

# FACTSHEET



This fact sheet is for education purposes only. Please consult with your doctor or other health professionals to make sure this information is right for your child. If you would like to provide feedback on this fact sheet, please visit: <https://www.schn.health.nsw.gov.au/fact-sheets/feedback-form>.

## Recovering from COVID-19

### How long will my child take to recover from COVID-19?

Most children with COVID-19 have typical viral symptoms such as fever, sore throat, runny nose, cough, headache and diarrhoea. Most children can be safely cared for at home during their illness, and generally, most children make a full recovery within one to two weeks of infection.

For a small number of children, recovery can take longer, with ongoing symptoms such as fatigue or loss of taste and smell.

If your child has ongoing symptoms of their COVID-19 illness for more than 4 weeks after infection, they may need to see a doctor (usually their GP).

### What is 'long COVID'?

'Long COVID' is a term used to describe persistent symptoms occurring after COVID-19 illness that leaves people feeling that they have not fully recovered.

Health care providers generally consider long COVID as a potential diagnosis, if there is continuation of COVID-19 symptoms (or rarely the development of new symptoms), that affect a child's normal daily activities, and which persist for more than 12 weeks from the initial infection. It can be difficult to know

if these symptoms are due to COVID-19 or the impact of the broader pandemic situation itself, but your child's doctor will ensure your child is cared for in the best way possible.

There is no test that a doctor can do to diagnose long COVID in children. Instead, the diagnosis relies on a careful medical assessment.

### How common is it, what causes long COVID, and which children are at risk?

Since COVID-19 is still a new condition, researchers are still investigating how common long COVID is, what causes long COVID, and why it affects some children but not others. However, from the research studies conducted so far, we know that most children recover quickly and completely following COVID-19. Overall long COVID appears to be less common in children, even if adults in the family are affected. In multiple research studies, only small numbers of children experienced ongoing 'long COVID' symptoms, and most have returned to normal health with time.

### What are the signs or symptoms of long COVID?

Symptoms of long COVID may be similar to those experienced after other common childhood viral illnesses, such as the common cold, gastroenteritis



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and viral-induced asthma. It is important to remember that if your child has these symptoms, it does not necessarily mean they have long COVID. When providing care to children with ongoing symptoms, long COVID should only be considered if children are unable to return to their normal daily activities such as attending school, participating in community sport and their other usual extracurricular activities.

Some of the more frequently reported ongoing symptoms include:

- Fatigue
- Loss or altered taste or smell
- Headache
- Cough or runny nose
- Shortness of breath
- Reduced appetite
- Tummy pain
- Difficulty concentrating
- Difficulty sleeping

Some children may experience only one of these symptoms, while other children may experience more.

## Fatigue

Fatigue is a feeling of tiredness or weakness that interferes with your child's ability to do their normal activities. This can include:

- Difficulty waking up to go to school
- Falling asleep easily during the day
- Being unable to take part in their usual activities such as playing with friends or sport.

The following strategies may be useful:

- Encourage a regular wake up and sleep time and a before bed routine
- Avoid naps in the daytime if possible
- Avoiding screen time in the evening, as this can disrupt the natural sleep-wake cycle.

- Small amounts of regular physical activity, building up the intensity, frequency and length of time slowly as tolerated
- Prioritise attending school and taking part in school activities over other extracurricular activities
- Plan rest breaks throughout the day and week, and in between activities
- Ensure a healthy, well-balanced diet and drinking plenty of water.

## Taste and smell

Our sense of taste and smell is important in everyday life. They help us to detect dangerous smells like gas and smoke, and allow us to enjoy our food and identify food that has gone bad. Loss or altered taste and/or smell usually gets better within a month of recovery from the initial COVID-19 illness, but can take up to 6 months or longer in a very small proportion of children. This can be stressful for children and can affect their ability to enjoy food that they normally eat. Try to encourage your child to continue to eat a healthy diet. It is important to know that loss or altered taste and/or smell can also be caused by other illnesses unrelated to COVID-19.

There are no proven ways to treat loss or altered taste and/or smell associated with COVID-19, but there is some evidence that smell-retraining therapy may help. You can try this at home with your child, by getting them to sniff several familiar scents, one at a time for a few minutes, twice a day. Children should be involved with picking the scents. Common scents used include orange, peppermint, cinnamon, lavender, and eucalyptus.

Check with your GP, if your child has ongoing loss or altered taste and/or smell, before trying any treatments.

It may also be important to consider some other things around your home like ensuring you have working smoke alarms and marking leftover food with dates. For some older children, a loss or altered sense of smell can cause them to worry if

they smell bad e.g., on hot days or after sport. Your child may like to choose a friend to be their 'smell buddy', who can let them know about any smells in a discreet way.

### What else should I know?

If your child is having ongoing effects from their COVID-19 illness or the impact of the pandemic situation, they may also experience some strong emotions around this. Feelings such as sadness, worry, frustration and anger can be completely normal. It is important to recognise these feelings and allow your child to express them in a supported way. It may be helpful to keep a record of when your child is experiencing different emotions to work out ways to help. If your child is experiencing distressing emotions, you should discuss this with your health practitioner.

### When should my child see a GP or Paediatrician?

If you have ongoing concerns, your GP is the best person to start with. If your child already has a paediatrician your GP may also recommend you make an appointment with them. Your GP can also refer your child to see a paediatrician for the first time.

### When to seek urgent medical attention

You should seek urgent medical attention if your child has:

- Shortness of breath or difficulty breathing at rest
- Chest pain, racing heartbeat or dizziness that gets worse with exercise
- Worsening mood, anxiety or thoughts of self-harm

### Where do I find more information?

Although there can be lots of information available online, it is important to make sure the information you are accessing is safe for your child. Your GP or paediatrician are the best professionals to give you information that is the most suitable for your child.

There are also some helpful websites and resources you can refer to below for more information.

#### Helpful websites/resources:

- <https://www.yourcovidrecovery.nhs.uk/>
- <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/long-term-effects/index.html>
- <http://www.resourcingparents.nsw.gov.au/>
- <https://raisingchildren.net.au/>
- <https://www.headtohealth.gov.au/>
- <https://www.schn.health.nsw.gov.au/fact-sheets>