

Southern Long COVID Management and Referral Guidance

Background

Increasing numbers of patients are starting to present to primary care with ongoing symptoms following infection with COVID-19. COVID-19 should be considered to be a new long term condition. This guidance outlines the range of support currently available to primary care, including referral to an MDT clinic, if necessary.

Initial Long COVID (LC) diagnosis

Patients with a recent COVID-19 infection are entitled to a **FREE** GP assessment within 42 days of their first day of infection.

This '6 week check' is an opportunity for GP's to assess ongoing symptoms and exclude/address any serious complications. During this check, patients should be advised around self-management. Advice should include:

Resources via Healthpathways:

- Health Navigator – [Long COVID](#)
- Royal Australian College of General Practitioners (RACGP) – [Patient Resource: Managing Post-COVID-19 Symptoms](#)
- Auckland DHBs - https://nsfl.health.govt.nz/system/files/documents/pages/booklet_self-management_for_adolescents_and_adults_recovering_from_covid-19.pdf
- NHS – [Your COVID Recovery](#)

If the patient would benefit from support to implement self management strategies, a 'warm handover' should be made to the Access and Choice team (Health Improvement Practitioner or Health Coach) or a referral to the Brief Intervention team, if Access and choice is not available in the GP practice.

Referral to Access and Choice/Brief Intervention Service

To best equip clinicians to help patients with LC symptoms, training should be encouraged, such as learning modules, free from Health Education England:

https://portal.e-lfh.org.uk/Catalogue/Index?HierarchyId=0_45016&programmeld=45016

Access and Choice and the Brief Intervention Service will work with patients to improve their health, by understanding the symptoms currently having the most impact on someone's wellbeing and building individual goals to implement symptom management strategies. Both providers can refer to services already available in the community which can be found here: <https://wellsouth.nz/community/clinical-service/>

The GP should review the patient again at 12 weeks or sooner if deteriorating. A¹ diagnosis of LC should be sought as defined as 'signs and symptoms that develop during or after an infection consistent with COVID 19, continue for more than 12 weeks and are not explained by an alternative diagnosis.'

If specific symptoms are unable to be mitigated via primary care at the 12 week mark, a referral to a LC MDT clinic with Allied Health clinicians can be obtained.

Referral to an MDT clinic

A minority of patients presenting to primary care may require referral to a full MDT assessment clinic. MDT clinics can provide input from a Physiotherapist, Occupational Therapist, Dietitian and exercise Physiologist. They will be conducted via Habit Health Clinics available in Dunedin, Balclutha and Cromwell. Clinics will involve a key worker to oversee the patient journey and act as a liaison person for the patient to go through. Clinics may include face to face or telehealth assessments, at patient preference. If any 'red flags' arise during assessment or review, the MDT clinician should refer the patient back to their GP.

In order to refer into this clinic, a referral should be received using the WHODAS assessment <https://novopsych.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/WHODAS-self-disability-scale-blank-form.pdf> via a GP, HIP or Brief Intervention team.

Referrals can be sent via ERMS to: habithut

Referral criteria:

- Must have had clinical diagnosis of acute COVID-19 via GP + ongoing symptoms >12 weeks **and** not related to pre-existing conditions **and** impacting on normal daily functioning.
- and**
- Have already tried self management advice from GP **and** received personalised rehab advice from a HIP/Brief Intervention team.
- and**
- Symptoms have a significant impact on physical recovery, psychological wellbeing or ability to perform usual activity.
- and**
- Must be 18 years or over.

LC Pathway

