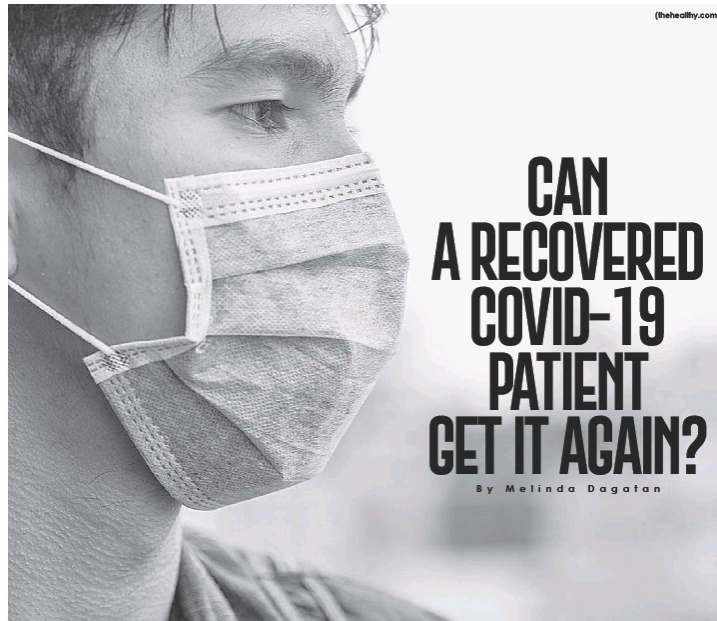


- Virus

## CAN A RECOVERED COVID-19 PATIENT GET IT AGAIN?

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Millions of people around the world have recovered from Covid-19, and one of their primary concerns is whether they can get re-infected by the coronavirus. They wonder if they have developed immunity to the coronavirus, and if so, for how long. As of now, scientists are yet unable to provide definitive answers.



The US-based Centers for Disease Control (CDC) generally defines “re-infection” as when a person that was infected (got sick) once, recovered, and then later became infected again. Based on what is known from similar viruses, some re-infections are expected. With Covid-19, though, more is still being learned through various studies.

How likely is re-infection? How often re-infection occurs? How soon after the first infection can re-infection take place? How severe are cases of re-infection? What re-infection means for a person’s immunity? Is a person is able to spread Covid-19 to other people when re-infected? The CDC attempts to answer some of these questions in light of updated knowledge from latest research.

There have been a few instances of people who have been declared recovered, testing positive again, raising fears of re-infection. It is not certain whether an infected person becomes immune to re-infection. But the CDC has said that no confirmed case of re-infection has been detected till now.

“Reinfection with [Covid-19] has not yet been definitively confirmed in any recovered persons to date. If, and if so when, persons can be re-infected with [Covid-19] remains unknown, and is a subject of investigation,” according to a recent CDC statement.

The CDC says that a recovered patient can have low levels of virus in their bodies for up to three months after they were first diagnosed, and this can be detected in the diagnostic tests. This is the reason why there have been instances of recovered people having tested positive again within the three-month period. But such people do not transmit the virus to others.

Therefore, retesting a person within the three month period could be “unnecessary.” Even if the person tests positive, it most probably would be because of leftover traces of virus (“persistent shedding”) rather than a case of re-infection. This does not mean, however, that people once infected with Covid-19 can be said to have developed an immunity against re-infection.

The CDC has developed recommendations for public health professionals to help decide when and how to test someone for suspected re-infection. The agency also provides information for state and local health departments to help investigate suspected cases of re-infection. At the same time, it reiterates the important ways that people shall adopt to slow the spread of Covid-19:

- Get a Covid-19 vaccine as soon as you can. Find a vaccine.
- Wear a mask that covers your nose and mouth to help protect yourself and others.
- Stay 6 feet apart from others who don't live with you.
- Avoid crowds and poorly ventilated indoor spaces.
- Wash your hands often with soap and water. Use hand sanitizer if soap and water aren't available.

Vaccines continue to reduce a person's risk of contracting the virus that cause Covid-19, including its new Delta variant, which causes more infections and spreads faster than earlier forms of the virus that causes Covid-19. The Delta variant might cause more severe illness than previous strains in unvaccinated people.

Fully vaccinated people with breakthrough infections from the Delta variant appear to be infectious for a shorter period. Vaccines are found to be highly effective at preventing hospitalization and death. Thus, people are urged to get vaccinated and wear masks indoors in public spaces to reduce the spread of Covid-19, including the Delta variant.