**What is Long COVID? What are the symptoms?**

Different presentations of COVID-19 have been identified and formally defined ([NICE December 2020](https://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/ng188)):

* 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 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.

[**'Long COVID'**](https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/long-term-effects-of-coronavirus-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 and post-COVID -19 syndrome (defined above) and has impacted numerous young, active, healthy people too. Also, not all patients seriously impacted by covid-19 in the longer term were hospitalised or had a confirmed positive SARS-CoV-2 test.

The most commonly reported symptoms of long COVID are breathlessness, cough, chest tightness, chest pain, palpitations, fatigue, fever, joint/muscle pain, dizziness, headaches, sleep disturbance, stress and mental health issues and many more.

**What should I do if I think I have long COVID?**

Employees should contact their GP. Post-COVID assessment clinics (also known as long COVID clinics) have been established across England, which give patients access to multi-professional advice so that they are put onto the right clinical pathways and offered physical, psychological and psychiatric rehabilitation.

**Is long COVID contagious?**

Long COVID is not contagious. Long COVID symptoms are caused by the body's response to the virus continuing beyond the initial illness. To avoid passing coronavirus on to others, employee’s should self-isolate for 10 days from the original symptoms or positive test, or if after 10 days they still have a temperature, or runny nose or sneezing, or sickness or diarrhoea, until these symptoms have gone.

**How do I record a long COVID sickness absence?**

To report yourself as self-isolating or off sick with COVID, please follow the schools agreed reporting process.

Employees can self-certify their long COVID symptoms for the first 7 calendar days of sickness following the end of a 10-day isolation period (if applicable). On the 8th calendar day and going forward, the employee will need to provide medical evidence to cover their absence:

* The long COVID referral letter from a GP/healthcare provider, or
* A letter from the NHS long COVID assessment centre confirming that they have long covid), or
* A GP’s fit note.

While infectious and in self-isolation, an employee’s will sick pay not be impacted. Employees should discuss with the school if they believe that their occupational sick pay may be reducing and further consideration should be given in relation to reinstating for the duration of the contagious element of the condition.

Normal sick pay will apply for any sickness absence due to long COVID.

**Does the sickness procedure apply?**

Absence due to the effects of long COVID will be monitored as part of the schools normal sickness procedure, including the option of deferred action, where appropriate.

This is to support our employees and consider whether it would be helpful to get further medical advice from our occupational health provider on how we can provide the most appropriate and best possible support.

**What support and reasonable adjustments are there for those who suffer from long COVID symptoms?**

The Council encourages all Headteachers to have regular, open and empathetic conversations with employees during any sickness absence and before they return, to identify a suitable pattern and any supportive measures to facilitate a return to work, including:

* Working from home where the role allows, bearing in mind this will only be possible for most school roles where the DfE has indicated there should be a move to remote learning.
* Providing specialist software, where appropriate.
* Adjusting working time or start and finish times to regularly attend medical appointments.
* Granting reasonable paid time off for disability-related medical appointments.
* Putting other appropriate adjustments in place, e.g. temporary alternative duties.
* Occupational Health assessment, especially if absent from work.
* A phased return to work.
* Organising a risk assessment or a stress risk assessment
* In more severe cases, ill-health redeployment. This is only appropriate following consultation with the employee where it is agreed that they cannot fulfil their current job, either with reasonable adjustments, or where such changes have been unsuccessful. Line managers must seek professional advice from the occupational health provide, their traded HR provider and where necessary the employer before deciding to carry out a redeployment search.

**Would long COVID be classed as a disability?**

We don’t yet know how long the physical effects of COVID 19 are likely to last.

Sufferers of long COVID may also have pre-existing conditions (e.g. diabetes or asthma), and the combined effect with their pre-existing condition may result in an overall substantial and long-term adverse effect such that it meets the Equality Act test for disability.

**Other protected characteristics**

As there are several risk factors for the development of long COVID (including older age, race, heavier weight, suffering from asthma and being female), Headteachers should maintain a compassionate and supportive approach, including considering all reasonable adjustments.