

UK teacher with Long COVID : “The government decided to go for herd immunity, they knew they were putting us at risk. They’re quite happy to reduce the population.”

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Long COVID sufferer Kathleen Davies spoke to the *World Socialist Web Site* about her illness. Kathleen, aged 50, is a secondary school teacher in the northwest of England, teaching Design and Technology. She has had COVID symptoms for 15 months and is still unable to work due to the debilitating effects of the disease.

Her story underlines the utter criminality of the policies of the UK government, which has been backed throughout the pandemic by the unions and the Labour Party.

Kathleen became ill on March 18, 2020. “I had a sore throat, a headache,” she said. “I picked up my daughter from primary and there was only one car in the car park, and I managed to drive into it; my brain wasn’t working. The next day I could barely get out of bed.”

Kathleen self-isolated at home with her 10-year-old daughter. “One day we went out for a walk. She was running and I couldn’t catch her. I went over, I couldn’t control my legs. The next day I couldn’t move. My whole body was being tortured. It was like my body was being squeezed in a vice. I lay on the sofa with my back to the sun, I couldn’t bear to look at the sunlight. I was two days like that, in absolute agony, the pain killers didn’t do anything, I was struggling with my breathing.

“I didn’t have enough energy to make food for my daughter, so she was just eating cereals, finding bags of crisps and all sorts of rubbish” until her husband returned from work.

“I phoned 111 [National Health Service non-medical

emergencies] and they said your symptoms are in line with COVID. I got antibiotics for pneumonia. My stomach wasn’t working, I had huge pains in my stomach and my chest. I was freezing cold, I was coughing up stuff, it was like a cytokine storm was taking hold of my body. I felt like I’d been in a car crash, my hands, my wrists, my ankles, everything was in agony. It was unbearable and it was going on day after day, week after week. The head pressure was horrendous.”

Kathleen developed further symptoms. “In May I developed heart palpitations. I started taking CBD oil, and that helped. I was getting dizzy. I remember trying to concentrate to watch *Gardeners World*. It wasn’t just the physical effort; it was the mental strain. I was watching for about 10 minutes when my heart rate went up to 186. When I got heart palpitations my oxygen levels would crash to 60.”

Kathleen was rushed to hospital, one visit among several with either heart or respiratory problems. “The doctor told me I had a post-viral syndrome following COVID, and it would take me up to a year to recover. I was staggered.”

Before she became ill Kathleen led an active life, enjoying “the odd half marathon, wild swimming, lots of outdoors things. Now, the whole garden is full of weeds. Being able to kick a football with my daughter would be amazing. Long COVID is life changing. You lose who you are.”

In July, after resting at home with the support of her

husband, Kathleen felt her health was improving. However, she was under financial pressure and the school management began pressuring her to return to work.

“My HR [human resources] rang and said next month you will be on half pay, could you try a phased return. My doctor advised doing two hours every other day. It was costing me a fortune buying all these supplements, I was concerned over how I was going to manage.”

After returning to work, Kathleen found she “couldn’t keep up with what they wanted me to do. I explained it was supposed to be time specific not task specific. They were forcing me to work more hours to get the work done.”

As school was working remotely, “I worked in an armchair with a flight pillow behind my neck as I couldn’t hold my head up. I felt proud of myself, I’m not completely brain dead. But work made me feel like I was failing as I wasn’t getting everything done. On Friday, HR said can you do full-time next week. My jaw dropped. I had to agree to three hours every day.”

The pressure to work before she was fit aggravated her symptoms. School presented her with work sheets to sign, which she refused, and she was expected to take part in performance management, increasing her stress. “I relapsed badly for three weeks. It stems from work pushing me. Over summer [school holidays] I started to improve a bit more, but by August I started with terrible insomnia. Then in September I was required to go back full time.”

In September, schools reopened for face-to-face teaching. “I managed to make it in for the first two days,” said Kathleen, “But my memory, my concentration was shocking. On the third day, carrying bags to the car pushed my heart rate up, and as I got to school, I couldn’t physically get out of the car. I had to ring 999.

“I deteriorated. Back at home I went to no pay in October. My husband started working lots of extra shifts, to get money. My dad was helping us, putting money in my account. Without my family I don’t know where we’d be. I was spending a lot of money on treatments... Then I developed bradycardia [heart damage]. I was talking to occupational health for an hour and I collapsed on a walk. I was looking around, I thought this is a nice spot, I thought this is it, I’ve had a good life.”

Kathleen was referred to a cardiologist, who told her “Lots of people with Long COVID have their autonomic nervous system affected, which controls your heartbeat and blood pressure, your bladder control. That also disturbs your sleep.”

Later, because Kathleen’s health was improving slightly occupational health suggested another phased return to work. “To try and get some money I organised to go back in January. I found it really hard with tinnitus, concentration and fatigue. We were online learning. By the fourth week I was teaching classes 80 percent of the time. I was exhausted; it was really difficult to do the preparation for the next day.

“When schools reopened, going up the stairs I couldn’t breathe, my legs were like lead. Then getting into class breathless, with the kids noisy, trying to get my voice across was horrific. I went into decline.

“They were doing well-being sessions with me, but it was more like a scrutiny meeting, you haven’t done this or that, every week. I felt like I was being targeted. I got a letter from the head telling me I wasn’t allowed to talk to anyone in the department... I was finally told that if I didn’t improve my teaching standards, I would be put in incapability procedures.”

Kathleen visited her doctor who “signed me off with Long COVID symptoms exacerbated by stress.”

“The government decided to go for herd immunity, they knew they were putting us at risk. They’re quite happy to reduce the population. They put people on the frontline at risk, they’ve covered up Long COVID. You want them to put money into research, to help people with a proper phased return. It’s all about money. Lots of educators put themselves on the frontline when schools should have been shut.”

Kathleen is still employed by her school and back on full pay for now. School expects her to begin a phased return after the summer holidays.

The Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committee urges educators, parents and students to attend our next online public forum on Saturday, July 10 at 2pm BST . To attend register here .



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