New study finds young adults vulnerable to developing debilitating long-term complications from COVID-19

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A new study conducted by the University of Dayton in Ohio has concluded that adolescents and young adults who fall ill with COVID-19 have a high chance of being afflicted with persistent and potentially devastating long-term complications. The results expose the pseudoscientific claims, promoted by the bourgeois press, that young people are exempt from the most serious effects of COVID-19. The promotion of this lie has been used to justify the homicidal back-to-school drive despite record cases, hospitalizations and deaths from the virus.

The preliminary study surveyed 43 students who had either tested positive or been clinically diagnosed with COVID-19. Only students who had been sickened with a mild or moderate (non-hospitalized) case of COVID-19 were surveyed. Over 50 percent of these students reported symptoms more than 28 days later, and 30 percent were still experiencing symptoms more than 50 days later. The study also surveyed 58 students who had not contracted COVID-19 as a control group, to make sure that the symptoms were not the result of general stressors or other health issues that typically affect college students.

The symptoms reported most frequently by what they called the "post-COVID syndrome" group were impaired concentration, headaches, rhinitis, exercise intolerance, dyspnea, sleep impairment, brain fog, appetite loss, fatigue, and chest pain. It is notable that all but one of the post-COVID-19 syndrome group were women. According to the study, although men are more likely to die from COVID-19 (accounting for 70 percent of COVID-19 deaths), women are more likely to experience prolonged complications.

The study explains: "It is plausible that the more active female immune system may be an advantage in clearing the virus, but this could be a double-edged sword if the female immune activation produces a lingering syndrome. This sexually dimorphic immune response is further supported by a recent study which found that 12.5 percent of males but only 2.6 percent of females with severe COVID-19 had neutralizing immunoglobulin G (IgG) autoantibodies against interferons which could explain some of the increased male mortality."

Overall, these findings sharply contradict the claim that long-term complications from COVID-19 only affect middle-aged or elderly people. Dr. Julie Walsh-Messinger, one of the organizers of the study, said in a statement on the university website:

> The common belief in the U.S. is that COVID-19 is benign or short-lived in young adults. … Our study, which we believe is the first to report on post-COVID syndrome in college students, almost exclusively between 18 and 21 years of age, suggests otherwise. More research needs to be done to confirm these findings, but until then, we urge the medical and scientific community to consider young adults vulnerable to post-COVID syndrome and to closely monitor those who contracted the disease for lingering viral effects.

The study goes on to cite a Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) report, which found that one in five adults between the ages of 18 and 34 reported that they were still experiencing symptoms three weeks after testing positive for the virus. A July report by the CDC found that fully 35 percent of people with mild cases of COVID-19 had not fully recovered two-three weeks later.

It is notable that the study took place at the University of Dayton, where an 18-year-old freshman died of COVID-19 in October, a deadly consequence of the pseudoscientific notion that young adults and adolescents have nothing to fear from the novel coronavirus. Since reopening, the University of Dayton has recorded at least 1,532 cases of COVID-19 on campus.

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The as yet unnamed "post-COVID syndrome" presents itself in a wide range of symptoms from mild to debilitating and potentially life-threatening. Common symptoms include chronic fatigue, shortness of breath, headaches, heart palpitations, aching of the joints, chest pain, loss of taste or smell, and gastrointestinal issues. More serious complications include damage to the heart, lungs and kidneys, among many others.

The syndrome can also manifest in a number of neurological disorders ranging from insomnia to cognitive impairment—which some survivors have likened to dementia—marked by "brain fog," memory loss and general confusion. Psychological disorders such as depression and anxiety have also been commonly reported.

One case that has received widespread attention is that of Arizona resident Riley Behrens. Behrens, a 23-year-old Harvard student and rugby athlete, suffered a Transient Ischemic Attack, a form of mild stroke, after contracting COVID-19. Though mostly recovered since then, he continues to experience dizziness and fatigue, with even mundane activities proving a challenge. According to *USA Today*: "I'm not walking my dog on long walks. I'm not over-exerting myself cleaning my house. I'm not allowed to drive until I'm cleared by a neurologist. I can't play sports because the risk of another head injury increases the risk of a stroke."

Dr. Luay Shayya, associated with Neurology Consultants of Arizona, told *USA Today* that the case of Behrens is more common than one might imagine: "There have been multiple case reports published ... about patients who are young having large strokes due to COVID. … It's very unusual for young people to have strokes to begin with."

It is also known that young children and teens are susceptible to developing post-COVID syndrome. One anguished parent told the WSWS: "My daughter has lost 30 pounds, she has heart problems, she has joint swelling and pain, she spends four hours a week at therapy, she has weird infections, she fights fatigue daily, she has brain fog. I just found out yesterday that she has a weak heart with a constant rapid heart rate. She just hasn't been the same."

Those who suffer from post-COVID syndrome, known as "long-haulers," are breaking their silence and speaking out about their struggles. Many have had their experiences dismissed by doctors as being the result of PTSD or depression resulting from their COVID-19 illness. However, as the population stricken with the syndrome grows, their pain has become undeniable. Online support groups such as Body Politic and Survivor Corps have appeared, giving a voice to those who had been suffering in silence.

A recent *New York Times* article published the accounts of COVID-19 survivors and their health care providers as they struggle to understand and treat the debilitating syndrome. Dr. Ann Parker, who works at a post-COVID clinic at Johns Hopkins, reported: "Approximately three months after their acute illness, more than half of our patients have at least a mild cognitive impairment. … We're also seeing substantial mental health impairments."

Hannah Davis, a 32-year-old Brooklyn artist and researcher, told the *Times*: "I forgot my partner's name. … I would regularly pick up a hot pan, burn myself, put it down and literally do it again. I forgot how to shower. I forgot how to dress myself." Davis, who is involved with Body Politic, went on to cite a survey conducted by the group of 3,800 of its members in 56 countries. According to the *Times*, the survey found that 85 percent reported cognitive dysfunction, 75 percent were having difficulties functioning at work, and almost half had difficulties with speech and language.

Several physicians, among them Dr. Anthony Fauci of the National Institute of Health, have speculated that many of those suffering from COVID-19 complications are on track to develop a condition resembling Myalgic Encephalomyelitis/Chronic Fatigue Syndrome (ME/CFS). ME/CFS, is described by the Institute of Medicine as "a serious, chronic, complex systemic disease that often can profoundly affect the lives of patients." This is a mysterious affliction that has no known cure and can cripple its sufferers for months, and sometimes years.

While the exact mechanism whereby COVID-19 causes these long-term effects remains murky, what is undeniable are the devastating implications of hundreds of thousands, and possibly millions of Americans being stricken with debilitating chronic health issues. In light of the growing mountain of evidence showing that young adults and adolescents are vulnerable to the ravages of COVID-19, the policy of reopening the schools and universities assumes a criminal character.

The catastrophic policies of the ruling class—represented by both Democrats and Republicans—which have allowed the uncontrolled spread of the coronavirus, will not only result in hundreds of thousands of preventable deaths, but will also cause untold suffering and misery for the millions who survive. This constitutes nothing less than a crime against all of humanity, and only the intervention of the international working class on the basis of a revolutionary socialist program—with the explicit aim of overthrowing capitalism—can halt this orgy of agony and death.

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