

LONG COVID and Effective Management of Return to work



Dr Karen Michell

Research Programme Lead Occupational Health, IOSH

Chair ICOH Scientific Committee Accident Prevention

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Global worldometer for Covid-19 and background

(as of 11 Mar 2022)
(<https://www.worldometers.info/coronavirus/>)



Coronavirus Cases:
454,287,804

Deaths:
6,053,737

Recovered:
388,453,576

10% with Long Covid:
44,823,406



News

Half of employers have staff with long Covid, CIPD research finds

8 Feb 2022 By Jasmine Urquhart

Experts urge firms to better train line managers to recognise illness, with significant proportion of employees experiencing symptoms during the last year



Dr Karen Michell, research programme lead for occupational health at the Institution of Occupational Safety and Health (IOSH), said that a "multidisciplinary team approach focused on rehabilitation and symptom management" was essential for employees who aim to return to resume work.

"Whether it's physical restrictions [such as] shortness of breath or cognitive impairment [such as] brain fog, you are managing workers who may be unable to cope with work for entirely different reasons, necessitating an individualised approach to care" she said.

Michell encouraged line managers to involve the worker in decision-making: "Ask the worker for suggestions on working life adjustments... address the mental health issues through good communication, and provide realistic assurances and advice where necessary" she said, adding that regular monitoring of an employees' functionality will be key to success.

What is Long Covid?

Pseudonyms: Long Haul Covid, Long Covid, Chronic Covid, Post Covid-19 condition

NICE definition, UK



- Syndrome (collection of symptoms)
- **Ongoing Symptomatic Covid-19** patients who 4 to 12 weeks after initial symptoms are still symptomatic, estimated as 1 in 5⁽¹⁾
- **Post Covid-19 syndrome** patients still symptomatic >12 weeks after onset of acute symptoms, estimated 1 in 10⁽¹⁾
- **Services** established to manage health of Long Covid patients

HOW MANY PEOPLE SUFFER WITH EACH LONG COVID SYMPTOM



Over 50 symptoms of Long Covid⁽²⁾

Symptoms – diverse affecting multiple systems
respiratory, nervous system, cardiovascular, musculoskeletal

Most common- fatigue, shortness of breath, muscle pains, chest pain, brain fog, headache, depression

Image source: The Sun (3)

Who gets Long Covid?



Complex and challenging not just those hospitalised with life threatening Covid-19

More likely in people with^(4,5)

- pre-existing health conditions (e.g. diabetes, asthma, poor mental health),
- older people (>50 years),
- overweight individuals,
- women, and
- patients with 5 or more symptoms in first week of Covid-19 infection

(Generally considered Vulnerable workers)

Impact of Long Covid on workability^(5,6,7)



Impact of Long Covid on individual

- 84% limits activity
- 81% brain fog hinders concentration
- 85% causes persistent fatigue
- 49% difficulty handling stress & doing basic tasks

Impact on workability

- 75% - affected workers' ability to work
- 60% - had to take time off
- 45% - RTW with reduced capacity

The value of Work

- Worklessness kills – need to facilitate RTW
- Positive impacts include enhanced wellbeing, self worth, sense of purpose, quality of life
- Workers do not need to be 100% fit to work
- Work is an important part of their recovery process
- Still do not know how long worker will show symptoms



‘For many it is a case of returning to work with Long covid and not after Long Covid’

Managing Return to Work (RTW) with Long Covid

Multidisciplinary team approach

- Employee
- CEO
- OSH professionals (health and safety)
- GPs and other medical specialists
- Human capital or people teams
- Line managers & supervisors
- Co-workers

Key:

- See those with function but with limitations
- Facilitate a safe and healthy RTW
- Based on abilities rather than disabilities
- Address psychosocial issues – historically not well managed

Psychosocial stress and Covid 19

- **Roles** – dual roles, home worker/ educator/ mother
- **Job demands**- remote, flexible and hybrid work, alone work, isolation
- **Organisational change** – lack of support to transition, communication
- **Change** - use of technology
- **Job security** - furloughed or job losses
- **Workload** - essential workers, health care workers
- **Violence** – frontline workers



Principles for RTW

- Starts while still off work
- Observe normal protocols – sickness absence, benefits, organisational policies
- Ensure policy and procedure is non-discriminatory and is gender sensitive
- Communicate with those absent
- Provide support
- Conversation about the how of RTW
- Establish workers needs and abilities
- Address fears and concerns
- Establish care plan, monitor, review and revise



Return to work process

- Medical clearance in safety critical jobs – (e.g. forklift driver, divers, pilots)
- Determine Occupational Risk Exposure Profile (OREP) or Man Job Specifications
- Complete a health risk assessment (HRA)
- Make recommendations based on HRA
- Communicate outcome to all
- Monitor progress – schedule sessions
- Plan time off for medical appointments
- Workplace accommodations

Case study 1

Operator in manufacturing area

Demands include:

- * physical activity
- * dust exposure



Exposure; indicates how often this action or ability is required 1 - Very Low 2 - Low 3 - Average 4 - High 5 - Very high			
JOB REQUIREMENTS		RATING	
PHYSICAL REQUIREMENTS			
Climbing (ladders, stairs)	1	Outdoors	1
Lifting / Carrying objects (Max 20kg)	3	Indoors	5
Working in crouching position	4	High/ low / extremes of temperature	3
Working in sitting position	3	Noise	1
Working in standing position	4	Heights	1
Hand grip power	3	Confined / restricted spaces	1
Use of arms	3	High / low humidity	3
Use of legs and feet	3	Dust / Gasses / Fumes / Vapours	5
Abnormal body position (bending)	4	Hazardous substances/ chemicals	5
SENSORY REQUIREMENTS			
Auditory	3	Shift work	2
Smell	3	SPECIAL REQUIREMENTS	
Speech	3	Safety goggles/glasses	4
Sight – Depth	4	Respiratory protection	4
Sight – Colour distinction	4	Gloves	4
Sight – Night vision	2	Safety shoes	4
Sight – Hand/eye co-ordination	4	Hard hats	1
		Safety harnesses	1
		Ear protection	1
Other requirements/ remarks		Operators are exposed to numerous chemicals in this job and need to assume full respiratory and eye protection. Standard GMP compliance essential. Annual medical examination required to monitor for possible health effects associated with chemical exposure. Apply health risk assessment requirements for department.	
Compiled by and date:			

Case study 2

— administrator working in the office and data capturing

Demands:
*cognitive



Exposure; indicates how often this action or ability is required 1 - Very Low 2 – Low 3 – Average 4 – High 5 – Very high			
JOB REQUIREMENTS	RATING	JOB REQUIREMENTS	RATING
PHYSICAL REQUIREMENTS		WORKING ENVIRONMENT	
Climbing (ladders, stairs)	1	Outdoors	0
Lifting / Carrying objects	1	Indoors	5
Working in crouching position	1	High/ low / extremes of temperature	3
Working in sitting position	5	Noise (TWA >80 <90dB)	1
Working in standing position	3	Heights	0
Hand grip power	3	Confined / restricted spaces	0
Use of arms	3	High / low humidity	0
Use of legs and feet	2	Dust / Gasses / Fumes / Vapours	0
Abnormal body position	2	Hazardous substances	0
SENSORY REQUIREMENTS		Computer	4
Auditory	4	SPECIAL REQUIREMENTS	
Smell	3	Safety goggles/glasses	0
Speech	4	Respiratory protection	0
Sight – Depth	4	Gloves	0
Sight – Colour distinction	4	Safety shoes	0
Sight – Night vision	2	Hard hats	0
Sight – Hand/eye co-ordination	4	Safety harnesses	0
Focus and concentration	4	Ear protection	0



Examples of workplace accommodation



Accommodation	Impact
Altered start and end times	Women can balance home life demands, avoid peak travel impact on fatigue, sense of control
Flexible / Hybrid work	Sense of control, work life balance, energy conservation
Adjust workload / demands (fewer tasks/ extend deadlines /slower pace)	Decreases work demand, allows for workers pace, sense of achievement, increased quality
Manage exposures (dust, chemicals, noise) – move to alternate job	Avoids additional physical impact on health, allows for recovery, allows pacing, keeps co-workers safe
Rest spaces provided	Allows rest during a crisis/ period of exhaustion

Other workplace accommodation

- Shift work – not recommended
- No alone or isolated work
- Establish rest spaces at work
- Manage exposures – dust vs SOB
- Physical activity – chairs, reduced time on line, rotation of task, alternate task for duration



Planning for RTW

- Medical clearance in safety critical jobs – (e.g. forklift driver, divers, pilots)
- Determine Occupational Risk Exposure Profile (OREP) and Job Specifications
- Complete a health assessment (HA)
- Make recommendations based on OREP and HA
- Communicate outcome to stakeholders
- Monitor progress – schedule sessions
- Plan time off for medical appointments
- Workplace accommodations

Case study

Office worker who leads a team of writers, responsible for quality assurance and has to meet publication deadlines. Often has to manage time critical deadlines.

- **OREP** – demands include computer work, precision, focus, time management, can be stressful
- **HA**- respiratory and musculoskeletal system affected, tires easily
- **Accommodations:**
 - Work from home (Hybrid model)
 - Flexible working hrs during day
 - Medical appointments built into calendar
 - Redistribute work within team
 - Additional eyes on for QA
 - Sick leave used for full day of incapacity

Summary

- Planned, supportive, coordinated RTW
- Policy and procedure not to cause discrimination
- Case by case management (safety critical)
- Individualised risk-based approach (fitness to work)
- Phased approach to RTW
- Monitoring and adjustment
- Be aware of mental health issues - anxiety, depression
- Ensure care plan is working follow up and check-ins
- Adapt as abilities increase



- Key to managing Long Covid is **prevention**
- Vaccination
- Maintain non pharmaceutical interventions



Long Covid Resources

- **WHO - A clinical case definition of Post Covid-19 condition by a Delphi consensus**

https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/WHO-2019-nCoV-Post_COVID-19_condition-Clinical_case_definition-2021.1

- **EU-OSHA Covid-19 infection and long Covid – guide for managers**
[COVID -19 infection and long COVID – guide for managers | Safety and health at work EU-OSHA \(europa.eu\)](#)

- **IOSH – Coronavirus**

<https://iosh.com/coronavirus/>

- **NHS Post-Covid Syndrome (Long Covid)** <https://www.england.nhs.uk/coronavirus/post-covid-syndrome-long-covid/>

- **NICE Managing the long-term effects of COVID-19 Guidelines –(updated Nov 2021)**

<https://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/ng188>

- **SOM Covid 19 return to work guide for managers -** https://www.som.org.uk/COVID-19_return_to_work_guide_for_managers.pdf

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Thank you

Karen.michell@iosh.com

