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Press release

Health Secretary warns of long-term effects of COVID-19 as new film released

New data suggests long COVID affects around 10% of 18 to 49 year olds who become unwell with COVID-19.

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From: [Department of Health and Social Care](#)



- The Health Secretary urges people to follow the guidelines to protect themselves and others from the potentially debilitating long-term impact of COVID-19
- A new film has been released today featuring the stories of 4 people, one aged just 22, who are living with the long-term effects of the virus

The Health Secretary is urging the public – and especially young people – to follow the rules and protect themselves and others from COVID-19, as new data and a new film released today reveal the potentially devastating long-term impact of the virus.

The symptoms of 'long COVID', including fatigue, protracted loss of taste or smell, respiratory and cardiovascular symptoms and mental health problems, are described in a new film being released today as part of the wider national Hands, Face, Space campaign. The film calls on the public to continue to wash their hands, cover their face and make space to control the spread of the virus.

The emotive film features the stories of Jade, 22, Jade, 32, Tom, 32 and John, 48, who explain how their lives have been affected – weeks and months after being diagnosed with COVID-19. They discuss symptoms such as breathlessness when walking up the stairs, intermittent fevers and chest pain. The film aims to raise awareness of the long-term impact of COVID-19 as we learn more about the virus.

A new study today from King's College London, using data from the COVID Symptom Study App and ZOE, shows one in 20 people with COVID-19 are likely to have symptoms for 8 weeks or more. The study suggests long COVID affects around 10% of 18 to 49 year olds who become unwell with COVID-19.

Public Health England have found that around 10% of COVID-19 cases who were not admitted to hospital have reported symptoms lasting more than four weeks and a number of hospitalised cases reported continuing symptoms for eight or more weeks after discharge.

Health and Social Care Secretary Matt Hancock said:

“ I am acutely aware of the lasting and debilitating impact long COVID can have on people of all ages, irrespective of the seriousness of the initial symptoms. The findings from researchers at King's College London are stark and this should be a sharp reminder to the public – including to young people – that COVID-19 is indiscriminate and can have long-term and potentially devastating effects.

“ The more people take risks by meeting up in large groups or not social distancing, the more the wider population will suffer, and the more cases of long COVID we will see.

“ The powerful new film we're releasing today sheds light on the long-term impact this devastating virus has and should act as a stark reminder to us all.”

The government is committed to supporting people suffering long-term symptoms of COVID-19. The NHS recently announced £10 million to run designated long COVID clinics in every area across England where respiratory consultants, physiotherapists, other specialists and GPs will all help assess, diagnose and treat thousands of people who have reported symptoms ranging from breathlessness, chronic fatigue, “brain fog” to anxiety and stress.

Most people recover from COVID-19 without needing special treatment and for the majority symptoms will clear after approximately 2 weeks ([endnote 1](#)). But some of the persistent health problems reported for weeks and months after include continuing headaches, fatigue, respiratory symptoms such as lung inflammation, cardiovascular symptoms such as chest tightness, protracted loss or change of smell and taste and mental health problems, such as cognitive difficulties.

Tom, 32, who features in the film says:

“ Do not make the mistake of thinking that being young or being fit is going to stop COVID from having a long-term impact on your health.”

Jade, 32, adds:

“ The virus doesn’t care about any of that.”

Jade also says:

“ I developed coronavirus symptoms in March and, as someone who lives alone, it was very concerning, and I hoped it would be over after a week or two. Every time I thought I was making a recovery my symptoms returned – my breathing and fatigue was overwhelming, and I eventually understood I was experiencing the long-term COVID-19. More than anything I think it’s important for people to understand this isn’t always a two-week long virus – it has hugely affected my life and I hope the video and my story encourages those watching to do what they can to prevent infection of the virus.”

Jade, 22, who also features in the film said:

“ I haven’t had a day since mid-March where I’ve felt better. I’m a Nursery Practitioner and I haven’t been able to work for seven months now. I’m having to rest more, sleep more and I don’t have the energy that I used to at all. I really hope that I go back to my normal self. Not knowing makes me feel really worried about my future.”

Professor Stephen Powis, NHS Medical Director, said:

“ As we continue to learn more about COVID-19, it is clear that a significant minority of patients are suffering the after effects for weeks or months after contracting the virus. New specialist centres across the country will see respiratory consultants, physiotherapists, other specialists and GPs, all help assess, diagnose and treat patients who are suffering, and so it has never been more important that everyone does what they can to reduce the risk of spreading the virus by following the Hands, Face, Space guidance.”

Health Minister Lord Bethell said:

“ The evidence is worrying – COVID-19 is clearly having a long-term impact on some people’s physical and mental health.

“ We are moving quickly to stand up rehabilitation facilities and recovery services. These are becoming more accessible with the opening of specialist clinics across England.

“ The NHS England Long COVID taskforce will have a big impact, bridging between our research and the care people need. But the public must continue to be aware their behaviour has a huge impact on the spread of this virus and they must take the necessary precautions.”

Dr Claire Steves, clinical academic at KCL and lead scientist at COVID Symptom Study App said:

“ The COVID Symptom Study App has released key findings on long-COVID that show that older people, women and those with a greater number of different symptoms in the first week of their illness were more likely to develop long COVID. Around one in seven had COVID-19 symptoms lasting for at least 4 weeks, with around one in 20 staying ill for 8 weeks and one in fifty suffering for longer than 12 weeks.

“ We look forward to collaborating further with DHSC to support future

preventative and treatment strategies for long-COVID. We urge everyone to join the effort by downloading the COVID Symptom Study App and taking just a minute every day to log their health.”

New figures have been released as part of the Hands, Face, Space campaign which reveal uncertainty around how long it takes to recover from COVID-19. Over a third of people (34%) believe COVID-19 symptoms disappear after four weeks, whilst 1 in 5 (20%) of the 18 to 34 age group state they thought this would take 2 weeks ([endnote 2](#)). Over a third (31%) of the same respondents admitted they are unsure how long it would take to recover from COVID-19 symptoms.

Nearly a third (29%) of people aged between 18 to 34 said they weren't aware it is possible to have COVID-19 without displaying symptoms, meaning many people could also be at risk of acting as a 'carrier' of COVID-19 and passing it on to vulnerable family members, further reinforcing the importance of adopting the three essential behaviours to protect ourselves and our loved ones.

Background information

If you are suffering from any long-term symptoms or health problems after recovering from COVID-19, speak to your GP, call 111 or check the Your Covid Recovery website – an online COVID recovery resource for patients.

Assets

[Hands Face Space - Long Covid](#)

- [Video without subtitles](#)
- [Video with subtitles](#)

The compelling evidence combined with expert recommendations around 'Hands. Face. Space' includes:

Washing your hands

While coronavirus is not likely to survive for long periods of time on outdoor surfaces in sunlight, it can live for more than 24 hours in indoor environments ([endnote 3](#)). Washing your hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, or using hand sanitizer regularly throughout the day will reduce the risk of catching or passing on the virus ([endnote 4](#)).

Covering your face

Coronavirus is carried by tiny respiratory droplets. Larger droplets can land on other people or on surfaces they touch while smaller droplets, called aerosols, can stay in the air indoors for at least five minutes, and often much longer if there is no ventilation ([endnote 5](#)). Face coverings reduce the dispersion of these droplets, meaning if you're carrying the virus, you're less likely to spread it when you exhale ([endnote 6](#)).

Making space

Transmission of the virus is most likely to happen within two metres, with risk increasing exponentially at shorter distances ([endnote 7](#)). While keeping this exact distance isn't always possible, remaining mindful of surroundings and continuing to make space has a powerful impact when it comes to containing the spread. 'Hands. Face. Space' are simple but vital behaviours that have the power to protect the public from both the short and potential long-term impact of coronavirus.

Endnotes

Endnote 1: [Tony Blair Institute For Global Change study, Long Covid Reviewing The Science And Assessing The Risk 2020](#)

Endnote 2: [Report of the WHO-China Joint Mission on Coronavirus Disease](#)

[2019 \(COVID-19\)](#)

Endnote 3: COVID Awareness survey conducted by Opinium on behalf of Cabinet Office. Total sample size was 2,001 UK adults. Fieldwork was carried out online between 13 to 15 October 2020.

Endnote 4: Neeltje van Doremalen N, Bushmaker T, Morris DH, et al. Aerosol and Surface Stability of SARS-CoV2 as Compared with SARS-CoV-1. *N Engl J Med* 2020; 382(16): 1564-7

Endnote 5: Beale S, Johnson A, Zambon M, null n, Hayward A, Fragaszy E. Hand Hygiene Practices and the Risk of Human Coronavirus Infections in a UK Community Cohort [version 1; peer review: 1 approved]. *Wellcome Open Research* 2020; 5(98).

Endnote 6: A. C. Fears et al., "Persistence of Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus 2 in Aerosol Suspensions," *Emerg. Infect. Dis.*, vol. 26, no. 9, Sep. 2020, doi: 10.3201/eid2609.201806.

Endnote 7: D. K. Milton, M. P. Fabian, B. J. Cowling, M. L. Grantham, and J. J. McDevitt, "Influenza Virus Aerosols in Human Exhaled Breath: Particle Size, Culturability, and Effect of Surgical Masks," *PLoS Pathog.*, vol. 9, no. 3, 2013, doi: 10.1371/journal.ppat.1003205.

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