

Supplementary written evidence submitted by Long Covid

Kids

Introduction

We write to provide this further evidence on behalf of Long Covid Kids to provide evidence about the impact Long Covid had had on school absences since the Coronavirus pandemic. We note the focus of the inquiry is to examine the issue of persistent and severe absence in schools with a focus on supporting disadvantaged pupils. We trust that the Inquiry is proceeding on the basis that a **health inequality** is disadvantage affecting some children and young people. Children and young people have a right to education regardless of their health status and it is a matter of considerable concern to us that children and young people with adverse health preventing their participation in education are being inadequately supported.

Cohort of children and young people with Long Covid

A proportion of children suffered long term and life changing symptoms following infection from Covid-19.

The latest ONS Survey (released 30 March 2023, relating to a period ending on 5 March 2023) showed that there are 59,000 children who have Long Covid and have had symptoms persisting for at least 12 weeks after the acute phase of the Covid-19 infection has passed.¹ Furthermore, 53,000 children have had symptoms for over one year which is an increase of 8,000 children since February 2023.²

Long Covid as a health disadvantage

Long Covid is a long-term health consequence of Covid-19 and can have a severe impact on health and life.³⁴ Long Covid is an often-debilitating illness that has been found to occur in 10% of SARS-CoV-2 infections in adults and more than 200 symptoms have been identified with impacts on multiple organ systems.⁵ Long Covid can be disabling, with loss of function and persistent health impairments. It adversely affects quality of life. In a recent study relating to the Omicron wave 12-16% infected children and young people met the research definition of long Covid at 3 and 6 months after infection⁶. The WHO states that in children and young people *“Symptoms generally have an*

¹ See ONS dataset on ‘Prevalence of ongoing symptoms following coronavirus (COVID-19) infection in the UK’. Available [here](#).

² Ibid [1]

³ National Institute for Health Research (March 2021), ‘Living with COVID 19 - Second Review’. Accessible via https://evidence.nihr.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/NIHR_COVID_REPORT_FINAL-150321-1_1_.pdf.

⁴ The Royal Society (October 2020) ‘Long Covid: what is it and what is needed?’. Available via <https://royalsociety.org/-/media/policy/projects/set-c/set-c-long-covid.pdf>.

⁵ Davis et al (March 2023) ‘Long Covid: Major findings, mechanism and recommendations, Nature Reviews Microbiology Vol 21 133-146.

⁶ Pereira, Mensah, Nugawela, Xu, Shafran et al (2023) ‘Long COVID in Children and Youth after infection or reinfection with the Omicron Variant : a prospective observational study, The Journal of Paediatrics, available

impact on everyday functioning such as changes in eating habits, physical activity, behaviour, academic performance, social functions (interactions with friends, peers, family) and developmental milestones.”⁷

Long Covid as a factor impacting attendance

Children and young people living with Long Covid have said that they feel ill, sad, hurt, lonely, dizzy and that they are in pain. Children describe how it is “*draining, exhausting, scary, horrible and never-ending*”.⁸ It is with these troubling words in mind that the Inquiry must consider the significant disadvantage children facing health inequity have in attending school.

Children and young people living with Long Covid face enormous disruption to education. Flexible learning is dependent on the individual school's understanding of Long Covid and willingness to support the family. Alternative education is difficult to obtain and dependant on the Local Authority's understanding of Long Covid and willingness to support the family. Education policy is urgently required.

Preliminary evidence from Long Covid Kids’ Long Covid in Children and Young People (CYP) Education Experiences and Attendance Survey shows 69.2% of respondents report that their education status has been affected in some way by infection from Covid-19. Changes in education status include a significant reduction in hours, leaving education entirely and the implementation of a new provision of hybrid or home learning by the Local Authority.

The survey also shows that a child with Long Covid will lose an average of 20.6 learning hours per week and when scaled up to the total respondents of this survey it is 171,882 lost learning hours per year. When expressed relative to confirmed Long Covid diagnoses nationally for children and young people with symptoms for more than 12 months this equates to 1,091,800 lost learning hours per academic year. 10.4% of respondents are currently temporarily away from school/college ill and 9.5% are currently too unwell to be in education.

75.3% of respondents reported that their attendance has been greatly impacted by and 54.9% say that their progress with learning has been greatly impacted. 40.2% of respondents from the survey mentioned above thought that the school lacked an understanding of the impact that Long Covid has had on their child or young person’s education and a further 25.9% have experienced pressure from schools to send their child or young person to school when they have been unwell.

Conclusion

We note that that scope of the Inquiry includes assessing the likely impact and effectiveness of the Department of Education’s proposed reforms on attendance. We provide these concluding comments to assist the Inquiry with formulating recommendations to counter disadvantages and inequalities.

[here](#).

⁷ World Health Organisation (2023) ‘A clinical case definition for post COVID-19 condition in children and adolescents by expert consensus’. Available [here](#).

⁸ Long Covid Kids (April 2022) ‘Exhausting & Painful’. Children & Young People Describe Their Long Covid’. Available [here](#).

Schools and families should be better supported to improve attendance by ensuring that children and young people receive the services and support they need.

The symptom profile is broad for all kids with Long Covid, and the different symptoms affect engagement with education and attainment in a multitude of different ways. Schools must offer flexible, and hybrid learning options and accommodate reasonable adjustments in order to provide equitable education and care for those children who are currently suffering.⁹

It is crucial to have the correct mitigation measures in place to stop children from being infected. Effective ventilation may remove air-borne pathogens and improve air quality including harmful pollution and viruses. We note that the National Education Union has published a five-point guide to “Ventilation in Schools and Colleges” which recommends changes to protect the air quality children are exposed to.¹⁰

Long Covid is a preventable condition, and it is airborne. The UK Government’s Covid-19 policy applicable to schools and educational settings has failed to adequately protect pupils from contracting Covid-19 and therefore, developing Long Covid.¹¹

Clear air in schools is vital and there is an urgent need for visible CO2 monitors and the upgrading of ventilation and air filtration, to name a few things.

We would ask that the Inquiry gives due consideration to these matters to address the inequalities those children suffering chronic illness and health conditions incurred during the Covid 19 pandemic face and make recommendations for improvements.

June 2023

⁹ Long Covid Kids Support Guide. Available [here](#).

¹⁰ <https://neu.org.uk/advice/ventilation-schools-and-colleges>

¹¹ All Party Parliamentary Group on Coronavirus (March 2022) ‘Long Covid Report’. Available [here](#).

