

COUGH

This provides suggestions as you engage in shared health care decision-making with Veterans. It is not intended to replace clinical judgement.

Cough appears to be more common and duration may be longer after COVID-19.¹⁶ (NICE, 2021) Cough often persists for weeks to months after resolution of initial illness with 5-30% of patients reporting cough at 3 months.¹⁷ (Jutant EM, 2022)¹⁸ (Goërtz YMJ, 2020) There are likely multiple reasons potentially related to development of fibrosis and underlying conditions such as asthma. For many people the cause is a post-infectious cough, which is often managed like cough-variant asthma. The evaluation will be similar to subacute and chronic cough for which the typical time courses are 3-8 weeks and >8 weeks, respectively.

Things to Keep in Mind

- Post-infectious cough is likely a common cause which means it should resolve with time
- Worsening cough could suggest secondary bacterial pneumonia or organizing pneumonia, which are uncommon, so always correlate with dyspnea and hypoxia
- Assess classic contributors such as gastroesophageal reflux disease (GERD), post-nasal drip, and pulmonary fibrosis
- Assess pregnancy/lactation status, review teratogenic medications

Evaluation

Labs to Consider

- None

Tests to Consider

- If greater than 8 weeks post COVID-19, consider:
 - Chest X-Ray
 - Pulmonary Function Test (including pre-/post-bronchodilator)
 - Chest CT

PACT Management to Consider

- ICD-10 Code: U09.9, Post-COVID-19 condition, unspecified
- Medication reconciliation to rule out iatrogenic causes such as angiotensin-converting enzyme inhibitors (ACE-i)
- Similar to cough-variant asthma with albuterol as needed, inhaled corticosteroid (ICS), and ICS/long-acting beta-agonist (LABA) for progressively severe or more frequent episodes
- Should limit to 2–3-month empiric trial and re-evaluate if not resolved
- Sputum management using hydration, expectorants, and airway clearance devices
- [Diaphragmatic Breathing](#)

Consults to Consider

- Pulmonary: if continued cough >12 weeks despite initial treatment
- Whole Health System approach: biofeedback, mind body skills, health coaching, yoga, Tai Chi

¹⁶ National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) UK, <https://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/ng188>

¹⁷ Jutant EM. Respiratory symptoms and radiological findings in post-acute COVID-19 syndrome. ERJ Open Res 2022;8. 10.1183/23120541.00479-2021

¹⁸ Goërtz YMJ. Persistent symptoms 3 months after a SARS-CoV-2 infection: the post-COVID-19 syndrome? ERJ Open Res. 2020 Oct 26;6(4). doi: 10.1183/23120541.00542-2020.