

AV Room Presentation on Long Covid

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What is Long Covid?

- The WHO defines Long Covid as the 'continuation or development of new symptoms 3 months after the initial Sars-CoV-2 infection, with these symptoms lasting for at least 2 months with no other explanation.' There are more than 200+ documented symptoms of Long Covid, ranging from mild to debilitating. Symptoms can last for months or years.

How many people are living with Long Covid? Who is affected or at risk?

- At least 76 million people are living with Long Covid globally, and 350,000 in Ireland.
- The WHO estimates 1 in 10 *infections* result in Long Covid.
- Vaccines do not prevent Long Covid. Prior infections do not prevent Long Covid. In fact, re-infections *increase* the risk of Long Covid, as damage is cumulative.
- Anyone can get Long Covid, regardless of previous health or fitness status - *including children*.
- COVID Infection nearly doubles risk of type 1 diabetes in children.
- Infection during pregnancy doubles rates of developmental delays (incl. motor, language, speech) in infants.

Is there treatment or a cure for Long Covid?

- There is currently no cure for Long Covid - only symptom management.
- Existing medications can help manage some symptoms & improve quality of life- if patients can access them!

What is the impact of Long Covid?

- Long Covid can and *does* impact school attendance, medical and public services, unemployment, suicide rates, homelessness, and most importantly the quality of life of many people.

How can we prevent Long Covid?

- The only way to prevent Long Covid is to prevent Covid-19 infection, per HIQA.
- Covid-19 is airborne, so airborne mitigations, including ventilation and air filtration are needed in all public spaces. High quality (FFP2/3) masking is effective. Handwashing is not enough to prevent transmission.

What are the key issues Long Covid patients in Ireland face?

- Lack of safe access to education for children, and public services due to risk of infection or re-infection due to absence of ventilation and air filtration.
- Lack of education among medical professionals around Long Covid and treating patients with Long Covid. Risk of re-infection while accessing healthcare due to absence of universal mask mandate.
- Financial instability due to limited or inability to work. Long Covid not currently recognised as a disability for social welfare. Uncertainty for healthcare workers on Special Leave with Pay scheme.
- Stigma and discrimination.

Key asks from LCAI and LCK:

1. Urgent action to reduce the spread of Covid. Government must provide the public with accurate, up to date info as to how Covid-19 is spread (airborne transmission), the importance of clean air and layered mitigations *in addition to* vaccination. Return of universal mandatory masking (with FFP2/3) in healthcare.
2. Awareness campaign from Dept of Health and HSE on Long Covid, potential symptoms, and risk with each infection. Only then can the public make an informed decision on personal risks.
3. Patient and Public Involvement (PPI) to review and inform the interim model of care and services provided at Long Covid clinics. Establishment of specialist paediatric clinics. Additional training given to GPs to help accurately diagnose and manage Long Covid.
4. Financial impact of Long Covid assessed at individual and national level. Support must be put in place to help people access illness/disability benefits efficiently and without delay.
5. Continuation of financial support for healthcare workers disabled by Long Covid.