

Long COVID a factor in more than 3,500 American deaths

December 14 2022, by Dennis Thompson



Long COVID is a collection of symptoms—brain fog, chronic fatigue,

shortness of breath, stomach pain—that can torment people for months and even years on end.

Worse, long COVID can also be is a killer.

More than 3,500 deaths linked to long COVID have occurred in the United States, according to a new report from the U.S. National Center for Health Statistics.

Analysis of death certificate data revealed that 3,544 people had "long COVID" or some similar term listed as a contributing or underlying cause of their death between 2020 and 2022, researchers said.

That's less than 1% of the more than 1 million people who died from their immediate COVID infection, researchers noted.

But experts said the results show that the damage caused by a COVID infection poses a long-term risk to some who survive their bout with the coronavirus.

COVID is more than just a respiratory infection. The disease does damage to many organs in the body, either directly through the virus itself or through inflammation promoted by a person's immune response to the disease.

"It's fair to say it is a factor in a select group," said [Dr. Aaron Glatt](#), chair of infectious diseases at Mount Sinai South Nassau in Oceanside, N.Y. "For a small number of patients who die, long COVID played a role in precipitating or facilitating their deaths, unfortunately."

Older folks account for about 4 out of 5 of deaths linked to long COVID, the study noted.

People 75 to 84 accounted for nearly 29% of deaths tied to long COVID, followed by those 85 and older (28%) and those between 65 and 74 (21.5%).

It could be that the systemic damage done by COVID worsens the chronic [health problems](#) people that age would face anyway, Glatt said.

"These are people thought to have underlying medical conditions, including COVID, and they have multiple" health problems, he said.

But because they'd have those [health issues](#) anyway, it's hard to say how much or how little long COVID symptoms contributed, Glatt continued.

"It's very difficult to tease out how much of it is really due to long COVID—how much is due to the impact of long COVID on your underlying heart or [lung disease](#)—and how much of it is due to other factors," he said.

Glatt said it is, however, safe to say that long COVID is undoubtedly involved in some of these deaths, especially those in elderly folks.

"It may be a contributing cause, but how often that occurs and is this really a tremendous complication of COVID?" Glatt said. "I can't really give you a hard answer."

The study found that the majority of long COVID-related deaths occurred among [white people](#) (78.5%), followed by Black people (10%) and Hispanic individuals (8%).

But the per capita death rate from long COVID was highest among American Indian and Alaska Native people (14.8 deaths per 100,000). That was followed by white people (6.7 per 100,000); Black people (6.4 per 100,000), and Hispanics (4.7 per 100,000).

"Despite having higher COVID-19 mortality rates, non-Hispanic Black and Hispanic people did not have higher long COVID death rates than non-Hispanic White people—rates were similar for non-Hispanic White and non-Hispanic Black people," the researchers noted in their report. "These differences may be due to higher mortality among non-Hispanic Black and Hispanic populations, resulting in fewer COVID-19 survivors left to experience long COVID conditions."

The potential [death](#) risk posed by long COVID is yet another reason for folks to get vaccinated, Glatt said.

"You can't die of long COVID if you don't get COVID, and even if you do get COVID, vaccination plays a role in minimizing the likelihood of you getting long COVID," he said.

More information: The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has more about [long COVID](#).

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Citation: Long COVID a factor in more than 3,500 American deaths (2022, December 14) retrieved 14 March 2023 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2022-12-covid-factor-american-deaths.html>

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