

Staggering 10 to 15 percent of infected children suffer from Long COVID

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Recently published data from the UK Office for National Statistics (ONS) shows that among children who have survived COVID-19, 13 percent of those 11 years or younger and about 15 percent of those aged 12 to 16 are suffering the effects of Post-acute COVID-19 (“Long COVID”) and report at least one symptom five weeks after a confirmed COVID-19 infection.

Long COVID is a multisystem disease in which growing numbers of adults and children are suffering from lingering symptoms for months or even a year now after contracting COVID-19. These include sleep disorders such as insomnia, heart palpitations, gastrointestinal issues, breathing difficulties, muscle and joint pain plus exhaustion, headaches and cognitive impairment (“brain fog”) and overall lack of concentration. Those who suffer from persistent symptoms sometimes refer to themselves as “long haulers.”

An Italian study published in January 2021 showed that of the 129 children diagnosed with COVID-19 between March and November, 2020, “More than a half reported at least one persisting symptom even after 120 days since COVID-19, with 42.6% being impaired by these symptoms during daily activities. Symptoms like fatigue, muscle and joint pain, headache, insomnia, respiratory problems and palpitations were particularly frequent, as also described in adults.”

The revelations are particularly concerning for infants, toddlers and children who are at the crucial stage of development. There is nothing yet known about how long it will affect and potentially ruin their long-term development and lives.

“The first thing is don’t let your child get COVID. You can’t develop Long COVID or have post COVID complications if you never get COVID,” said Dr. Daniel Griffin in a March 17, 2021 interview with Medcram.com. Griffin is an MD/PhD board certified in infectious disease and an instructor in Clinical Medicine and an associate research scientist in the Department of Biochemistry and Molecular Biophysics at Columbia University.

Dr. Griffin cited data from the UK and explained the

troubling cases he is seeing in the New York Tri-State area (New York, New Jersey, Connecticut) that some ten percent of children with COVID are suffering from Long COVID. “The one thing I want to bring up which parents are getting very upset about now is that children, like adults, may get covid and not be better in a week or two. Long COVID in adults is twenty percent, in children it may be as high as ten percent, that is what we are seeing in the UK where they have good surveillance.”

Dr. Griffin described that one third of Long COVID patients he sees had asymptomatic infections: “With the opening of schools and resumption of sports, large numbers of children are enrolling in sports and “realizing they can’t run up and down a soccer field, or a teacher is calling and saying ‘Hey your son is not paying attention in school.’ From there, parents are having to piece together that their child had COVID a few months ago and it was either mild or asymptomatic. We don’t see long COVID just in people who end up in hospital. Hair loss has been particularly traumatic.”

Information and studies on Long COVID in adults are difficult to find, but this is even more true when it comes to children. As a result, thousands of parents from around the world have taken to social media and sought answers from others in large support groups where children are experiencing a laundry list of debilitating symptoms that affect organs from the heart to the brain. Here they search for patterns, share stories and find support.

A number of parents on social media support groups air frustrations that their children have had numerous “tests come back normal,” so they are sent home without treatment or referrals to specialists. Parents report children have debilitating gastrointestinal pain, acute ankle and joint pain so severe that it forces older children crawl, testicular torsions in boys, brain fog which prevents them from learning at school or via remote education, tremors, slurred speech, and fatigue that keeps them groggy for large portions of the day. In essence they do not recognize their children.

Many parents lament that they have burned bridges at a number of pediatric hospitals because their desperation has forced them to have to scream at the top of their lungs so their child's issues are taken seriously. Major advocacy and information groups have also been built by parents and physicians seeking answers and sharing stories.

Frances Simpson is the cofounder of support and advocacy group Long Covid Kids (LCK) in the United Kingdom where she is a lecturer in psychiatry at Coventry University in Scarborough. Simpson and her two children have endured lasting effects of Long COVID for over a year now. In a recent interview with German Deutsche Welle (DW) news, she explained the exhaustion that parents face trying to get care for their children, often with little guidance from medical professionals: "It's a really difficult place to be in. Quite often parents are ill themselves, and to have children who are ill and their illness is denied. Parents feel they are being gaslighted."

LCK has conducted two major surveys on hundreds of children in its growing network. The findings of these surveys are among the most comprehensive data collected to date. Simpson noted that their surveys "established that a lot of the symptoms in children are very similar [to adults with long COVID], but children tend to have an increased amount of gastric issues. Children ending up with appendicitis. We see a lot of the symptoms of PMIS, Pediatric multisystem inflammatory disorder. We are seeing neuropsych symptoms, seizures, tics, Tourette's, seizures. There is a real gamut."

LCK notes, "Our study provides further evidence on Long COVID in children. It is based on a survey of 510 children. Symptoms like fatigue, headache, muscle and joint pain, rashes and heart palpitations, and mental health issues like lack of concentration and short-term memory problems, were particularly frequent and confirm previous observations, suggesting that they may characterize this condition. A better comprehension of Long COVID is urgently needed."

Parents reported that their child's activity levels had worsened. Only "10% of the children have returned to previous levels of activity and 21.2% are currently unable to enjoy any activity, while 30.2% enjoy occasional activity but usually have an increase of symptoms afterwards."

Another worrisome issue is the frequency of neuropsychiatric symptoms and mental health issues. With regards to memory and concentration, "60.6% reported lack of concentration, 45.9% difficulty in remembering information, 40% difficulty in doing everyday tasks, 32.7% difficulty processing information, and 32.7% short-term memory issues."

A number of children and families have shared stories and

photos of handwritten notes that outline the age, location, and duration of symptoms. Fifteen-year-old Delaney suffers from multiple heart and breathing issues and holds a pair of ballet slippers indicating that she can no longer dance. Six-year-old Seren has been suffering for over 300 days from ulcers, pneumonia, rashes and extreme body pains. Eleven-year-old Itai says he can no longer play rugby and has been suffering for 349 days from a litany of symptoms that include tics and seizures.

Citing data from the UK Office of National Statistics (ONS), the organization notes that in the UK alone, 74,126 children report symptoms at 5 weeks, and 45,616 continue to report symptoms after 12 weeks.

Simpson and her two children continue to suffer from long COVID a year after their initial infections in March 2020. "My children are not better, they have relapses anytime something exerts them," she said.

LCK provides an informational packet for parents and schools that compiles all the significant data, the results of their surveys, and also stresses the necessity of ventilation in classrooms. Among their materials they regretfully report that, though anecdotal, "We do not have one recovery story to share. No child in our group has yet returned to their previous state of health."

Despite the growing number of cases and staggering data that 10-15 percent of COVID-infected children are facing Long COVID, there has been a near media blackout on the issue as schools have continued with reopening around the world. The ruling class throughout the globe is making a conscious decision as part of a class policy to turn a deaf ear to the issue, just as it has to the growing global death toll as it nears three million and a worldwide fourth surge is gaining momentum.

All parents, educators, and workers interested in putting an end to these dangerous policies and prioritizing safety and human life instead, should join and help build the international network of Rank-and-File Safety Committees by contacting us at wsws.org/edsafety.



To contact the WSWs and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

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