

Aftermath of COVID-19

Prof. Dr. HN Sarker

About eight months have passed after declaring Coronavirus disease-2019 (COVID-19) pandemic by the World Health Organization (WHO) on 11th March 2020, which is caused by SARS-CoV-2 virus first detected in Wuhan province of China in 31 December, 2019.

According to the World Health Organization, about 80% of infections are mild or asymptomatic, 15% result in moderate to severe symptoms (requiring oxygen) and about 5% are critical infections, which require ventilation.

We know a lot about the symptoms of COVID-19, but relatively little about what happens after someone recovers. Much is still unknown about how COVID-19 will affect people over time. There's still much to be learned from those who have recovered from COVID-19.

We are still only nine months beyond the first emergence of COVID-19, so it's too early to tell what the extent of any long-term impacts will be. With less than a year of COVID-19, identifying the long-term effects of COVID-19 can feel a little bit like predicting the future.

We are learning something new every day. Our understanding of the pandemic is growing and changing daily. The world is

focusing on the short term – flattening the curve, treating the sick and discovering a vaccine. But there is more to this pandemic than the short term.

Most people who have COVID-19 recover completely within a few weeks¹. But some people - even those who had mild disease, continue to experience symptoms after their initial recovery. Older people and people with many serious medical conditions are the most likely to experience these lingering COVID-19 symptoms. The most common symptoms that linger over weeks, even months are:

- Fatigue
- Cough (dry)
- Shortness of breath
- Headache
- Joint pain
- Muscle pain
- Confusion and even hallucinations.

But, our body has surprising healing capacity; most of these symptoms will improve by six months. However, some people recovering from COVID-19 will likely suffer from long-term health problems.

Although COVID-19 is seen as a disease that primarily affects the lungs, it can damage many other organs as well. This organ damage may increase the risk of long-term

1. Professor, Medicine, SBMC, Barishal

health problems. Some of the most common long-term effects are:

Lungs: The pneumonia associated with COVID-19 can often cause long-standing damage to the tiny air sacs (alveoli) in the lungs². The resulting scar tissue i.e. pulmonary fibrosis can lead to long-term breathing problems.

Heart: A recent study from the University of Frankfurt in Germany showed abnormal heart findings in more than 75% of people studied who had recently recovered from COVID-19. Imaging tests taken months after recovery from COVID-19 have shown lasting damage to the heart muscle, even in people who experienced only mild COVID-19 symptoms. This may increase the risk of heart failure or other heart complications in the future.

Brain: COVID-19 can cause strokes³, seizures and Guillain-Barre syndrome, even in young people. COVID-19 may also increase the risk of developing Parkinson's disease and Alzheimer's disease.

Blood clots and blood vessel problems: COVID-19 can predispose to form clots. While large clots can cause heart attacks and strokes, much of the heart damage caused by COVID-19 is believed to stem from very small clots that block tiny blood vessels (capillaries) in the heart muscle.

Other organs affected by blood clots include the lungs, legs, liver and kidneys.

Psychiatric issues: Most people recovering from COVID-19 experience anxiety, depression, or cognitive impairment. Some may develop more serious Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) due to the trauma of the illness and treatment⁴.

Kidney: Patient may develop kidney complications which could lead to a need for long-term dialysis.

A lot of things may happen in long run in those who recovered from COVID-19. Our understanding of COVID-19's long term effects will depend greatly on ongoing studies over the next decades. The body has an amazing way of healing and there is no evidence that recovering from COVID-19 makes you more susceptible to lung cancer and other serious conditions.

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