation's (WHO) definition of 'Post Covid-19 condition' which prescribes that the symptoms 'cannot be explained by an alternative diagnosis'.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> NICE, [COVID-19 rapid guideline: managing the long-term effects of COVID-19 NICE guideline \[NG188\]](#), last updated 11 November 2021

<sup>3</sup> NICE, [COVID-19 rapid guideline: managing the long-term effects of COVID-19 \[NG188\]](#), last updated 11 November 2021

<sup>4</sup> NHS, Long-term effects of coronavirus (long Covid), accessed 21 March 2022

<sup>5</sup> WHO, [A clinical case definition of post Covid-19 condition by a Delphi consensus](#), 6 October 2021

The biological mechanisms responsible for long Covid are still poorly understood but research to examine the possible causes is ongoing.

A Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology (POST) rapid response article on [Long Covid and the long-term health effects of Covid-19](#) provides more information on the clinical features, prevalence and possible mechanisms for long covid.

## 1.2 Impact on the workforce

In July 2021, the ONS published analysis of the [impacts of long Covid on adults in Great Britain](#), including analysis of how it had impacted on their work.<sup>6</sup>

40% of those who said they were experiencing long Covid reported that it was negatively affecting their work, although this proportion differed for different groups of people:

- There was a higher proportion of people aged 30-49 who reported long Covid was negatively affecting their work than for other age groups. 51% of 30-49 year olds reported this was the case, compared to 32% of 16-29 year olds and 38% of 50-69 year olds.
- 45% of men with long Covid reported it was negatively affecting their work compared to 36% of women.
- 48% of disabled people with long Covid reported it was negatively affecting their work compared to 35% of people who are not disabled.

The Library Insight, [Will more economic inactivity be a legacy of the pandemic?](#) looks at the impact that the pandemic had on economic inactivity. There has been a large increase in the number of people who are economically inactive since the start of the pandemic, meaning that they are neither in work or looking for work. Economic inactivity for 16 to 64-year-olds has increased by over 300,000.<sup>7</sup>

One of the main reasons for this increase is because of the number of people of working age who have a long-term illness, with the prevalence of long Covid being seen as one of the causes.

In their November 2021 report [Begin again?](#), the Resolution Foundation reported that 600,000 adults were working less, and attributed this to either

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<sup>6</sup> ONS, [Coronavirus and the social impacts of 'long COVID' on people's lives in Great Britain](#), 21 July 2021

<sup>7</sup> ONS, [Labour market overview, UK: March 2022](#), 15 March 2022

long Covid, or a fear of the virus. The report also concluded that younger workers were the most likely to say that long Covid was affecting their work.<sup>8</sup>

The TUC conducted their own analysis into the impacts of long Covid, and have reported that 1 in 20 of the respondents to their study have been “forced out of their jobs” due to long Covid. They surveyed 3,300 people who self-reported having long Covid in June 2021.<sup>9</sup>

## 1.3

### Workplace support for people with long Covid

ACAS have published [guidance](#) that provides advice for employers and employees in relation to long Covid. This says that employers should discuss with employees the support that they need, which may include an occupational health assessment, a phased return to work or changes to the workplace or to how the employee works.<sup>10</sup>

ACAS have also published their advice on whether long Covid should be treated as a disability. In the Equality Act 2010, a person is defined as having a disability if they have a physical or mental impairment which has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on their ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities.<sup>11</sup>

The Equality Act prohibits both direct and indirect disability discrimination in employment and recruitment, and prohibits employers from harassing or victimising disabled people. It also requires employers to make [reasonable adjustments](#) to support disabled job applicants and employees.<sup>12</sup>

The Government has said that as “work is ongoing to understand its long-term effects, it would be “premature” to class long Covid as a disability.<sup>13</sup> However, ACAS have advised that employers should “focus on the reasonable adjustments they can make rather than trying to work out if an employee's condition is a disability”.<sup>14</sup>

The law firm Addleshaw Goddard have also advised that there is “currently no definitive answer” to whether long Covid meets the definition of disability in the Equality Act. They suggest that employers should “err on the side of caution when dealing with employees suffering from long Covid”, and in line

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<sup>8</sup> Resolution Foundation, [Begin again?](#), November 2021

<sup>9</sup> TUC, [Workers' experiences of long Covid](#), 20 June 2021

<sup>10</sup> ACAS, [Long COVID - advice for employers and employees](#) (accessed 22 March 2022)

<sup>11</sup> Section 6, [Equality Act 2010](#)

<sup>12</sup> Section 39, [Equality Act 2010](#)

<sup>13</sup> [PQ 75091](#), 15 November 2021

<sup>14</sup> ACAS, [Whether long COVID is treated as a disability](#) (accessed 25 March 2022)

with the ACAS guidance, should make the necessary reasonable adjustments to protect themselves against potential disability discrimination claims.<sup>15</sup>

Examples of reasonable adjustments are included in the guidance and on the GOV.UK page [Reasonable adjustments for workers with disabilities or health conditions](#).<sup>16</sup> The Equality and Human Rights Commission has also provided [examples of reasonable adjustments in practice](#).<sup>17</sup> Access to Work funding can be applied for towards the cost of making such reasonable adjustments.<sup>18</sup>

The TUC have called for long Covid to be recognised as a disability so that workers with long Covid can get employment protections.<sup>19</sup>

## 1.4 NHS support

During a [Commons debate on long Covid in February 2022](#), Parliamentary Under Secretary at the Department of Work and Pensions Guy Opperman, set out measures the Government was taking to improve healthcare services and support research on long Covid:

The Department of Health and Social Care has invested over £50 million in dedicated research to improve the diagnosis and treatment of long covid. In addition, NHS England and NHS Improvement have invested £224 million to provide care for people with long covid, including £90 million in 2022-23. There are 90 long covid assessment services across England, including 14 specialist paediatric hubs that have been established to support adults, children and young people with long covid and to direct them into appropriate care pathways.<sup>20</sup>

NHS England's [Long COVID: the NHS plan for 2021/22](#) (June 2020) sets out actions the NHS has been, and will be, making to provide services for long Covid, undertake research and support individuals with long Covid. NHS England and NHS Improvement has also published [guidance for Post-Covid Assessment Clinics](#) (April 2021).

NICE has published a rapid clinical guideline on [managing the long-term effects of Covid-19](#).<sup>21</sup> It notes that there is no internationally agreed treatment pathway and that the evidence base is developing. The guideline provides

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<sup>15</sup> Addleshaw Goddard, [Is long Covid protected as a disability under the Equality Act 2010](#), 24 August 2021

<sup>16</sup> GOV.UK, [Reasonable adjustments for workers with disabilities or health conditions](#). (accessed 13 January 2022)

<sup>17</sup> Equality and Human Rights Commission, [Examples of reasonable adjustments in practice](#). (accessed 26 January 2022)

<sup>18</sup> GOV.UK, [Access to Work: get support if you have a disability or health condition](#). (accessed 13 January 2022)

<sup>19</sup> TUC, [TUC calls for long Covid to be urgently recognised as a disability to prevent “massive” discrimination](#), 20 June 2021

<sup>20</sup> HC Deb, [Long Covid](#), Vol 709, 24 February 2022

<sup>21</sup> NICE, Covid-19 rapid guideline: managing the long-term effects of Covid-19, published 1 March 2022

advice on diagnosis and management, based on best evidence and the knowledge and experience of an expert panel. The guideline is subject to continuous review and update in response to emerging evidence.

It recommends clinical assessment for people experiencing symptoms more than four weeks after the initial infection. The assessment should consider physical, cognitive, psychological, and psychiatric symptoms as well as functional abilities. The guidance notes a lack of evidence for pharmacological interventions to treat the conditions itself but does recommend making accommodations at work and education settings and multidisciplinary rehabilitation where appropriate.

## 2

## Press articles

[Employers hit by surge in Long Covid claims – Aviva](#)

Financial Planning Today

17 March 2022

[Memory and concentration problems are common in long COVID and must not be ignored, say scientists](#)

University of Cambridge

17 March 2022

[Cheshire West council staff absent for 14,000 days with Covid](#)

Northwich Guardian

16 March 2022

[Long Covid: The nightmare a million of us still can't shake off](#)

The Times

13 March 2022

[Having Covid-19 linked to risk of economic hardship, study suggests](#)

The Guardian

9 March 2022

[Covid pandemic sparks steep rise in number of people in UK with long-term illness](#)

The Guardian

5 March 2022

[Staff with long Covid should be treated as having disability](#)

Personnel Today

1 March 2022

[Long Covid will hit hundreds of thousands more people if all restrictions axed, campaigners say](#)

The i

13 February 2022

[Long Covid fuelling staff absences among UK employers, research finds](#)

The Independent

8 February 2022

[Long Covid now major cause of long-term job absence, say quarter of UK employers](#)

Financial Times

8 February 2022

[Long Covid: 'My shame over 18-month work absence'](#)

BBC

8 February 2022

[Ambulance service lost 33,000 working days to long Covid](#)

Chester and District Standard

1 January 2022

[Long Covid patients 'made redundant' and 'left on crutches' want it classed a disability](#)

The Mirror

19 June 2021

## 3

# Press releases

### [UKHSA review shows vaccinated less likely to have long COVID than unvaccinated](#)

UK Health Security Agency  
15 February 2022

The UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA) has undertaken a rapid evidence review looking at the effects of vaccination against long COVID or post-COVID symptoms. The [review includes 15 UK and international studies](#) that were undertaken up until January 2022.

An [estimated 2% of the UK population](#) have reported symptoms of long COVID or post-COVID syndrome, which can last for more than 4 weeks after their initial infection. The 3 most common symptoms are fatigue, shortness of breath and muscle or joint pain.

Eight of the studies in the review looked at the effect of vaccinations administered before infection. Most of these studies suggest that vaccinated people (one or 2 doses) were less likely to develop symptoms of long COVID following infection compared with unvaccinated people – in the short term and long term (4 weeks up until 6 months after infection).

The data from some of the studies included in the review suggests that:

- people with COVID-19 who received 2 doses of the Pfizer, AstraZeneca, or Moderna vaccines or one dose of the Janssen vaccine, were about [half as likely](#) as people who received one dose or were unvaccinated to develop long COVID symptoms lasting more than 28 days
- vaccine effectiveness against most post-COVID symptoms in adults was highest in people aged 60 years and over, and lowest for younger participants (19 to 35 years)

The remaining studies looked at the effects of vaccination among people who already had long COVID symptoms.

Four studies specifically compared long COVID symptoms before and after vaccination. Three of these studies suggested that more people with COVID-19 reported an improvement than a worsening in symptoms after vaccination, either immediately or over several weeks.

Another 3 studies of unvaccinated people with long COVID compared ongoing symptoms in those who either went on to receive a vaccination or remained unvaccinated. These studies suggested that those who were vaccinated were less likely to report long COVID symptoms after vaccination than people who remained unvaccinated over the same period.

One study looked specifically at the timing of vaccination after COVID-19 infection and suggested that people with COVID-19 who were vaccinated sooner after diagnosis were much less likely to report long COVID symptoms than people who were vaccinated later after diagnosis. All studies were observational, so results may be from differences other than vaccination.

In one study, of those participants who reported having long COVID, a greater proportion of vaccinated participants said their symptoms improved compared to unvaccinated participants ([23.2% compared to 15.4% respectively](#)).

Dr Mary Ramsay, Head of Immunisation at UKHSA, said:

These studies add to the potential benefits of receiving a full course of the COVID-19 vaccination. Vaccination is the best way to protect yourself from serious symptoms when you get infected and may also help to reduce the longer-term impact.

For most people symptoms of long COVID are short-lived and resolve overtime. But for some, symptoms can be more severe and disrupting to their daily lives.

If you're experiencing unusual symptoms particularly for longer than 4 weeks after infection, you should consider contacting your GP.

The review concluded that people who received 2 doses of a vaccine against COVID-19 were less likely to develop long COVID symptoms or experience symptoms for a shorter time, compared with those unvaccinated.

Individuals who received a vaccination after being infected with COVID-19 also reported that the duration of post-COVID symptoms was less than for those who were unvaccinated. Two doses of the COVID-19 vaccination provide a high level of protection against long COVID, compared to one dose or no doses.

## 4

# Parliamentary material

## Written Questions

[Coronavirus: Health Services](#), Question for Department of Health and Social Care, UIN 136496

**Asked by Sir Christopher Chope on 8 March 2022**

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how much money (a) NHS England and (b) NHS Improvement has provide for care for those with (i) long covid and (b) covid-19 vaccine damage in 2021-22; and what the budget is for such care in 2022-23.

**Answered by Maria Caulfield on 14 March 2022**

Since November 2020, NHS England and NHS Improvement have invested £224 million to develop and deliver services for people experiencing persistent symptoms following COVID-19 infection. This includes £90 million for 2022/23.

The information for those with COVID-19 vaccine damage is not available in the format requested.

[NHS: Long Covid](#), Question for Department of Health and Social Care, UIN 129738

**Asked by Sir Mark Hendrick on 25 February 2022**

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether he has made an assessment of the potential merits of creating a compensation scheme for NHS frontline workers who have been unable to return to work due to the impact of long covid.

**Answered by Edward Argar on 3 March 2022**

No assessment has been made. COVID-19 is a new disease and it is not yet clear what the physical, psychological, rehabilitation and support needs will be for those experiencing long-term effects. As more evidence emerges, the Department of Health and Social Care will continue to work with the Department for Work and Pensions to consider the Government's provisions and approach for those experiencing the long-term effects of the virus.

[Long Covid: Lost Working Days](#), Question for Treasury, UIN 126788

**Asked by Layla Moran on 21 February 2022**

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what assessment he has made of the (a) economic impact of lost workforce days due to long covid and (b) impact of those lost days due to that condition on GDP.

**Answered by John Glen on 24 February 2022**

The government's Living with Covid strategy, published on 21 February, outlined that the NHS will continue work to better understand Covid-19 and the long-term health impacts it may have, supported by £50 million in research funding. The Therapeutics Taskforce will also continue to support the eight national priority clinical trial platforms run by the National Institute for Health Research, focused on prevention, novel treatments, and treatments for Long COVID.

HM Treasury will continue to monitor Covid impacts, such as workforce absences, on the economy as we move into the next phase of Living with Covid. HM Treasury does not prepare formal economic forecasts, including GDP, for the UK economy, which are the responsibility of the independent Office for Budget Responsibility (OBR).

The Living with Covid strategy can be found at the following website:  
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-response-living-with-covid-19>

[Unemployment: Long Covid](#), Question for Cabinet Office, UIN 122660

**Asked by Jonathan Ashworth on 10 February 2022**

To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and Minister for the Cabinet Office, whether his Department has undertaken research into the number of people who have become economically inactive as a result of experiencing long covid.

**Answered by Mrs Heather Wheeler on 21 February 2022**

The information requested falls under the remit of the UK Statistics Authority. A response to the Rt Hon Member's Parliamentary Question of 10 February is [attached](#).

[Employment: Long Covid](#), Question for Department for Work and Pensions, UIN 100581

**Asked by Cat Smith on 10 January 2022**

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what steps the Government is taking to support people unable to work as a result of having long covid.

**Answered by Chloe Smith on 18 January 2022**

The DWP offers financial support through Universal Credit and New Style Employment and Support Allowance for people affected by the pandemic, including those with long-COVID, if they satisfy eligibility criteria. In addition, people with long-COVID may be eligible to Personal Independence Payment.

Employers are legally required to pay Statutory Sick Pay to eligible employees who are off work sick including where sickness absence is due to long-COVID. Some employers may also decide to pay more, and for longer, through Occupational Sick Pay.

Furthermore, the Industrial Injuries Advisory Council (IIAC), who advise the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions regarding Industrial Injuries Disablement Benefit (IIDB), are investigating whether long-COVID can be prescribed as an occupational disease for the purposes of IIDB.

## Oral Questions

[Jobcentre Services](#)

HC Deb, 28 June 2021, c6

## Debates

[Covid-19: Deteriorating Long-Term Health Conditions](#), HC Deb, 10 March 2022, c168WH

## 5

## Further reading

[Coronavirus: Impact on the labour market](#)

House of Commons Library  
17 March 2022

[UK Labour Market Statistics](#)

House of Commons Library  
15 March 2022

[Labour market overview, UK: March 2022](#)

Office for National Statistics  
15 March 2022

[Prevalence of ongoing symptoms following coronavirus \(COVID-19\) infection in the UK: 3 March 2022](#)

Office for National Statistics  
3 March 2022

[COVID-19 Response: Living with COVID-19](#)

Cabinet Office  
23 February 2022

[Will more economic inactivity be a legacy of the pandemic?](#)

House of Commons Library  
16 February 2022

[Labour Market Statistics, March 2022](#)

Institute for Employment Studies  
15 March 2022

[Working With Long Covid](#)

Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development  
8 February 2022

[Begin again?](#)

Resolution Foundation  
23 November 2021

[Coronavirus and the social impacts of 'long COVID' on people's lives in Great Britain](#)

Office for National Statistics  
21 July 2022

[Workers' experiences of long Covid](#)

TUC  
20 June 2021

Coronavirus: Long Covid  
House of Commons Library  
15 January 2021

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