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Two-thirds of UK workers with long Covid have faced unfair treatment, says report

Monday 22 May 2023, by [STEWART Heather](#) (Date first published: 27 March 2023).

TUC and charity call for better support and legal right to reasonable adjustments at work for sufferers

UK ministers should act to ensure long Covid sufferers receive the support they need from employers, with as many as two-thirds claiming they have been unfairly treated at work, a report argues.

The report, from the TUC and the charity Long Covid Support, warns that failing to accommodate the [2m people who, according to ONS data, may be suffering from long Covid in the UK](#) will create, “new, long-lasting inequalities”.

The analysis is based on responses from more than 3,000 long Covid sufferers who agreed to share their experiences.

Two-thirds said they had experienced some form of unfair treatment at work, ranging from harassment to being disbelieved about their symptoms or threatened with disciplinary action. One in seven said they had lost their job.

The report, released on Monday, makes a series of recommendations, including urging the government to designate long Covid as a disability for the purposes of the 2010 Equality Act, to make clear sufferers are entitled to “reasonable adjustments” at work; and to classify Covid-19 as an occupational disease to allow people who contracted it through their job to seek compensation.

Long Covid is an umbrella term for a wide range of symptoms experienced by some people after contracting Covid-19, which can include chronic fatigue, brain fog and breathing difficulties, and can last months or even years.

Paul Nowak, the [TUC](#) general secretary, said: “Workers with long Covid have been badly let down. Many of these are the key workers who carried us through the pandemic – yet now some are being forced out of their jobs.

“Ministers must make sure all workers with long Covid have the legal right to reasonable adjustments at work so they can stay in their jobs.”

The report argues that such adjustments might include flexible working, disability leave and a phased return to the workplace.

The definition of a disability under the Equality Act is “a physical or mental impairment which has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on a person’s ability to carry out normal day-to-day

activities”, defined as lasting, or being likely to last, more than a year.

Many long Covid sufferers’ condition could already meet that definition, but the report argues the challenges they face in getting support at work means clear guidance from government is needed.

Almost a quarter of the respondents to the survey (23%) said their employer had questioned whether they had long Covid, or the impact of their symptoms.

Lesley Macniven, a founding member of Long Covid Support said: “Long Covid is devastating the health of a significant percentage of our workforce and urgently requires a more strategic response.

“Those still fighting to stay in work face discrimination and a lack of understanding. Without action around retention of these workers, not least in sectors facing skills shortages, the numbers, and costs, will continue to rise as they too reluctantly exit the workforce.”

Half of the long Covid sufferers who responded to the survey said they believed they had originally contracted Covid-19 in the workplace.

The Industrial Injuries Advisory Council (IIAC) recommended last November that health and social care workers should be entitled to claim industrial injuries disablement benefit, for specific complications of Covid-19 such as lung fibrosis or strokes.

The report calls on the government to adopt that recommendation – but also to designate Covid-19 as an occupational disease for sufferers in any sector.

“This would entitle more frontline workers to protection and compensation if they contracted the virus while working and be essential for people who have lost income and work as a result of long Covid,” the report argues.

A government spokesperson said: “The Equality Act clearly defines disability as a long term or substantial physical or mental impairment which has a negative effect on an individual’s ability to carry out normal daily activities.

“This would capture long Covid, on a case-by-case basis, if an individual is impacted in this way. There is therefore no plan to update the act to list every illness or disability that may be covered.”

Heather Stewart

P.S.

- The Guardian. Mon 27 Mar 2023 00.01 BST:
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