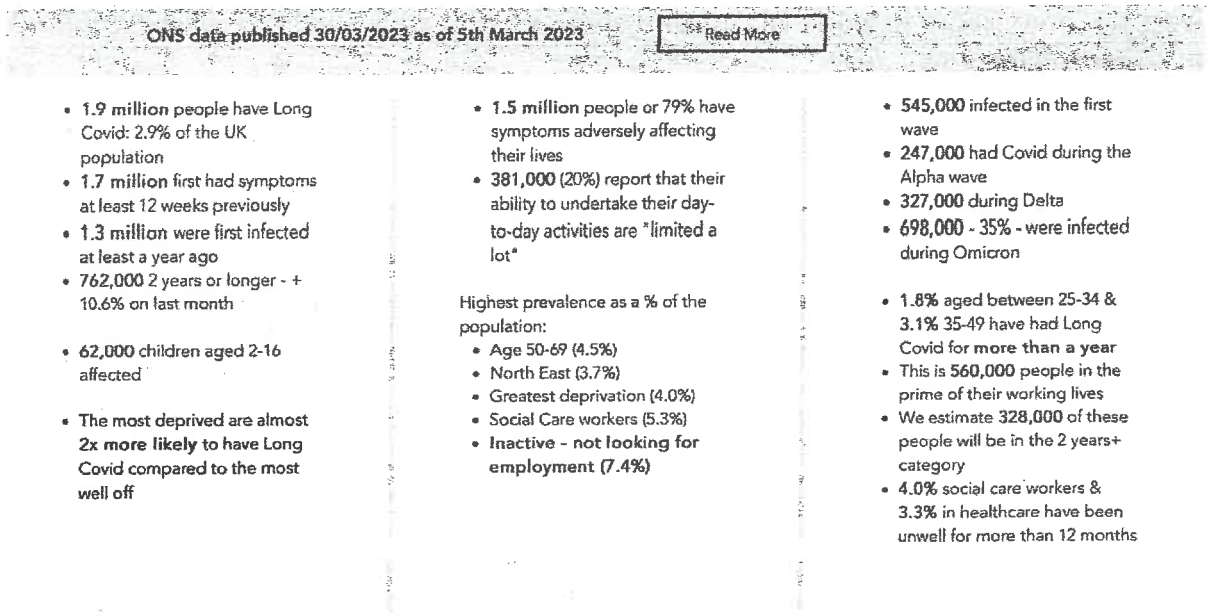

Long Covid – guidance for employees

If you are living with Long Covid, you may find that you cannot manage to work as normal. This is a short guide on steps you might consider in order to manage the situation with your employer. There are links to places where you can get further support at the bottom of the page.

Absence policy

Your employer should have an absence policy (this information may also be in your contract of employment). This should detail: how long you can receive full pay whilst off sick, any period on a lower rate of pay, Statutory Sick Pay, or unpaid; and the maximum time your employer will support a period of sickness before requiring you to return to work, or beginning a process to remove you from your post, if it seems that there is not a realistic prospect of you being able to continue with your role within a certain time frame. It should also tell you who you should speak to about your sickness.

This could be your manager, your organisation's HR department, or an occupational health department or service. Your employer must follow the steps set out in their policy.

You can find some more detailed information on absence policies here.

Notifying your employer about sickness

You should tell your employer when you are going to be off sick, and keep them updated at regular intervals, in line with the requirements of the absence policy. Your employer should not ask for updates more often than this. After you have been absent from work for 7 days, your employer will normally require you to supply a 'Fit Note' from your GP. This will give brief details of your illness, and may also give details of any changes your employer can make which would enable you to continue

working, or to return to work. Discussing changes with your employer will be covered in more detail below.

Statutory Sick Pay

You may be paid by your employer for some or all of the time you are off sick. If your employer does not pay your normal pay whilst you are off sick, you may be entitled to Statutory Sick Pay. Statutory Sick Pay is paid to you by your employer instead of your normal pay. You can only start to be paid Statutory Sick Pay after you have been sick for 4 days.

You can find information about Statutory Sick Pay here.

Requesting changes to your work

You might feel that you could continue to do some or all of your work if your employer made some permanent or temporary changes. This could include things like: reduced or changed hours; longer or more frequent breaks; working from home all or some of the time; changed duties; a change to your working environment, such as working on the ground floor, or in a quieter office; equipment to help you; or anything else which may enable you to continue working. There are several ways you could approach asking your employer to make changes:

If you have been sick for more than 12 months, or expect you will be, in a way which impairs your ability to carry out everyday tasks, you are considered under the Equality Act to be disabled, and you can ask your employer to carry out 'Reasonable Adjustments' in order to ensure that you can do your job. Your employer must consider your request. To see what adjustments could be made your employer could agree to an occupational health assessment. If they unfairly refuse to make any 'Reasonable Adjustments', it may be possible to take them to an Employment Tribunal.

You can find more information about requesting 'Reasonable Adjustments' here.

Your GP or other doctor can detail changes that your employer can make to support your return to work in a Fit Note. It is up to your employer to decide whether they choose to accept the advice, or decide that you remain 'unfit for work' for the period covered by the Fit Note, and remain off sick.

All employees who have worked for the same employer for more than 26 weeks are entitled to request flexible working. Your employer must consider your request. If your employer does not manage your request reasonably, it may be possible to take them to an Employment Tribunal. You should seek further advice before considering making a claim at a tribunal.

You can find more information about flexible working here.

If you have to leave your job due to illness

You should get advice, if possible, before choosing to resign from your job due to your health. Some organisations who can advise you are listed below.
Your employer may dismiss you for being unable to continue with your work after a period of time. This period of time should be described in the employer's absence policy. Your employer should have followed their own policy, and considered any requests for flexible working, or reasonable adjustments. If your employer has managed you unfairly, it may be possible to make a claim at an Employment Tribunal. This needs to happen within 3 months, less 1 day, of the problem. You should seek further advice before considering making a claim at a tribunal.

Further help and advice

If you belong to a Union, they will be able to advise and represent you. You can find further information about Unions, and find their details here.
ACAS provide free advice on all work-related matters, and must be contacted prior to making a claim at an Employment Tribunal.
Citizen's Advice (CAB) provide free advice on a wide range of issues, including employment matters, benefits, housing issues and debt.
The Equality Advisory Service can offer advice if you feel you have faced discrimination due to disability, or for any other reason.
The Law Centres Network : your local law centre may be able to give advice.
The Law Society has a list of employment law specialists.
The Disability Law Service provides advice and assistance about disability matters.

Benefits

There are a number of benefits that you, or someone caring for you, may be able to claim whilst you are unwell. You can get additional advice, or help applying, from CAB.
Personal Independence Payment (PIP) can be claimed by anyone having difficulties with daily living or mobility, that have lasted for at least 3 months, and are expected to last for at least another 9 months. You can apply for PIP whether or not you are currently working.
Employment Support Allowance (ESA), can be claimed by anyone unable to work more than 16 hours a week (earning less than £140 per week), due to health or disability. If you have paid National Insurance contributions for the last 2 years, you will be able to claim 'contributions-based' ESA, and no other household income will be taken into account. If you have not paid enough National Insurance Contributions, you may be able to claim 'income-based' ESA, based on other household income, e.g. your partner's pay.
Universal Credit is to help meet your living costs. It can include money to help with housing costs and children. You can also claim this if you are looking for work, or are working and on a low income.
If someone is caring for you, they may be entitled to claim certain benefits. These are summarised here.

Carers UK provides information and support for carers.

Practical Support
If you need practical support with daily tasks in your home, you can find out more about what's available, and how to get assessed, here.