Dear Prof. Kern

Thank you for sending us your revision. We continue to recognise its potential importance and relevance to general medical readers, but I am afraid that we have not yet been able to reach a final decision on it because several important aspects of the work still need clarifying.

We hope very much that you will be willing and able to revise your paper as explained below in the report from the manuscript meeting, so that we will be in a better position to understand your study and decide whether the BMJ is the right journal for it. We are looking forward to reading the revised version and, we hope, reaching a decision.

When you return your revised manuscript, please note that The BMJ requires an ORCID ID for corresponding authors of all research articles. If you do not have an ORCID ID, registration is free and takes a matter of seconds.

Yours sincerely,
Timothy Feeney MD MS MPH
Research Editor
The BMJ
tfeeney@bmj.com

To start your revision, please click this link or log in to your account: *** PLEASE NOTE: This is a two-step process. After clicking on the link, you will be directed to a webpage to confirm. ***

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**Report from The BMJ's manuscript committee meeting**

Decision: Put points

Please respond to these additional comments by the committee and reviewer (below):
* The abstract should include the number approached and the response rates as well as the number included in the analysis (at present only 11,710 participants is reported in the abstract).

* The abstract should include selection and recall biases as substantial caveats to the interpretation of prevalence.

* The study design is a cross sectional survey. Calling it a retrospective cohort seems to suggest more rigor than is the case. As we read it, outcome and covariate data were collected on participants at one time point only. Although health records were used to identify the sample of people to recruit this is not the primary feature of a retrospective cohort.
* We asked that the focus be on primarily on symptom clusters. These results should be reported first. The paragraphs of results for prevalence of individual symptoms should be moved to last in the results section. Similarly Figure 1 should appear after the present Figures 2 and 3 at least and perhaps Figure 4.

* The revision letter requested "Presenting the estimates as you have them now is fine as long as limitations of prevalence are strongly worded and honest, and as long as the focus is shifted as suggested above." There is little mention of limitations. Page 15 appears to be the first mention and the wording appears very mild to my eyes.

* We suggest that a sentence be added to the first paragraph of results (the one reporting the low response rate) explaining that in view of the low response rate the absolute prevalence results may be unreliable so the results concentrate firstly on the symptom clusters that may be a more reliable finding.

* Last we still feel Fig 2 is a bit confusing. We've had our in house visual display expert, Dr. Will Stahl-Timmins, offer some comments and potential ways to improve clarity. An in depth review is attached as a PDF.

In your response please provide, point by point, your replies to the comments made by the reviewers and the editors, explaining how you have dealt with them in the paper.

** Comments from the external peer reviewers**

Reviewer: 1

Comments:
I'd like to thank the authors for addressing my comments. I felt all the responses were carefully considered and it became clear that there were some limitations in the data that were collected which did not allow for some of the suggested changes to be made - this limitations are now clear in the Discussion. I didn't think this detracted from the study - it was still very interesting and relevant.

Two minor comments:

1) pg 9, line 11: Add SD to mean value (time from PCR to survey completion)

2) In the methods section you mention ‘parallel’ analysis was used. I still don't think the readers will know what you mean here - I think a reference is needed at the very least.

Additional Questions:
<em>The BMJ</em> uses compulsory open peer review. Your name and institution will be included with your comments when they are sent to the authors. If the manuscript is accepted, your review, name and institution will be published alongside the article. <strong>/em>
Please confirm that you understand and consent to the above terms and conditions.

I consent to the publication of this review

Please enter your name: Jamie Kirkham

Job Title: Professor of Biostatistics

Institution: The University of Manchester

Reimbursement for attending a symposium?: No

A fee for speaking?: No

A fee for organising education?: No

Funds for research?: No

Funds for a member of staff?: No

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Have you in the past five years been employed by an organisation that may in any way gain or lose financially from the publication of this paper?: No

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