MetLife | Return to Health

Post COVID-19 Syndrome



The Stages of Covid-19 Recovery

Stage 1: Acute COVID-19

- Symptoms present up to 4 weeks following onset of initial COVID-19 infection

Stage 2: Post COVID-19 Syndrome Conditions

- Chronic condition occurring after SARS-CoV-2 infection and is present for at least 3 months.
- Long COVID symptoms and conditions can emerge, persist, resolve and reemerge over weeks and months. Symptoms may be mild to severe[2].

Post COVID-19 Syndrome and work

Employers are experiencing the impacts of employees' ability to return to work following Acute COVID-19. The US DHHS and DOJ issued guidance that Post COVID-19 Syndrome can be considered a disability, protected under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).[1] Individualized assessment is necessary.

An employee's ability to return to work may vary depending on baseline pre-COVID-19 status, the severity of illness and types/severity of complications. Employers should consider reasonable accommodations, where applicable to help employees return to work.

Impacts on Functionality

The ongoing effects of Post COVID-19 Syndrome can impact a person's functionality, for days, months or longer. The level of functionality varies from person to person, and the severity of the Acute COVID-19 does not dictate the Post COVID-19 Syndrome conditions.

- Most patients with COVID-19 recover fully, but some develop post COVID-19 condition with long-term effects on one or more body systems.
- Post COVID-19 can affect a person's ability to perform daily activities such as work or household chores and restrict social participation.[3]

Symptoms Impacting Functionality

The diagram[4] below shows some of the most common Post COVID-19 Syndrome manifestations:

Neurological

- Cognitive issues
- Brain fog
- Memory and multitasking challenges
- Loss of taste and smell
- Stroke
- Dizziness
- Neuropathy
- Headaches

Pulmonary

- Coughing
- Shortness of breath
- Residual pulmonary disease
- Chest pains
- inflammation

Digestive

- Stomach pain
- Diarrhea
- Constipation

Cardio-Vascular/Circulatory

- Heart palpitations
- Heart failure
- Inflammation of the heart membranes
- Blockage of lower extremity arteries

Skin Conditions

- Rashes

Mental Health

- Post-traumatic stress
- Anxiety
- Social isolation
- Depression

General

- Muscle aches and pains
- Joint pain
- Fever
- Fatigue

Return to work accommodations to consider:

Symptoms of Post COVID-19 Syndrome can result in a wide variety of limitations due to its multiorgan involvement and return work strategies should be individualized to optimize the chance of a successful return to work.

Reasonable workplace accommodations should be directed at the specific symptoms reported:

Symptom	Potential Accommodation
Fatigue	Flexible work schedule, remote work, phased RTW plan, frequent rest breaks, less physically demanding position/sedentary, ergonomic equipment, job restructuring.
Brain fog/cognitive issues	Additional time to complete tasks, reduce workload, reduce distractions, rest breaks, memory aids, apps for concentration, memory and organization, verbal/written cues, job restructuring, remote work.
Shortness of breath/cough	Reduce verbal communication duties, reduce physical job demands, rest breaks, reduce workplace triggers, allow time for medical treatment (inhaler/nebulizer), remote work, job restructuring.
Tachycardia	Rest breaks, ergonomic equipment, allow drinks at workstation, remote work.
Joint pain/body aches	Rest breaks, reduce physical job demands, ergonomic equipment, flexible work schedule, job restructuring, remote work.
Depression/anxiety	Flexible work schedule, modified break schedule, EAP support, mindfulness apps, workplace wellness support, employer support, empathy, communication, reinforcement of self-care.
Headaches	Reduce workplace triggers, alternative lighting, glare reduction.
Digestive/GI	Flexible work and break schedule, workplace wellness support, quick access tot eh appropriate facilities.
• Long haulers should be allowed flexibility to attend medical appointments, and therapy with FMLA as needed. • Employers should take into consideration the requested accommodations and provide direct and frequent communication to support their employees return to work.	

1. https://www.hhs.gov/civil-rights/for-providers/civil-rights-covid19/guidance-long-covid-disability/index.html
2. Long COVID Basics (3Feb2025) taken from the CDC https://www.cdc.gov/covid/long-term-effects/index.html
3. Post COVID-19 condition (long COVID) (26 February 2025) https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/post-covid-19-condition-(long-covid)
4. Signs and Symptoms of Long COVID (11Jul2024) taken from CDC https://www.cdc.gov/covid/long-term-effects/long-covid-signs-symptoms.html

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