

# WHAT NURSES NEED TO KNOW »»» PREVENTING THE LONG COVID HEALTH CRISIS

*There is a second health crisis happening because of the Covid-19 pandemic*—a large proportion of people who get Covid-19 experience long-term symptoms and health impacts, known as “long Covid.” The more Covid-19 infections someone has had, the more likely they are to develop long Covid.

The Covid-19 pandemic is not over—cases continue to spread and new variants continue to emerge, which are more transmissible and immune evasive. These new variants mean more cases and more reinfections, which means more people experiencing long Covid.

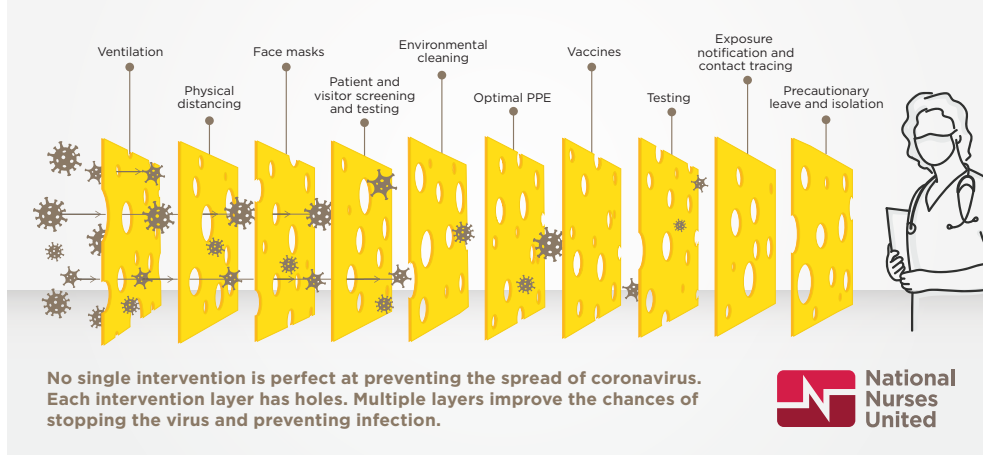
The only way to prevent long Covid is to prevent Covid-19 infections and reinfections. Studies have found that vaccines and anti-viral medications provide only a small reduction in long Covid risk, 15 percent and 25 percent, respectively.

Preventing long Covid in public settings requires the Swiss Cheese Model approach.

It’s important to think about each infection control measure as like a slice of Swiss cheese with holes. Each slice, or measure, could allow the virus to spread by itself. But if you stack multiple slices together, you can prevent the virus from spreading.

## Respiratory Pandemic Defense in Health Care Settings

### THE SWISS CHEESE MODEL



### WHAT IS LONG COVID?

Some people who have had a Covid-19 infection develop long-term effects, known as long Covid. These impacts include:

- » Symptoms that can last for weeks to months to years, including fatigue, shortness of breath, chest pain, and other symptoms.
- » Long-term health impacts including higher risk for heart disease, stroke, diabetes, lung damage, brain damage, immune system dysfunction, and damage to other organ systems.

It is estimated that between 10 and 51 percent of people who had a Covid-19 infection develop long Covid.

### WHAT IS LONG COVID?

People who are reinfected with Covid-19 more than one time are twice as likely to die, three times as likely to be hospitalized, and twice as likely to develop long Covid as people who were only infected once.



#ProtectNurses. All Our Lives Depend On It.



Measures that need to be implemented to prevent long Covid include wearing respirators or masks in public spaces, staying at home when sick, getting vaccinated, getting tested when exposed or experiencing symptoms, and implementing optimal workplace protections for frontline workers.

Preventing long Covid for nurses and other health care workers requires optimal workplace protections.

Hospitals and other health care employers have a duty to ensure a safe environment for staff and patients. **The following measures are necessary to prevent spread of Covid-19 within health care facilities and to protect staff and patients from long Covid:**

- » Patient and visitor screening for Covid-19
- » Prompt isolation of patients with suspected or confirmed Covid-19
- » Optimal personal protective equipment (PPE) that is available and accessible to health care workers when and where they work. When a health care worker is caring for a patient with suspected or confirmed Covid-19 or whose Covid-19 status is unknown, optimal PPE includes:
  - »» A powered air-purifying respirator (PAPR)
  - »» Coveralls impervious to viral penetration and with head and shoe coverings
  - »» Gloves
  - »» Under no circumstances should a health care worker care for a patient with Covid-19 or who may have Covid-19 with less than minimal PPE: a single-use N95 filtering facepiece respirator that has been fit-tested, eye protection, an isolation gown, and gloves.
- » Safe staffing
- » Exposure notification and contact tracing
- » Free and ready access to testing, especially after exposure or if symptomatic
- » Universal masking/N95 use

**For more information: [www.nationalnursesunited.org/covid-19](http://www.nationalnursesunited.org/covid-19)**

**#ProtectNurses. All Our Lives Depend On It.**

