

Long COVID – advice for employers and employees

For some people, coronavirus (COVID-19) can cause symptoms that last weeks or months after the infection. This can be called 'post-COVID-19 syndrome', 'long-tail COVID' or 'long COVID'.

Long COVID symptoms could affect someone's ability to work or cause them to take sickness absence.

The usual rules for [sickness absence](#) and [sick pay](#) apply when someone is off work because of long COVID.

Find out more from the NHS about:

- [symptoms of long COVID](#)
- [COVID-19 recovery](#)

What the employer should do

Employers should be aware that the effects of long COVID can come and go. On some days the person might seem well, but on others their symptoms can be worse and they might need to be off work again.

If someone is off sick, they might feel isolated or need support to return to work. Employers should:

- agree how and when to make contact during any absence
- make sure their work is covered and shared out appropriately while they're off
- talk about ways to support them as they return to work where and when possible

When the employee feels able to return to work

The employer should talk with the employee about any support they may need. They could discuss:

- getting an [occupational health assessment](#)
- making changes to the workplace or to how the employee works ('reasonable adjustments'), such as different working hours
- a phased return to work
- what they want to tell others at work about their illness

[Find out more about returning to work after absence.](#)

Example of making a reasonable adjustment

Bo has had severe tiredness and body aches since having COVID-19 a few weeks ago. Their doctor has diagnosed long COVID. Bo is ready to come back to work but is worried that working full time will be hard.

Bo's employer looks at the workload and is able to allocate some work to others in the team. This means they can offer Bo part-time hours to start their return to work. They put in a date to review the arrangement.

If an employee is struggling to do their job

If an employer feels the employee is not able to do their work or is taking a lot of absence, they should see if they can do anything to help. For example, a further occupational health assessment to find out if more support is needed.

They should make sure they have done everything they can before considering a [capability procedure](#). If an employer dismisses an employee without first carrying out a full and fair disciplinary or capability procedure, the employee could make a claim of [unfair dismissal](#) to an employment tribunal.

Under the law, a disability is a physical or mental impairment that has a 'substantial and long-term' negative effect on a person's ability to do normal day-to-day activities.

'Long term' means the impairment:

- has lasted or will last for at least 12 months
- can come and go or is likely to last for the rest of the person's life

Long COVID is still a new illness and it may take time to understand it fully. It can affect a person's day-to-day activities and it's currently understood that it can last or come and go for several months. The effects of long COVID could also cause other impairments.

It's a good idea for the employer to focus on the reasonable adjustments they can make rather than trying to work out if an employee's condition is a disability.

Find out more about:

- [reasonable adjustments](#)
- [disability discrimination](#)
- [supporting mental health](#)

2. Avoiding discrimination

As well as disability, employers must be careful to avoid other types of discrimination when considering long COVID.

Long COVID has been found to more severely affect:

- older people
- ethnic minorities
- women

Employers must avoid discriminating by age, disability, race or sex.

Find out more about:

- [discrimination and the law](#)
- [avoiding discrimination during COVID-19 from the Equality and Human Rights Commission](#)