

Screening of employees who have recovered from COVID-19

With many people now returning to work, should **occupational health professionals** now consider the impact of COVID-19 when conducting hearing screening tests, especially for those employees whose symptoms were critical and hospitalisation was required?

Medical professionals globally continue to carry out research and studies on the long-term side-effects of COVID-19. This week, the University of Manchester¹ released a study which asked 121 patients, eight weeks after they had been discharged from hospital, if they had experienced any hearing problems after recovery. A significant number responded as experiencing some form of hearing loss. The results from the study were published in a letter to the *International Journal of Audiology*² and stated that sixteen patients claimed their hearing was now worse, eight said they had noticed deterioration and eight complained of tinnitus. The study now joins a growing number of evidence that COVID-19 may affect hearing ability.

"We already know that viruses such as measles, mumps and meningitis can cause hearing loss and coronaviruses can damage the nerves that carry information to and from the brain. It is possible, in theory, that COVID-19 could cause problems with parts of the auditory system including the middle ear or cochlea".

Professor Kevin Munro,

Professor of Audiology at The University of Manchester and NIHR Manchester BRC Hearing Health Theme Lead.

Since this study suggests hearing loss may now be considered as a potential side-effect, it could be important for occupational health professionals to take an employees recovery from COVID-19 into account when they conduct a hearing screening test. However, other factors can be questioned. Professor Munro also explains that other causes may include medications that the patient took, wearing a face masks which could restrict communication or patients who suffered from anxiety, all factors highlighted as potential causes.

The ongoing studies in hearing loss related to COVID-19 are still relatively new and further research and data is still needed on recovering patients to understand the wider impact on hearing health. In light of this, occupational health professionals may want to consider monitoring employees who have been critically ill with COVID-19 and continue to consider the latest research on long-term symptoms that could contribute.

1. <https://www.manchester.ac.uk/discover/news/hearing-deterioration-reported-by-discharged-covid-19-patients/>

2. Munro KJ, Uus K, Almufarrij I, Chaudhuri N, Yioe Veronica, *Persistent self-reported changes in hearing and tinnitus in post-hospitalisation COVID-19 cases*, *International Journal of Audiology*, 2020 <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/14992027.2020.1798519>

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