Long COVID: The NHS plan for 2021/22

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NHS England and NHS Improvement
As an initial response to the challenge of Long COVID, last October the NHS set out a 5-point plan:

- we promised advice for clinicians and information for patients; NICE published the case definition in November and clinical guidance on managing the long-term effects of COVID-19 in December 2020;

- NHS England and Improvement committed to providing Post-COVID Assessment Clinics. 90 clinics have now been established in England to offer specialist physical, cognitive or psychological assessment. A national specification was published in April 2020 to support this;

- over 3.5 million visits have been made to the highly rated patient information section of the Your COVID Recovery website and over 130 rehabilitation services have been trained to support patients to use the specialist online rehabilitation support element;

- on research, the NHS worked with the National Institute of Health Research to support studies to advance understanding of Long COVID with £50 million having now been committed to research; and

- finally, we have been much aided by the work of the NHS Long COVID Taskforce, which includes a wide range of participants including people with lived experience of Long COVID, NHS staff and researchers. Listening to people with lived experience is at the centre of our work.
The NHS Long Covid Plan 2021/22

Progress on the 5-point plan provided the basis for a further 10 key actions, underpinned by an additional £100 million in 2021/22

- Invest £30 million in the rollout of an enhanced service for general practice to support patients to be managed in primary care, where appropriate.
- Invest a further £70 million to expand Long COVID services to add to the £24 million already spent on Post-Covid Assessment Clinics.
- Care coordination to ensure care is joined up and prioritised based on clinical need.
- Establish 15 Post-COVID assessment paediatric hubs across England in order to coordinate care for children and young people across a range of services.
- Extend the use of the Your COVID Recovery online rehab platform.
- Collect and publish data to support operational performance, and clinical and research activities.
- Focus on equity of access, outcomes and experience.
- Support our NHS staff suffering from Long COVID by offering a package of comprehensive support for health and wellbeing.
- Promote good clinical practice through the national learning network on Long COVID for healthcare professionals.
- Develop standard rehab pathway packages to treat the commonest symptoms of Long COVID.
Primary/community care post-COVID syndrome pathway all ages
Incorporating NICE/SIGN/RCGP guidance 2020

Assessment from 4 weeks - Code: 'Ongoing symptomatic COVID-19' from 4 weeks

- Patients signposted from Test and Trace, community pharmacy, NHS website
  - Your COVID Recovery (YCR) Part 1
    - General practice: Previous COVID-19 suspected or confirmed - symptoms from 4 weeks
    - Assessment: To exclude serious underlying pathology and differential diagnoses as per NICE guidance
    - Post COVID syndrome diagnosed: Initial advice given +/- referral into existing pathways if appropriate

Post COVID management options - Code: 'Post-COVID-19 syndrome'

- Referral pathways and patient flow dependent upon local systems, structures and organisations
  - Post COVID triage/MDT assessment service
    - Post COVID MDT advice/rehabilitation/support
      - Physical - Psychological - Psychiatric - Vocational
    - Specialist referral for specific conditions

Manage urgent conditions

- Referral to paediatric services including for Paediatric Inflammatory Multisystem Syndrome (PIMS)
- Mental health support (all age) if required
- Specialist referral for specific conditions

Support access and follow up for underserved groups

Ongoing monitoring of patient as required

Monitoring of service use: numbers, demographics, protected characteristics
Further £90 Million announced for 2022/23

Integrated Care Systems are requested to ensure Post COVID services consider the following areas:

- Supporting primary care to implement its part of the pathway. This includes
  - sharing knowledge and education about the condition with primary care colleagues
  - raising awareness of the local pathways so primary care has knowledge of services
  - implementing actions to mitigate inequity of access to services

- Clinic core requirements:
  - Accept patients with suspected long Covid whether post hospital or community
  - Access to diagnostic tests
  - Access to multi-professional team
  - Access to rehab pathway
  - Offer of face to face appointments where clinically necessary
NHS activity and access for post Covid services (Aug – October 2021)

Number of Referrals, initial assessments and follow up appointments

- Nationally, initial referral and assessment activity has plateaued while follow-up appointments have increased.
- Majority of individuals accessing services are of white ethnicity, female, aged 35 – 64 years (working ages).
- Ongoing work to improve availability and accuracy of access data as part of improving equity of access.

Access demographics

- Ethnicity:
  - White: 64%
  - Unknown/not stated: 19%
  - Other ethnic group: 3%
  - Black, Black British, Caribbean or African: 4%
  - Asian or Asian British: 7%
  - Mixed ethnic groups: 3%

- Age:
  - 35-44 years: 20%
  - 25-34 years: 10%
  - 45-54 years: 10%
  - 55-64 years: 9%
  - 65-74 years: 9%
  - 75-84 years: 4%
  - 85+ years: 1%
  - Unknown/not recorded: 1%
  - 14-18 years (where soon in adult service): 0%
  - 19-24 years: 3%

- Gender:
  - Male: 36%
  - Female: 63%
  - Unknown/not stated: 1%

- Deprivation category:
  - IMD 1 & 2: 39%
  - All other IMD deciles (3-10): 41%
Children and young people’s specialist Post COVID hubs

- **ONS self-reported prevalence estimates** in October 2021 found symptoms in those 12 to 16 years and 17 to 24 years comparable to people aged 35 to 69 years.

- The children and young people with Long Covid (CLoCk) study shows 1 in 7 (14%) CYP testing positive for acute COVID-19 infection may have symptoms linked to the virus 15 weeks later.

- 14 specialist paediatric hubs established to support local paediatric services.

**North East and Yorkshire**
- The Newcastle upon Tyne Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust
- South Tees NHS Foundation Trust
- Hull University Teaching Hospitals NHS Trust
- Leeds Children’s Hospital
- Sheffield Children’s NHS Foundation Trust

**East of England**
Cambridge University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust

**Midlands**
- Birmingham Women’s and Children’s NHS Foundation Trust
- University Hospitals of Leicester NHS Trust

**North West**
- Alder Hey Children’s NHS Foundation Trust
- Royal Manchester Children’s Hospital

**London**
- London hub led by the Evelina, Imperial, University College London Hospital (UCLH) and Great Ormond Street Hospital for Children (GOSH)

**South West**
- Bristol Royal Hospital for Children

**South East**
- Solent NHS Foundation Trust
- Oxford University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust
Rehabilitation for people with Post Covid Syndrome

- Integrated rehabilitation/recovery pathway including physical and psychological assessment and intervention for all ages.
- In person, virtual and digital options for rehabilitation and recovery
- Use of outcome and experience measure including the friends and family test
- Occupational health support and vocational rehabilitation where appropriate
- Early local feedback shows most patients report improvement in quality of life and ability to return to work after rehab
Support from the voluntary and care sector to address health inequalities and make connections beyond healthcare

Commitment in the Long Covid NHS Plan 2021/22 to partner with National Voices, Asthma UK/British Lung Foundation and other VCSE organisations to engage with communities more likely to be impacted by health inequalities.

Developing a multiagency framework to signpost to other services.

**National Voices**
- Disseminate good practice, raise awareness, improve quality of support for people with Long-Covid, particularly those from marginalised communities
- Unite an alliance of VCSE partners, giving a voice to under-represented communities
- Create additional insight about information and support needs of marginalised communities
- Address inequalities and tackle the inverse care law
- Emerging themes on awareness, connection, access, and quality

**Asthma UK and British Lung Foundation**
- Create a pathway for people to help identify if they have Long-COVID and access tools to manage their varied symptoms in one place.
- A web-based tool for symptom identification
- An information hub with short-form information and signposting to more detailed resources.