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- [01. Viral infection & disease \(incl. COVID-19\)](#) (n=1)

P0327

Long COVID looks like other post-viral syndromes 12 months after infection

01j. COVID-19 (incl virology, epidemiology, evolution, immune response, diagnosis, treatment, vaccination, prevention, response and societal impact)

#P0327

Oral presentation

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Background

To understand the impact of “long COVID” on an Australian public health system, we compared ongoing symptoms and functional impairment 12 months after symptomatic adults received a PCR test for an acute respiratory illness.

Methods

We undertook an observational cohort study among symptomatic adults who were PCR positive for COVID-19 or PCR negative for COVID-19 (i.e. either PCR positive for influenza, or negative to both COVID-19 and influenza). PCR testing occurred between May-June 2022 with follow-up conducted 12 months later in 2023. Respondents were asked about the existence of ongoing symptoms and if so, the symptom type, and the degree of functional impairment. We conducted a multivariate logistic regression analysis, controlling for age, sex and First Nations status.

Results

Among 5112 eligible respondents who were symptomatic when PCR tested, 834 (16.3%) reported ongoing symptoms 12 months later and 184 (3.6%) reported moderate-to-severe functional impairment. In total, 2399 symptomatic adults were COVID-19 positive, and 2713 were COVID-19 negative at baseline (995 influenza positive, 1718 PCR negative).

After controlling for potential predictor variables, we found no evidence that COVID-19 positive adults were more likely to have moderate-to-severe functional impairment (“long COVID”) than symptomatic adults who were PCR negative for COVID-19 (3.0% vs 4.1%; aOR 0.74; 95% CI 0.51–1.07). Results were similar when compared with 995 symptomatic adults who were influenza-positive (3.0% vs 3.4%; aOR 0.89; 95% CI 0.54–1.46).

The predictor variables associated with moderate-to-severe functional impairment were age over 50 years, and the symptoms of dizziness, muscle pain, shortness of breath, post-exertional malaise, and fatigue.

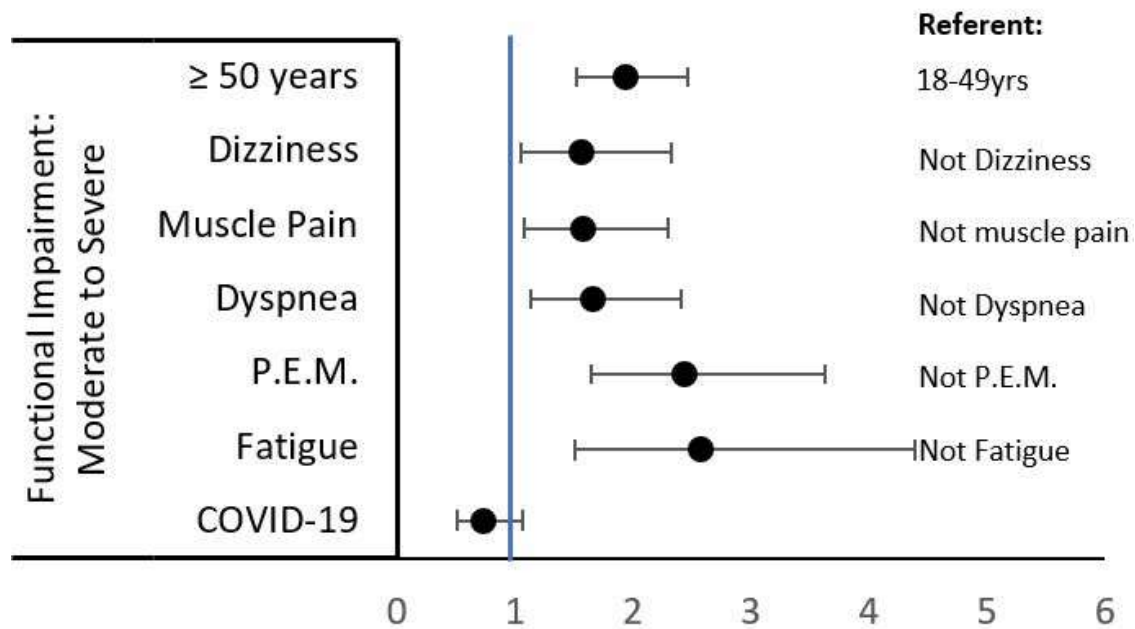
Conclusions

One year after a PCR test, “long COVID” manifested as a post-viral syndrome indistinguishable from influenza and other respiratory illnesses, with no evidence of increased risk of functional impairment among those who tested PCR positive for COVID-19. In health systems, long COVID may have appeared as a distinct and severe illness because of high volumes of COVID-19 cases.

These findings underscore the importance of comparing post-COVID-19 outcomes with those following other respiratory infections, and of further research into post-viral syndromes.

(see image)

Figure 1: Predictor variables associated with moderate-to-severe functional impairment



Authors	index	:
A		
Andrews	R.	P0327
B		
Brown	M.	P0327
G		
Gerrard	J.	P0327
S		
Sparrow T.		P0327