

To: SofS and PS(PC)

From: Name Redacted Long
COVID Policy Team

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LONG COVID – UPDATE NOTE: FOR INFORMATION

DATA DASHBOARD (Annex A)

As per the previous update note, we have attached the dashboard which includes data from studies such as ONS, activity data from NHSEI, press reports, social media and the relevant research.

We are currently on a bi-weekly schedule which has reduced from a previous frequency of weekly update notes and bi-weekly dashboards. It would be helpful to review whether this schedule is still currently appropriate.

EMERGING EVIDENCE ON VACCINATION AND LONG COVID

There were two new studies on vaccination and long COVID that were published this week and received some media and social-media pick-up.

Cohort study looking at outcomes following COVID infection at 6 months in vaccinated people (finding limited effectiveness of vaccination on long COVID)

A new study published via pre-print (so should be treated some with caution) has found very limited impact of vaccination on long COVID which is concerning. However, more research is likely needed on this point.

This cohort study based on electronic health records (mostly from the US) compares the 6-months outcomes of SARS-CoV-2 infection among individuals who were vaccinated against COVID-19 versus those were not (but who had received an influenza vaccination). Of 10,024 vaccinated individuals, 9,479 were matched to unvaccinated controls.

The researchers suggest that some post-acute outcomes including long COVID are likely to persist even after successful vaccination as long as breakthrough infections occur. However, while the researchers found that vaccination did not provide an overall protective effect against long-COVID features¹, they did find protective effects for some specific outcomes including myalgia, fatigue, pain and potential additional

¹ For the purposes of the study, long COVID was broadly defined as ‘abdominal symptoms, abnormal breathing, anxiety/depression, chest/throat pain, cognitive symptoms, fatigue, headache, myalgia and other pain.

protection after a second dose of the vaccine against abnormal breathing and cognitive symptoms.

This study highlights some of the definitional challenges we have discussed previously. The classification of long COVID within individual studies can have a significant effect on the overall interpretation of research findings. That said, the study serves as an important reminder that there is **still a great degree of uncertainty about the extent to which vaccination will reduce morbidity in those who go on to contract COVID-19 and this should be considered a risk in a high prevalence scenario.**

ONS data on the effect of vaccination on Self-reported long COVID symptoms

The ONS published an analysis of whether people infected with COVID-19 before vaccination continued to experience long COVID symptoms after receiving a vaccine (*note this was not a study into whether long COVID could be prevented by vaccination but rather whether vaccination could improve symptoms*).

Receiving a first COVID-19 vaccination was associated with an **initial 13% decrease** in the likelihood of self-reported long COVID among study participants aged 18 to 69 years in the UK. It is unclear whether this improvement was sustained. Receiving a second COVID-19 vaccination was associated with **a further 9% decrease**. There was evidence of a sustained improvement after the second vaccination

PARLIAMENTARY BUSINESS

We received five PQs on long COVID this week.

- Rachael Maskell MP (Labour MP for York Central) asked three questions focused on estimates of long COVID (including in children) and demand for services, recording long COVID figures and lung health.
- Dan Carden MP (Labour MP for Liverpool Walton) asked about long COVID in children and young people.
- Layla Moran (liberal Democrat MP for Oxford West and Abingdon) asked about long COVID and NHS charging regulations.

NATIONAL SUICIDE PREVENTION ADVISORY GROUP (NSPSAG)

Officials from the Department alongside NHSEI counterparts, a patient representative and clinician spoke to the National Suicide Prevention Strategy Advisory Group (NSPSAG) to raise awareness of long COVID among mental health stakeholders. We spoke about the need and potential opportunities to review existing data sets to capture data on the longer-term effects of COVID-19 infection and mental health.