

**- Virus / Mental health****Long Covid Hospitalised children at risk of lasting fatigue, research finds**

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Children who are hospitalised with coronavirus may be at risk of persistent fatigue and other symptoms of long Covid, according to researchers who examined the health of patients months after they were discharged. Scientists interviewed the parents of more than 500 children who were admitted to a Moscow hospital with Covid between April and August last year. They found that a quarter had ongoing symptoms more than five months after returning home, with the most common ailments being fatigue, sleep disruption and sensory problems.

The preliminary work from a global team of scientists, including UK researchers on the International Severe Acute Respiratory and Emerging Infection Consortium (Isaric), is not conclusive, but builds on early data from the Office for National Statistics that suggests some children may have ongoing symptoms after Covid infection.

Among 518 children included in the Covid study, 24% had persistent symptoms when followed up seven to nine months after they had left hospital, with their parents most often reporting that they suffered from fatigue (10%), sleep disturbances (7%) and sensory problems (6%).

Older children appeared to be at greater risk than younger ones and a history of allergies may be a contributing factor, too.

Dr Daniel Munblit, a specialist in paediatrics and allergy at Sechenov University in Moscow, said that while the findings are preliminary, doctors should to take the prospect of long Covid in children seriously.

“This shows that there is a problem,” he said.

“Fatigue is the commonest issue. We are not talking about fatigue for a day or two, we are talking about quite persistent fatigue and the cause of this fatigue in the children needs to be determined.”

According to the study, 16% of the children had fatigue soon after leaving hospital, a figure that dropped to 12% within a few months.

But from then on it declined far slower, with 11% of children still fatigued seven months later.

More than 8% of children had a loss of smell on leaving hospital, and while this too was found to have improved over time, nearly 6% of the children still reported problems seven months later.

Previous work from the Isaric group, submitted to the government’s Sage committee of experts, found that working age women who are hospitalised with Covid are five times more likely to develop long Covid as men in the same age group.

But while long Covid in adults is reasonably well established as a medical condition, there has been far less research on long Covid in children who do not generally become severely ill with coronavirus.

In further work, the scientists asked parents to rate their children on a wellness scale before and after their stay in hospital.

Those with no long Covid symptoms scored much the same after being discharged, but having one or more persistent symptom significantly reduced wellness, the authors write in the study.

“In some children, most definitely the parents acknowledge a reduction in wellness and I would think that to a certain degree it impacts on their daily life,” said Dr Munblit.

Other hospitals, notably in Sweden and Italy, have recently reported cases of long Covid in children, but as with the latest study, the data come from single centres and includes only a small numbers of patients.

How common, or how rare, the problem may be in children will be the focus of a new study at University College London which is investigating long Covid in 11 to 17-year-olds who are not hospitalised with the disease.