

# Pandemic to Endemic, Myths, Long COVID, and Vaccine Hesitancy

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SFP2024; 50(10)

On 5 May 2023, the World Health Organisation declared an end to the COVID-19 public health emergency.<sup>1</sup> However, this does not signify that COVID-19 is no longer a threat. While immunity to COVID-19 has increased due to effective vaccines, previous exposure to the virus, or both, new variants of the virus continue to emerge, which cause new surges in cases and mortality. Vaccine-induced immunity can wane over time,<sup>2</sup> with the antibodies triggered from either getting vaccination or infected lasting approximately three to four months.

Similar to how seasonal flu shots are the norm, COVID-19 vaccination boosters are still recommended. Though COVID-19 is no longer as dangerous as it was previously, it still has significant mortality and morbidity risks for vulnerable groups such as young children, the elderly, and the immunocompromised. Besides reducing the risk of severe disease, vaccination against COVID-19 also prevents long COVID. A meta-analysis of 24 studies found that individuals who had received three doses of COVID vaccine were 68.7 percent less likely to develop long COVID compared to individuals who were unvaccinated.<sup>3</sup>

As we shift into a new phase, we should remain vigilant and continue to adopt public health practices such as staying away from others and masking if ill, similar to how we would act when trying to prevent the spread of flu or other respiratory diseases.

This issue of the *Singapore Family Physician* provides an overview of how family physicians can navigate and practise against the backdrop of COVID-19 in 2024.

In Unit 1, Adj A/Prof See Kay Choong provides practical strategies that family physicians can adopt to manage COVID-19 such as improving vaccination uptake.

In Unit 2, Dr Barnaby Young gives an overview of long COVID and how family physicians can approach this issue.

In Unit 3, Dr Leong Hoe Nam explores the unusual complications that might arise from COVID-19 infection.

In this issue, A/Prof Goh Lee Gan has selected ten current readings on topics related to COVID-19 spanning complications, interactions with other comorbidities, and vaccination.

## REFERENCES

1. United Nations. WHO chief declares end to COVID-19 as a global health emergency | UN News [Internet]. news.un.org. United Nations; 2023. Available from: <https://news.un.org/en/story/2023/05/1136367>
2. Lin DY, Du Y, Xu Y, Paritala S, Donahue M, Maloney P. Durability of XBB. 1.5 Vaccines against Omicron Subvariants. *N Engl J Med*. 2024 Jun 13;390(22):2124-2127. doi: 10.1056/NEJMc2402779. Epub 2024 May 29. PMID: 38810167; PMCID: PMC11197991.
3. Byambasuren O, Stehlik P, Clark J, Alcorn K, Glasziou P. Effect of covid-19 vaccination on long covid: systematic review. *BMJ Med*. 2023 Feb 1;2(1):e000385. doi: 10.1136/bmjmed-2022-000385. PMID: 36936268; PMCID: PMC9978692.