Long COVID:
What we know and what we need to know

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WHO Definition: Long COVID aka Post-COVID-19 condition

- Begins < 3 months from the onset of probable or confirmed COVID-19
- Symptoms last 2 months or longer
- No alternate diagnosis

- Common symptoms = fatigue, shortness of breath, cognitive dysfunction, pain, anxiety, poor sleep.¹
- Symptoms highly variable
- Can fluctuate or recover/relapse

Why?

- Direct effects of the virus that causes COVID-19
- Indirect effects through the immune system (inflammation)
- Other effects – reactivation of EBV? Gut microbes?
Who is at risk for Long COVID?

- Severe acute infection
- Length of hospitalization
- Comorbidities (e.g., diabetes)
- Older age

*Vaccination status*

- Two doses of vaccine halved odds of persistent symptoms (> 4 weeks)
- One dose of any vaccine also protective
- Some studies have also shown that vaccination protective after getting Long COVID

1. Lancet Infectious Disease, doi.org/10.1016/S1473-3099(21)00460-6
About the Long COVID Initiative

We are using the Initiative website and social media platforms to rapidly communicate research findings, news and expert insights on Long Covid.

aboutlongcovid.org @aboutlongcovid @BrownLCI
What are the impacts of Long COVID on disability?

- July 2021: Long Covid could be classified as a disability under the ADA and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act.
  - Applies to employers with 15+ employees.
  - HHS Guidance: Long COVID = disability if there is a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities

- Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2021: 1.2 million more people were identified as having a disability than in 2020, with 65% under the age of 65.

**Key Challenges:**
(1) No diagnostic test for Long COVID,
(2) Not all cases of COVID are confirmed
What are the financial & economic impacts of Long COVID?

- Direct financial impact
- Denial of disability benefits
- Insurance coverage: limits on payments for self-reported conditions, coverage for treatments for Long COVID
- Ending pandemic-era programs (supplement income, rent assistance)

Knowledge gap: Understanding the true economic impact of Long COVID.
What are the impacts of Long Covid on the Workforce?

• Around 3-4 million long haulers in the US are unable to work at any given time, 40-60% reducing their hours instead of taking time off\(^1\)

• \(\sim1.1\) million Americans are estimated to be wholly out of work due to Long COVID\(^2\)

• \(\sim2.1\) million workers are estimated to have reduced their work hours due to Long COVID\(^2\)

\(^{1}\text{www.barrons.com/articles/labor-shortage-workers-millions-sick-long-covid-}\)

\(^{2}\text{www.brookings.edu/research/is-long-covid-worsening-the-labor-shortage/}\)
Insights from stakeholder groups (Patients)

- Some individuals have been unable to work for months to > 1 year
- Feel dismissed by the medical community
- Undergo extensive diagnostic testing
- Feel “gaslit” by providers, told pandemic-related anxiety or depression
- Lack of research
- Eager to “feel normal” and return to work
Insights from stakeholder groups (Employers)

- Immediate issues get more attention (e.g., testing, vaccination)
- ADA recognizes Long COVID, but there is limited awareness of Long COVID and how it might impact someone’s ability to function
- Need for education around Long COVID for employers and employees
- Research that drives best practice and policy around different workplace scenarios
- Need support systems for all types of workers (including small business employees), particularly those with both physically and mentally challenging roles
Insights from stakeholder groups (Policy)

- Need for more disaggregated data to understand demographic impacts
- Payers, health system leaders and policymakers need an overview of who is being impacted by Long COVID (prevalence and cost).
- Policies unclear on financial support for people with Long COVID (e.g., paid leave)
- Immediate challenge of supporting people currently with Long COVID combined with difficulty of estimating future impact.
(Some) Key questions

- How can we anticipate the ongoing costs?
- How much of the current labor participation / unemployment rates are being driven by Long COVID?
- What resources need to be available to help treat and support employees with Long COVID? Employers?
- And many more
Thank You

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