

UW Health: Pain observed as long-lasting symptom of COVID-19 infection

Posted on Friday, Aug 20, 2021

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MADISON, Wis. – Chronic pain has emerged as a symptom associated with long-lasting cases of COVID-19, according to literature review by researchers at UW Health.

Pain has been associated with COVID-19 infections since early in the pandemic, particularly headache and chest pain, but long-lasting chronic pain indicates the virus may impact the human body in ways we are just starting to understand, according to Dr. Alaa Abd-Elsayed, associate professor of anesthesiology, UW School of Medicine and Public Health, and medical director, Pain Management Clinic, UW Health.

“There seems to be a correlation between the virus and pain that manifests in certain parts of the body,” he said.

Chronic pain was more prevalent in patients who were hospitalized for a SARS-CoV-2 infection, particularly for those who were cared for in an intensive care unit. Patient age and overall physical condition likely contribute to patient risk for chronic pain post-infection, the literature review showed.

The review – an analysis of published research – was triggered by patients Abd-Elsayed was seeing at the UW Health Pain Management Clinic who reported chronic pain throughout the body as a result of a COVID-19 infection, he said.

“We had a suspicion that cases of chronic pain might be something more systemic, not just a collection of cases at our clinic, so we scoured the internet looking for any

substantiated data, and we discovered that this and to a lesser extent, other types of pain like testicular pain, appear to be a long-lasting symptom of a COVID-19 infection,” Abd-Elseyed said.