

When to get medical help for long Covid

Most patients recover with time, but those with severe or persistent symptoms should see a doc

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Most Covid-19 patients who continue to suffer symptoms after recovering from the disease – a condition known as long Covid – will recover naturally with time, but experts say a small group that continues to experience severe symptoms should seek medical help.

Dr Barnaby Young, head of the Singapore Infectious Disease Clinical Research Network at the National Centre for Infectious Diseases (NCID), said the main cause of long Covid is a severe infection.

“Protecting oneself against this is the most important thing to do – and this can be done by getting vaccinated and (getting) boosters,” he said.

In addition to severe infection, Dr Edgar Tay, consultant and cardiologist at the Asian Heart & Vascular Centre in Mount Elizabeth Hospital, cited a recent study that highlighted four key factors that increase the risk of long Covid: the viral load during infection, the presence of diabetes, the presence of

auto-antibodies, and the reactivation of the Epstein-Barr virus in some patients.

Noting that some develop long Covid despite being vaccinated, Dr Young said the reason for this is not clear but is most likely due to a combination of genetic, microbiome and environmental factors.

He said most patients will recover from their symptoms within four weeks. Others may find their symptoms persisting for four to 12 weeks, with an even smaller number having symptoms that go beyond this period.

Dr Young expects the proportion of patients who experience long Covid from the recent Omicron surge to be low, as most were infected after getting vaccinated and also because Omicron tends to produce less severe infections.

But patients should seek help if they have symptoms that may suggest a serious medical condition, including chest pain, breathlessness and persistent fever.

“Most symptoms from long Covid are not so alarming, and it is okay to self-monitor these symptoms. However, if they are interfering with your ability to do your usual ac-



As the coronavirus transitions from being a novel virus to something that people's immune systems are used to encountering, long Covid should become increasingly less common, says one expert. ST PHOTO: KUA CHEE SIONG

tivities, if they are not improving or if you are otherwise concerned, then it is best to see your local GP (general practitioner) or polyclinic for advice,” Dr Young said.

Dr Tay said three groups of patients ought to go for post-Covid-19 evaluation – those who have persistent symptoms, or develop new or worse symptoms after recovering; patients whose symptoms have an impact on them, such as by affecting their sleep; and those planning to start strenuous exercise but still have chest pain or tightness, breathlessness, palpitations or light-headedness.

Dr Adrian Chan, a respiratory specialist at Respiratory Medical Associates in Mount Elizabeth Novena Hospital, said that patients with a pulse oximeter reading of 94 per cent and below should also seek medical advice, as this may be a sign of residual issues in the lower respiratory tract.

Both Dr Tay and Dr Chan said

they have seen an increase in patients seeking help for long Covid over the past few weeks, which they did not observe during previous waves of infection.

In the light of the rising number of such patients, Gleneagles, Mount Elizabeth and Mount Elizabeth Novena hospitals have launched a post-Covid-19 evaluation for patients to ensure a smoother recovery. It will include a consultation with a respiratory physician, a CT lung scan and an electrocardiogram.

Professor Dale Fisher, senior consultant with the National University Hospital's Division of Infectious Diseases, who is not affiliated with the three hospitals, noted a lot of merit in such an evaluation.

He said there is still a lot to learn about the long-term effects of Covid-19, and if the information from the evaluations is collated as research, it would be good to analyse it to find out more about long Covid.

“I would suggest it only for those

who have relevant symptoms. I would not recommend such a package as a routine as most will recover without these symptoms,” he said, adding that patients should first ask their primary care doctor if the evaluation is right for them.

Dr Young said that as the coronavirus transitions from being a novel virus to something that people's immune systems are used to encountering, long Covid should become increasingly less common.

Nevertheless, it is still important to protect oneself from the virus.

Professor Leo Yee Sin, NCID's executive director, said: “Although the clinical illness from Omicron is milder in comparison with earlier variants of concern, it is not a mild disease as we do witness fatal cases among older vaccinated individuals... It is important that we exercise reasonable precaution against getting (infected).”

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Hub to help firms reach climate targets

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Companies looking to create action plans to cut their carbon footprint and achieve climate targets will be able to tap the expertise of a climate and sustainability hub in Singapore.

With help from the Climate and Sustainability Hub for Innovation in Asia, firms in the region could translate their climate targets and commitments into tangible outcomes. One way for companies to do this is to work with the hub to invest in and scale up sustainability businesses, said Boston Consulting Group (BCG), which launched the initiative yesterday.

Mr Dave Sivaprasad, BCG's South-east Asia leader for climate and sustainability, told The Straits Times that different skill sets may be required in a world looking to wean itself off fossil fuels. For instance, the measurement, reporting and verification of emissions is a growing field.

He said that the hub will be hiring “deep experts” in the various fields over the next one to two years, while also hosting interns from universities here.

At the launch of the hub, BCG Asia-Pacific chairman Neeraj Aggarwal said: “Leveraging Singapore for the Climate and Sustainability Hub for Innovation in Asia brings together the best of BCG's global expertise and offering to the Asia-Pacific region, to drive climate action and lead change for the future through partnerships and supporting local talent development.”

The global consultancy firm, which has about 22,000 staff in more than 50 countries and regions, has a track record in the sustainability field.

In 2021, it founded the Aviation Climate Taskforce with 10 major airlines, including Cathay Pacific and Lufthansa, with a focus on investments into technologies that could reduce emissions in the aviation sector.

It was also the consultancy partner for the United Nations' climate change conference in Glasgow last November.

The opening of the hub, which is located at BCG's existing office in Robinson Road, was officiated by Minister for Sustainability and the Environment Grace Fu.

At the launch, she said Singapore wants to create good jobs in the sustainability and related sectors, in areas such as consulting, legal, accounting, information technology, and research and development.

“Singapore can be a place where initiatives like BCG's Climate and Sustainability Hub in Asia can establish their footing, and pave the path forward for the region in effective climate action,” she added. There are currently over 70 organisations involved in carbon services and trading in Singapore, ST had reported earlier this year.

Carbon services refer to services that help firms reduce the amount of planet-warming gases, such as carbon dioxide, that they release. These services include clean energy project development or financing, as well as consultancy, audit and certification services that help firms in their efforts to measure, reduce and manage emissions.

Carbon services also cover carbon offsetting. Companies may choose to buy a carbon credit from a renewable energy plant or a forestry restoration project developer elsewhere to “offset” their emissions. This buying and selling of credits requires financial expertise, creating new roles for carbon brokers and traders.

“Carbon services will be needed as we invest in new technologies and solutions in mitigation and adaptation, develop the carbon credit market, and mobilise capital for new growth sectors in sustainability,” said Ms Fu. “Singapore can be a place for innovation in finance, carbon services and sustainable reporting, measurement and verification.”

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5 taken to hospital after fire breaks out in Bukit Merah flat

Kok Yufeng and Isabelle Liew

Five people were taken to Singapore General Hospital after a fire broke out in a Housing Board flat in Bukit Merah yesterday.

One had burn injuries while the other four suffered from smoke inhalation, the Singapore Civil Defence Force (SCDF) said in a Facebook post.

SCDF was alerted to the fire at Block 121 Bukit Merah View around 11.45am. When firefighters reached the second storey, fire was raging in the one-room unit.

“Firefighters from Alexandra Fire Station and Central Fire Station donned breathing apparatus sets and carefully manoeuvred their way into the heavily smoky unit,” said SCDF in its post. The fire was extinguished with a water jet. The rest of the unit was affected by

heat and smoke damage, it said.

Two people in the affected unit had evacuated before the firefighters' arrival. About 35 residents were evacuated by the police and SCDF.

SCDF is investigating the cause of the fire.

When The Straits Times visited the block at about 9pm, the smell of smoke still hung in the air. Outside the burnt flat, the common corridor – which stretches across about four units and the lift landing – was charred.

Mr Ler Ah Yam, 60, who lives in the unit next door, was wiping the soot off his front gate when ST spoke to him. He said a couple in their 80s live in the burnt unit.

He added that he was at work in Jurong Island at the time of the fire and was not carrying his cellphone then. He heard about the fire only at about 8pm when a friend called him. He reached home at about 8.30pm.

“I've lived here for 50 years and it

is the first time there has been a fire,” said Mr Ler in Mandarin. “I don't have much at home so I didn't incur any losses. I'm just waiting for the authorities to repaint the corridor.”

Ms Joan Pereira, an MP for Tanjong Pagar GRC, told ST the elderly couple were taken to hospital.

She said in a Facebook post that she joined the Henderson-Dawson Community Emergency and Engagement Committee and Bukit Merah View Zone B Residents' Committee to assist and reassure the residents, many of whom are elderly.

Ms Pereira said the Tanjong Pagar Town Council has started cleaning the affected areas, and will also be assessing damaged areas for expedited repair works.

“They will also be assisting affected residents with their needs,” she added.

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Top: The one-room unit at Block 121 Bukit Merah View that caught fire. Above: Five people were taken to hospital. One had burn injuries while the other four suffered from smoke inhalation, said SCDF. PHOTOS: SCDF/FACEBOOK