



Kent

Cite this as: *BMJ* 2022;377:o1391
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1136/bmj.o1391>
 Published: 01 June 2022

Covid-19: Two million people in the UK are estimated to be experiencing long covid, says ONS

Jacqui Wise

Around two million people in the UK are estimated to be experiencing long covid symptoms, the Office for National Statistics has said.

The figure, based on self-reported symptoms and not a clinical diagnosis, comes from an analysis of 296 868 responses to the Coronavirus (Covid-19) Infection Survey, collected over the four week period ending 1 May 2022.¹

Participants were asked if they are still experiencing symptoms, that are not explained by something else, more than four weeks after first having covid-19. The estimates are based on a representative sample of people living in private households and do not include those in communal establishments such as halls of residence, prisons, schools, hospitals, or care homes.

Long covid symptoms adversely affected the day-to-day activities of 1.4 million people (71%) of those who self-reported long covid, with 20% reporting that their ability to go about day-to-day activities had been “limited a lot.”

Fatigue was the most common symptom reported (55% of those who self-reported long covid), followed by shortness of breath (32%), a cough (23%), and muscle ache (23%).

Of the two million, 1.4 million had covid-19 at least 12 weeks previously, while 826 000 had it at least one year previously and 376 000 said they had it at least two years previously.

Self-reported long covid was highest in people aged 35 to 69; women; people living in more deprived areas; those working in social care, education, or healthcare; and those with another health condition or disability.

Of people with self-reported long covid, 30% first had covid-19 before alpha became the dominant variant, compared with 12% in the alpha period, 21% in the delta period, and 31% in the omicron period.

David Strain, clinical senior lecturer and honorary consultant at University of Exeter Medical School, said, “The increase in number of cases of long covid is not surprising given the recent UK strategy of managing covid based on the risk of hospital admission and death alone.”

He added, “The most concerning figure here is the 376 000 people who have had the disease for over two years, remembering this by definition is only looking at the first four months of covid infections in the UK. This number will inevitably climb as all of those who caught covid in the second, third, and fourth waves experience continued symptoms.”

¹ Office for National Statistics. Prevalence of ongoing symptoms following coronavirus (covid-19) infection in the UK: 1 June 2022. www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/healthandsocialcare/conditionsanddiseases/bulletins/prevalenceofongoingsymptomsfollowingcoronaviruscovid19infectionintheuk/1june2022.

This article is made freely available for personal use in accordance with BMJ's website terms and conditions for the duration of the covid-19 pandemic or until otherwise determined by BMJ. You may download and print the article for any lawful, non-commercial purpose (including text and data mining) provided that all copyright notices and trade marks are retained.