

Many children suffering ongoing COVID symptoms

by University of Otago, New Zealand



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More than 20% of children and young people in Aotearoa, New Zealand are experiencing significant persistent health symptoms following COVID-19 infection, according to a new Otago-led study.

Published in the *Journal of Paediatrics and Child Health*, the study led by researchers from University of Otago, Wellington—Ōtākou Whakaihu Waka, Pōneke is one of the most comprehensive assessments of the effects of COVID-19 on youth health in New Zealand to date.

Researchers surveyed more than 4,200 children and young adults aged 3–20 years between November 2022 and April 2023, following New Zealand's first widespread COVID-19 community transmission in early 2022.

More than 70% of participants reported a confirmed COVID-19 infection.

One in 4 reported experiencing more frequent coughs, colds, and stomach bugs since infection, while 1 in 5 reported ongoing symptoms such as headaches (21.7%), fatigue (20.6%), stomachaches (14.6%), and new anxiety (13.1%).

Prior to COVID-19's widespread arrival, 82.6% of children rated their health as "very good" or "excellent"—that number dropped to 66.9% after the omicron variant waves.

Children who had COVID-19 were significantly more likely to rate their health as "fair" or "poor" compared to those who did not.

Many healthy children reported new difficulties

Children with pre-existing health conditions, such as asthma or ADHD, were more likely to develop post-COVID symptoms. However, many previously healthy children also reported

new difficulties, including fatigue, persistent coughs, concentration issues, and sleep disturbances.

Lead author Associate Professor Julie Bennett, from the Department of Public Health, emphasizes the importance of preventing COVID-19 infections, as long-term symptoms can affect children's ability to participate in daily activities and attend school.

"Reducing infections is key to preventing Long COVID. Simple steps like opening windows to improve ventilation in classrooms, workplaces and at home helps reduce the spread of COVID-19 to others."

Associate Professor Bennett says common symptoms reported in New Zealand children include headaches, fatigue, stomach aches, anxiety and more frequent coughs and colds.

"If a child has COVID, ensure they are able to rest during and after infection to prevent post-viral complications such as Long COVID."

Co-author Larisa Hockey, of Long COVID Kids New Zealand, says the findings show that COVID-19 has had a measurable and ongoing impact on many children's health in New Zealand.

"There is strong evidence that preventing infection is key to preventing Long COVID," she says. "Children deserve every opportunity to grow up healthy and thrive—and that includes protecting them from preventable long-term illness."

"Long COVID is having a significant impact on children's lives, and those of family members."

"Both previously healthy children and those with existing health conditions reported new symptoms that affected school attendance, concentration, and overall well-being."

More information: Julie Bennett et al, Post-Covid-19 Symptoms in Children: A Cross-Sectional Survey, *Journal of Paediatrics and Child Health* (2025). [DOI: 10.1111/jpc.70104](https://doi.org/10.1111/jpc.70104)

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