

## High-level meeting on post-COVID conditions (“Long COVID”)

Friday, 19 March 2021, 11:30–13:00 CET

### Background

Over the past year, the world has tracked the progress of the COVID-19 pandemic using data on cases and deaths. However, the clinical data currently available to WHO through the Global COVID-19 Clinical Data Platform provide only a partial picture of the range of COVID-19 clinical manifestations. Many people struggle to recover from the acute infection even when they have not needed hospitalization, suffering often disabling symptoms that last weeks or months and, in some cases, presenting with disabilities that are likely to be even longer lasting. Our understanding of this new condition, now termed post-COVID conditions,<sup>1</sup> or “Long COVID”, by patient groups, is still very limited but is growing rapidly.

Although the scale of the problem is not yet fully understood, there is evidence to suggest that around one in 10 individuals is still unwell 12 weeks after initial COVID-19 infection.<sup>2</sup> Based on this, WHO/Europe expects a high number of cases with post-COVID conditions in the WHO European Region. It is clear that Long COVID has significant implications for all components of health systems and will require strengthening of health services, which are already under considerable strain.

This meeting will be the first convened on post-COVID conditions in the Region and will set the stage for common action. Based on the evidence available so far, the meeting will present the magnitude and gravity of post-COVID conditions in the Region, seek Member States’ engagement on the matter, and present WHO/Europe’s approach to supporting Member States from a patient-centred perspective.

### Meeting agenda

- Opening remarks by the WHO Regional Director for Europe, *Dr Hans Kluge (5 min)*
- Presentation on post-COVID conditions, *WHO Regional Office for Europe (15 min)*
- Reflection on health systems and Long COVID, *Professor Martin McKee (5 min)*
- Member State interventions (*3 min per country*), reflecting on the questions below, and discussion (*55 min*)
- Next steps for the WHO European Region and wrap up by the Regional Director (*10 min*)

### Questions for consideration by Member States

1. How are post-COVID conditions being considered and addressed in your country? Consider:
  - a. Challenges in implementing multidisciplinary pathways starting in primary care and supported by specialists
  - b. Rehabilitation policy or strategies to address rehabilitation needs
  - c. Strategies to address increased demand on services and the workforce
2. How have you engaged with patient associations representing COVID-19 survivors? Would you value an umbrella group at the regional level to represent the views of patient groups?
3. Are you already using harmonized data collection for surveillance, evidence-informed decision-making and research purposes?

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<sup>1</sup> Updates 3 & 4 in relation to COVID-19 coding in ICD-10. Geneva: World Health Organization; 2021 (<https://cdn.who.int/media/docs/default-source/classification/icd/covid-19/covid-19-coding-updates-3-4-combined.pdf>).

<sup>2</sup> Rajan S, Khunti K, Alwan N, Steves C, Greenhalgh T, MacDermott N, et al. In the wake of the pandemic: preparing for Long COVID. Copenhagen: WHO Regional Office for Europe; 2021 (Policy Brief 39).