



Healthy Aging in Neighborhoods of Diversity across the Life Span

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The Healthy Journey

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U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES • NATIONAL INSTITUTES OF HEALTH • NATIONAL INSTITUTE ON AGING

Mental Health Support

It has been over 2 years since the COVID-19 crisis changed our lives. COVID-19 has affected our physical and mental health. We have experienced illness, loneliness, loss, grief, fear, stress, and anxiety. Everyone reacts differently to stressors like COVID-19. Free support is available if you are feeling differently since the pandemic began or if you are concerned about your emotions.

- The *National Suicide Prevention Lifeline* is available 24/7 to assist anyone experiencing a mental health crisis. For support, call 1-800-273-TALK (8255) or visit <https://suicidepreventionlifeline.org/>.
- SAMHSA's *National Helpline* is a confidential mental health and substance use treatment referral and information service. For support, call 1-800-662-HELP (4357) or visit <https://www.samhsa.gov/find-help/national-helpline>.
- The *Disaster Distress Helpline* provides immediate crisis counseling for people in emotional distress related to natural or human-caused disasters. This includes the COVID-19 pandemic. For support, call/text 1-800-985-5990 or visit <https://www.samhsa.gov/find-help/disaster-distress-helpline>.

Long COVID may occur when symptoms last longer than a month

What is Long COVID?

While some people feel better within weeks after COVID-19 infection, others have lasting symptoms. According to the CDC, post-COVID conditions are new, returning, or ongoing health problems after COVID-19 infection. People whose symptoms have lasted more than 4 weeks after COVID-19 infection may have long COVID. Some physicians call this post-acute sequelae SARS-CoV-2 infection (PASC).

People typically develop flu-like symptoms such as fever, sore throat, cough, fatigue, and body aches 4-5 days after exposure to COVID-19. People with mild cases of COVID-19 often recover 7-10 days after their symptoms begin. However, people with long COVID

have symptoms weeks and even months after COVID-19 infection.

Common symptoms of long COVID are:

- Tiredness or fatigue
- Difficulty concentrating or memory impairment
- Shortness of breath or difficulty breathing
- Headache
- Dizziness
- Heart palpitations
- Chest or stomach pain
- Cough
- Joint or muscle pain
- Depression or anxiety
- Fever
- Loss of taste or smell

Anyone who was infected by COVID-19 can develop long COVID. People who had 6 or more symptoms during the first week of COVID-19 infection and older adults are more likely to experience long COVID. While they have lasting symptoms, people with long COVID are not contagious if they produce a negative COVID-19 test.

Medical providers can diagnose whether you have long COVID based on your medical history and a physical exam. Your provider can ask about your symptoms and existing health conditions. Your provider can measure your blood pressure, heart rate, and breathing. They may ask questions about your mood or order tests like a chest X-ray, echocardiogram, or bloodwork. These tests will help your provider decide if your symptoms are due to long COVID or another condition.

If you are diagnosed with long COVID, your provider may suggest treatment. Depending on your needs, your

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provider may suggest pulmonary rehabilitation, cardiac rehabilitation, psychotherapy, or physical therapy. Your provider may refer you to a cardiologist, neurologist, or ear nose and throat specialist (ENT). Sometimes, symptoms improve on their own for people with long COVID.

For more information about long COVID, visit <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/long-term-effects/index.html>.

Long COVID Prevention

The best way to protect yourself from long COVID is to prevent COVID-19 infection. To slow the spread, take the following steps:

- Wear a mask that covers your nose and mouth.
- Avoid crowds and poorly ventilated indoor spaces.
- Wash your hands with soap and water or use hand sanitizer.
- Stay home if you have COVID-19 symptoms.
- Take a COVID-19 test to prevent spread to others.
- Get a COVID-19 vaccine and booster shot when you are eligible.

COVID-19 Testing

Baltimore City offers several free COVID-19 testing sites. For information on where to get tested, call 211 or visit <https://coronavirus.baltimorecity.gov/testing/where-get-tested-covid-19-baltimore-city>. If you are homebound, call 410-929-5448 for information about free COVID-19 testing. Someone can visit you at home to provide a test.

COVID-19 test kits are still available through the United States Postal Service. Every household can place 2 orders through the USPS for a total of 4 tests per order. The test kits and shipping are free of charge. To place your order, visit <https://special.usps.com/testkits> or call 1-800-275-8777. You can also visit <https://www.covidtests.gov/> to learn more about at-home COVID-19 tests.

Treatments for COVID-19 are widely available

COVID-19 Therapeutics

Treatments for COVID-19 are widely available. Follow advice from your medical provider before you take medicine or start a treatment for COVID-19. Providers can help you heal safely with approved medications and treatments. People can get very sick from medications that have not been approved for treating COVID-19. There are 2 out-of-hospital treatment options for

COVID-19. These options are antiviral treatments and monoclonal antibody treatments.

COVID-19 Treatment: Antiviral Medications

Antiviral medications help the body fight a virus. The FDA authorized 2 antiviral medications to treat COVID-19. To be eligible, you must be at a high-risk for developing severe COVID-19. This includes adults 65 and older, and people of all ages with conditions like heart disease, cancer, or diabetes.

The approved antiviral medications for COVID-19 are Paxlovid (Pfizer) and molnupiravir (Merck). Paxlovid is approved for patients ages 12 and older. It includes 3 pills taken twice a day for 5 days. Molnupiravir is approved for patients ages 18 and older. It includes 4 pills taken twice a day for 5 days. Both medications reduce the risk of hospitalization and death in high-risk patients.

In March 2022, President Biden announced the "test to treat" initiative. This allows people to visit pharmacies, health centers, or long-term care facilities for a COVID-19 test. If you test positive at one of these locations, you can get antiviral medication immediately. For information about test-to-treat locations, call 1-800-232-0233 or visit <https://covid-19-test-to-treat-locator-dhhs.hub.arcgis.com>.

If you have COVID-19 symptoms and test positive, you must take antiviral medication within 5 days of your first symptoms. If you test positive, you should contact your medical provider right away to ask about antiviral medication. You can also visit a test to treat location. If you test positive at home using a rapid test kit, you can schedule an appointment at a test to treat location and fill a prescription for antiviral medication. Your medical provider can also call in a prescription for antiviral medication for you to pick up at your local pharmacy.

COVID-19 Treatment: Monoclonal Antibodies

Antibodies are proteins produced by your body's immune system. Antibodies detect and fight harmful substances in your body, like the COVID-19 virus.

Some people's bodies make strong antibodies that do a better job at fighting diseases. These strong antibodies can be copied by scientists in a lab. Scientists take the antibodies they created in a lab and place them in liquid. Medical providers can give people these antibodies through an IV. This is when a needle is put in

your vein and the antibodies flow from a bag of liquid into your bloodstream. This is also called an infusion.

People get vaccines to teach their bodies how to make antibodies. If you get a monoclonal antibody infusion, your body didn't learn how to make its own antibodies from a vaccine. This means you need another infusion every few months because the lab-made antibodies don't last as long as antibodies that your own body creates.

Monoclonal antibody treatments are authorized to treat COVID-19. To be a candidate for this treatment, you must test positive for COVID-19 and have symptoms for 10 days or less. You also must be at a high risk of becoming seriously ill. Your healthcare provider can direct you to an infusion location for an antibody treatment. If you have symptoms, but do not have a healthcare provider, call the Combat COVID Monoclonal Antibodies Call Center at 1-877-332-6585. To learn more about treatments for COVID-19, visit <https://www.hhs.gov/coronavirus/covid-19-treatments-therapeutics/index.html>.

What is BA.2 Sub-Variant?

All viruses change over time. This process is called mutation. A mutation is a change in a virus's genetic material. This process causes variants, or strains. The COVID-19 virus has changed over time, and now variants exist. Examples of COVID-19 variants are Delta and Omicron.

Variants can split into sub-variants as they mutate. BA.2 is a sub-variant of Omicron. This means that BA.2 is closely related to Omicron. Currently, BA.2 is the most dominant COVID-19 sub-variant in the United States.

The BA.2 sub-variant spreads more easily than the original COVID-19 virus. The Pfizer, Moderna, and Johnson & Johnson vaccines help protect people from hospitalization and death due to COVID-19 and its variants. For better protection, get a booster shot as soon as you are eligible. For updated information about BA.2, visit <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/variants/omicron-variant.html>.

Second Booster Shot Available

Vaccines are effective at reducing the risk of severe illness, hospitalization, and death from a virus. A booster shot is an extra dose of a vaccine. Sometimes, a vaccine's protection against a virus fades over time. Vaccines that come with booster shots are chickenpox,

measles, and tetanus. The COVID-19 vaccines have booster shots, too. This extra dose helps your body fight infection by increasing your protection against the virus. Vaccines and booster shots protect people from infection and hospitalization due to COVID-19.

On March 29, 2022, the CDC updated its recommendations for booster shots. Now, certain people can receive a second booster shot. People who are immunocompromised or over age 50 are eligible for another booster shot. You can schedule a second booster shot if it has been 4 months or more since your first booster shot. For more information about this update, visit <https://www.cdc.gov/media/releases/2022/s0328-covid-19-boosters.html>.

You can schedule a booster shot the same way you scheduled your last COVID-19 vaccine. You can register for your first dose, second dose, 1st booster shot, or 2nd booster shot of the COVID-19 vaccine by visiting <https://covax.baltimorecity.gov/en-US/> or calling 443-984-8650.

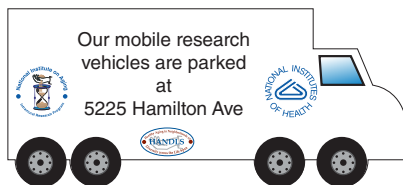
Please bring your COVID-19 vaccination card to your booster shot appointment. You do not need to get the same shot as before. The CDC and FDA reported that it is safe to mix and match brands. This means that you can get Pfizer, Moderna, or Johnson & Johnson booster shots regardless of which shot you received before. Any of these booster shots will protect you from COVID-19. If you are more comfortable getting the same shot as before, you can choose to get the same shot.



Contacting HANDLS

Did you know that HANDLS has an email address? Email is a great way to keep in touch with our team. If you'd like to be added to the HANDLS email list, please message us at handls@mail.nih.gov. We look forward to hearing from you!

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Newsletter for the HANDLS community

The purpose of this study is to learn about changes in health over time. Using our medical research vehicles, we want to study as many people with different backgrounds as we can. We want this study to help us understand healthy aging by examining the influences of different backgrounds on changes in health over time. The information we gather will help improve health and prevent disabilities. Our goal is to gather information to improve health and prevent disabilities for people of all backgrounds, particularly in minority communities and communities with limited resources.

For information about our study call 877-677-9538 or visit our website <https://handls.nih.gov>.