

Getting Healthy After COVID-19

AHS provides a provincially coordinated approach for patients recovering from COVID-19

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Alberta Health Services (AHS), together with Covenant Health and primary care, has developed a long-term provincial strategy to support and care for Albertans who have tested positive for COVID-19 and are left with lasting symptoms.

At the outset of the pandemic in March 2020, 'long', or post COVID was not initially recognized or understood, and didn't become apparent until the spring after some initial COVID patients were taking more than 12 weeks to recover, if at all.

AHS recognized that post COVID rehabilitation was becoming a need for patients, as questions were raised around the potential long-term effects of the virus on individuals who have tested positive.

Responding to the Needs of Post COVID Patients and System Impact

"AHS knows that post COVID recovery and rehabilitation is essential for these patients," says Dr. Chester Ho, Senior Medical Director for AHS' Neurosciences, Rehabilitation & Vision Strategic Clinical Network (NRV SCN). "A comprehensive approach has been implemented province-wide to support those struggling with long-term effects of COVID-19, and also to help guide healthcare providers in delivering care plans tailored for each patient's unique needs."



While the majority of people who have tested positive for COVID-19 will fully recover and self-manage symptoms, we know approximately 10-25% of individuals are left with lingering physical, psychological, social and cognitive effects including chronic fatigue, muscle weakness and shortness of breath.

This has been referred to as "long COVID-19" or "post COVID-19 syndrome", with symptoms occurring regardless of age or gender, whether or not patients have been hospitalized or whether they originally experienced mild or severe illness. Patients are often referring to themselves as "Long Haulers".

As the pandemic continues we expect to see increased impacts on: critical care, emergency departments, acute care, hospital services, primary health care, ambulatory care, community health services, continuing care, mental health, and specialty services. We also anticipate significant demand on rehabilitation services.



For example, our partners at Workers Compensation Board (WCB) are seeing approximately 30% of new submitted 'time-lost' claims related to COVID-19.

Post-COVID TaskForces & Collaboration

In April 2020, the NRV SCN; AHS Operations; and AHS Allied Health launched the Post COVID-19 Rehabilitation Taskforce. This multidisciplinary group conducted literature reviews, examined available evidence and consulted with local and international experts in order to make recommendations that would collectively enable timely, appropriate rehabilitation for adult patients with COVID-19 across the care continuum.

The recommendations are presented in a [final report](#), and are currently being customized and implemented across the zones, including:

- Building screening tools into existing platforms (e.g. Connect Care).
- Developing referral criteria for rehabilitation programs.
- Creating guidelines for rehabilitation practice with this population.
- Leveraging virtual health where possible.
- Producing provider resources; and zone-specific resources as needed.

In order to fully understand the long term trajectory of COVID-19 and to potentially inform future health service delivery and government policy around post COVID-19 care, AHS together with Alberta Health is planning to do a provincial, retrospective patient-reported survey later this year.

Supporting Patients and Providers Through a Provincial Approach

This evidence-based strategy provides province-wide access to resources for patients suffering from lasting symptoms of COVID. Whether accessed through symptom self-management resources; community/primary care; or specialty medical care, (i.e., pulmonary, respiratory) the focus is on providing the right care for each patient by:

- Appropriately screening patients for COVID-19 rehabilitation needs.
- Delivering targeted post COVID supports/services.
- Transitioning patients with COVID-19 between care settings (including discharge back to community/home).
- Guiding providers on triaging patients based on their level of functional impairment and rehabilitation needs with a [Rehabilitation and Functional Screening Tool and Symptom Checklist](#) (appendix G, page 58)

Resources and supports are available by visiting ahs.ca/healthyaftercovid or [MyHealth.Alberta.ca](https://myhealth.alberta.ca).

As the COVID-19 trajectory progresses, the NRV SCN in collaboration with zones and other partners will continue to adapt to the situation in Alberta in order to effectively support and ensure patients are aware of a broad range of health services across the care continuum.