



Workplace Support

Submissions & suggestions from
Long Covid Support Group
Aotearoa New Zealand



Long Covid 101

What is Long Covid?

Long Covid:

- Is an umbrella term for signs and symptoms that continue or develop after acute Covid-19
- Has over 200 symptoms that can be neurological, cardiovascular, immunological, or systemic
- Can occur if vaccinated or if reinfected

It is not:

- Mild or “like a cold”
 - Just feeling a bit tired
 - Resolvable within a set time period
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1 in 10

Number of Covid-19 patients who go on to experience Long Covid*

What do workplaces need to know?

Things to consider

Early signs are that Long Covid will have worldwide workforce implications. 25% of UK employers cite Long Covid as driving absences.

New Zealand does not yet have best practice policies in place for Long Covid patients

Key messages from lived experience is:

- Rest is imperative for recovery from Covid-19 and to avoid Long Covid
- Leadership to support Long Covid patients now and as future variants arrive is vital
- Patients are having difficulty with getting even GP support, with little information being provided by the MOH

Best practice considerations

Support from Team Leaders

Things to consider

- Timeframes for recovery could be weeks, months or years. Improvement is not linear - patients can have progress and then regression.

Key messages:

- **Flexibility** around workload, hours, break times, timing for return to work, and adapting approach based on updates from the patient (including when working from home)
- **Providing** a safe way to converse on what they're feeling will help staff feel supported without feeling shame or guilt around recovery timeframe
- **Remove stigma** around Long Covid by talking about it

Support from Team Leaders

Things to consider

- **Wrap around support** should be considered
 - childcare/pet care provisions
 - mental health support
 - catering
 - Four day week
 - App subscriptions e.g. Calm
- **Pacing** is critical to aid recovery
- **Dedicate time** to do a primer on Long Covid for managers/staff
- **Criteria for support** should not be dependant on a positive test, increasingly we will find people have not been able to secure testing data to support their symptoms

Support from Team Leaders

Things Long Covid patients want you to know

Reassurance around support and clear guidance on role is critical to remove stress about job security.

Gaslighting or minimising of symptoms is very common for Long Covid patients - “being believed” is vital.

If you have more than one Long Covid patient on your team, their recovery will not mirror each other

Remove perceived pressure:

- To return in employer focussed timeframe
- To “keep up” with colleagues - encourage pacing of energy
- To urgently complete work; give time and space for tasks to take a little longer/remove KPIs. Be conscious that staff may be feeling shame or guilt about capacity to complete work.

Policy gaps

What are the grey areas?

There is an assumption that systemic safety nets like ACC and Work and Income NZ will address Long Covid.

Anecdotally this is not the case - reluctance to progress in this space has significant financial implications for Long Covid patients

Key messages:

- Ensure you are operating with transparency and good faith
- Ensure a plan is in place well prior to discretionary, sick and holiday leave running out
- Offer clear pathways to support if employment is discontinued

Reality check

The pandemic is not over.

Long Covid can occur after a relatively mild illness.

Vaccines do not guarantee protection against Long Covid.

New variants will continue to arrive in New Zealand - Long Covid can occur with reinfection.

A new normal is here and Long Covid is part of that - best practice should be considered now.

In summary

Final thoughts

Long Covid is hard to navigate.

It affects every area of your life - and restored balance can take time.

The difficulty of navigating an illness that is different for everyone but has many common symptoms cannot be understated.

The potential impact of Long Covid on the workforce as we navigate current and future variants cannot be understated.

Work is a crucial factor in overall well-being - it is critical to start to include Long Covid as a factor in well-being discussions and workplace policy.

Educate yourself, your staff and especially your People Leaders on Long Covid

Actions list

What's next

HEALTH / EMPLOYMENT

What happens if you've got long Covid and can't work?

Quarter of UK employers cite long COVID as driving absences - survey

Reuters

Here comes the long-Covid tsunami

Siouxie Wiles · 13:44, May 09 2022



WORLD

Covid 19 US: 'Mass disability event' long Covid warning as huge numbers diagnosed

Actions list

What's next

1. Educate yourself, your staff and especially your People Leaders on Long Covid
2. Create a safe environment for open communication
3. Offer remote options
4. Consider job flexibility and be open to change
5. Reevaluate benefits and paid leave policies
6. Invest in peer-mentorship programs
7. Encourage collaborative work systems

Source: [How Managers Can Support Employees With Long COVID](#)

Further reading:

- [I've had Covid-19 for a year. Here's what I've learned.](#)
- [Pacing and Management Guide for ME/CFS](#)
- [How Long Covid Exhausts the Body](#)
- [How Managers Can Support Employees With Long COVID](#)
- [Navigating Career & Life Transitions with Long-COVID: Dr. Julie Hill, Rehabilitation Counselor](#)
- [Accommodating employees with Long Covid or Covid-19](#)
- [Supporting people with Long Covid to: stay in, return to, or leave work well.](#)
- [Rushing back to exercise could cause long Covid](#)
- [Explained: The three things to know about Long Covid](#)
- [Long Covid must be taken seriously as Omicron dominates - experts](#)
- [Here comes the long-Covid tsunami](#)
- [Quarter of UK employers cite long COVID as driving absences - survey](#)
- [Covid 19 US: 'Mass disability event' long Covid warning as huge numbers diagnosed](#)
- [What happens if you've got long Covid and can't work?](#)

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