

# Long COVID Return to Work Guidelines for Clinicians

## What is Long COVID?

Long COVID refers to a broad range of physical and mental symptoms that develop during or after COVID-19 illness, continue for at least three months from the onset of illness, have an impact on the patient's life, and are not explained by alternative diagnoses. Over 200 symptoms have been associated with long COVID, and patients may present with various combinations of symptoms, ranging in severity, and with different functional impacts.

Scientific evidence regarding long COVID is evolving; a summary of current evidence can be found on UpToDate: <https://www.uptodate.com/contents/covid-19-evaluation-and-management-of-adults-with-persistent-symptoms-following-acute-illness-long-covid>

## Why might return-to-work planning for long COVID be challenging?

Long COVID is a newly emerging condition that is not yet well characterized. The symptoms associated with long COVID are numerous, and their severity and functional impacts in individual patients may range widely. There is a wide variability in time to symptom resolution, and the recovery trajectory in any individual patient is difficult to predict. Long COVID is considered a chronic, episodic condition, or disability, which does not align with a traditional phased return to work plan approach.

## What factors should be considered when developing a return-to-work plan?

Return-to-work planning for long COVID needs to be individualized to thoughtfully consider the employee's symptoms and functional limitations in relation to the requirements of the job. Due to the unpredictable recovery trajectory and potentially episodic nature of long COVID symptoms, return-to-work plans need to be flexible, closely monitored, and adjusted as necessary as symptoms, functioning, and energy capacity change over time.

Employees with long COVID may have broad and changing impacts to their cognitive, physical, or emotional health. They may experience various functional limitations because of their symptoms in these areas.

The return-to-work plan should be closely monitored to ensure that job demands and requirements adequately accommodate changes in patient symptoms and functional capacity. If job demands exceed functional capacity, then this may exacerbate symptoms and cause significant setbacks.

## What can you do if symptoms persist?

Refer **employees** to the self-management resources at: [ahs.ca/healthyaftercovid](https://ahs.ca/healthyaftercovid) as early as possible.

Refer **healthcare providers** to [Recovery & Rehabilitation After COVID-19: Resources for Health Professionals](#) for additional tools and resources to support their patients.

