



Long COVID: A Guide for Health Professionals on Providing Medical Evidence for Social Security Disability Claims

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This guide for health professionals describes the kinds of medical evidence the Social Security Administration (SSA) needs to evaluate disability claims filed by individuals with long-term health effects of COVID-19, known as Long COVID or Post-COVID Conditions (PCC).¹ We appreciate you providing us timely medical and laboratory reports and other medical records.² You may send us medical **records electronically, on our secure website**, or by fax, or by mail.

Definition of Disability

Federal Social Security law sets out a specific definition of disability. While some programs provide partial disability or short-term disability payments, SSA's

disability programs do not. We consider an adult disabled if the individual is unable to do any substantial gainful work activity because of any medically determinable physical or mental impairment(s) that has lasted, or can be expected to last, for a continuous period of at least 12 months, or that is expected to result in death. We consider a child under the age of 18 disabled if the child has a medically determinable physical or mental impairment(s) that causes marked and severe functional limitations, and that has lasted, or can be expected to last, for a continuous period of at least 12 months or that is expected to result in death.

1- Long COVID is a lay term for the technical term post-COVID conditions (PCC), a subset of which are termed Post-Acute Sequelae of SARS CoV2 infection (PASC). These conditions are sometimes referred to as long-haul COVID, post-acute COVID-19, or chronic COVID. For more information, see the COVID.gov page **About Long COVID**.

2- An individual applying for disability benefits must inform SSA about, or submit all evidence known to them that relates to, whether or not they are disabled. See **20 CFR 404.1512**, et seq., and **20 CFR 416.912**, et seq. By providing us with all medical evidence, you are helping individuals fulfill their duty to provide all known evidence relating to whether they are disabled.

The medical impairment(s) must be shown to exist by means of medically acceptable clinical and laboratory findings. Under the law, symptoms alone cannot be the basis for a finding of disability, although the effects of symptoms may be an important factor in deciding whether an individual is disabled. In some adult disability claims, we also consider other factors, such as age, education, work background, and functional capacity in light of the individual's medical impairment(s). If a child claimant under age 18 has a functional limitation because of the child's medical impairment(s), we consider the child's functioning in relation to other children of the same age who do not have the medical impairment(s). You can find more detailed information about our disability evaluation process on the ***Disability Evaluation Under Social Security*** page on the Medical/Professional Relations section of our website.

What We Need from You

We need information from you that will help us determine the existence, severity, and duration of the individual's medical condition(s).

Medical reports you provide to us should include a thorough description of the individual's medical history, with information on the diagnosis, onset, duration, and prognosis of the individual's COVID-19; Long COVID; conditions that might be associated with, exacerbated by, or consistent with Long COVID; and any other conditions. Longitudinal clinical records and detailed historical notes discussing the course of the condition(s), including any treatment prescribed and the individual's response to treatment, are very useful for us because we are interested in the impact of the illness over time.

Include in your reports all clinical findings (such as results of physical examinations and mental status examinations) and laboratory findings (such as blood tests, magnetic resonance imaging, or any other clinically accepted form of testing), both positive and negative, including any findings used to support a diagnosis of COVID-19 or Long COVID. A positive viral test result for SARS-CoV-2 is not necessary for a diagnosis of COVID-19 or Long COVID. It is essential that you submit all available objective findings concerning your patient's condition, even if the findings may relate to another disorder or establish that the individual has a co-occurring condition.

Please report any medical signs you have observed. Examples include:

- Difficulty breathing or shortness of breath;
- Cough or abnormal auscultation of the lungs;
- Fever;
- Heart palpitations or other cardiovascular abnormalities;
- Coagulopathy;
- Orthostatic intolerance (symptoms worsen on maintaining upright posture and improve by lying down);
- Weight loss or malnutrition;
- Edema; and
- Newly developed diabetes or abnormalities in serum glucose.

Also, please include in your reports any additional signs and any symptoms or other effects of Long COVID, such as:

- Persistent or relapsing fatigue resulting in reduction or impairment in ability to carry out daily or work-related activities;
- Post-exertional malaise (worsening of symptoms after physical, cognitive, or emotional effort);
- Exercise intolerance;
- Respiratory difficulties, such as labored breathing or sudden breathlessness;
- Muscle or joint pain or tenderness;
- Weakness;
- Chest tightness, pain, or tenderness;
- Cognitive impairment(s) such as having difficulty with information processing, memory, or concentration and attention;
- Headaches of a new type, pattern, or severity;
- Changes in taste or smell;
- Gastrointestinal disturbances, discomfort, diarrhea, or constipation;
- Dizziness when standing up;
- Paresthesia (numbness, tingling, or pins-and-needles sensation);
- Sleep problems;
- Tinnitus; or
- Mood changes and new or worsening depression or anxiety.³

3-For more information on potential symptoms of Long COVID, see the CDC's ***Long COVID*** webpage.

Your descriptions of any functional limitations you noted throughout the time you examined or treated the patient are very important. If possible, please provide your opinion of the individual's ability to do daily activities or work-related physical and mental activities. Tell us your opinions about both the individual's physical and mental functions and, to the extent possible, the reasons for your opinions, such as the clinical findings and your observations of the individual.

Examples of work-related functions include:

- **Physical functions:** The ability to walk, stand, sit, lift, push, pull, reach, carry, and handle.
- **Mental functions:** The ability to understand, remember, and carry out simple instructions; the ability to use appropriate judgment; and the ability to respond appropriately to supervision, co-workers, and usual work situations, including changes in a routine work setting.

Evaluating Disability for Individuals with Long COVID

State agencies called Disability Determination Services (DDS) perform initial evaluation of disability claims for SSA. The DDS uses an adjudication team that consists of a physician or psychologist and a specially trained disability examiner to decide whether an individual is disabled under Social Security law. In evaluating disability for individuals with Long COVID, the team looks at all the available evidence, including the clinical course from the onset of the illness, and considers the impact of the illness on each affected body system.

If the team determines there is not enough information to make a determination, they may call or write you to find out if you have the needed information. If you do not, they may ask you or, in some circumstances, an

independent medical source, to provide the information by performing tests or an examination paid for by the DDS.

For more information on how we evaluate disability cases with Long COVID or COVID-19 involvement, see SSA Emergency Message **EM-21032 REV, Evaluating cases with Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19)**.

Contacting Social Security

The most convenient way to contact us anytime, anywhere, is to visit www.ssa.gov, where you can also access many of our services with an online *my* Social Security account.

We look forward to serving you.



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and tomorrow

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