

Doctors in Kerala wary of post-COVID health risks

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By Anuja Susan Varghese
Express News Service

KOCHI: Even as the search for a medical cure for COVID-19 remains elusive, experts are increasingly worried about its long-term ramifications on the health of those who have recovered from the infection. Studies reveal that the disease results in deterioration of vital bodily systems, leading to issues ranging from lung complications to diabetes.

Based on clinical observations, scientists from King's College London have concluded that there is a bi-directional relationship between COVID-19 and diabetes. They believe that it is possible that the novel coronavirus may alter glucose metabolism that could complicate the condition of pre-existing diabetes or lead to the disease.

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"In many instances, persons who have recovered from COVID-19 have developed autoimmune diabetes. It is not necessary that they have had diabetes in the beginning. The virus causes a hypersensitivity reaction in our bodies. It destroys the pancreatic beta cells and in turn the production of insulin gets reduced, leading to diabetes. It may be a life-long condition," said Dr Joseph K, consultant, Internal Medicine and Diabetology at VPS Lakeshore.

Permanent damage to the lung tissue and pulmonary blood clots can occur in patients whose respiratory systems had deteriorated during the infection, necessitating ICU ventilator support. "When pneumonia progresses to become acute respiratory distress syndrome (ARDS), it may lead to a lot of complications for the patient even after recovery. Long-term breathing difficulty can occur. Pulmonary fibrosis, which is a lung disease that occurs when lung tissue becomes damaged, and pulmonary embolism, a condition in which one or more arteries in the lungs are blocked by blood clots, can occur. However, for persons who had developed viral pneumonia during the SARS-CoV-2 infection and got cured, not many complications may happen later," said Dr Tinku Joseph, an interventional pulmonologist at the Amrita Institute of Medical Sciences.

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Dr Anup R Warriar, an infectious disease expert, said after recovering from COVID-19, a person should revisit doctors and undergo checkups for three to six months. "Any disease can affect you in two ways -- either it can have a direct organ involvement, which can cause damage to whichever organ the virus attacks, or it can cause dysregulated immune response --that means the immunity developed due to the infection doesn't function in the way it is supposed to. The immune system itself causes damage to the organs. That is why many medicines like Dexamethasone and Tocilizumab, which suppress the immune system, are used for treatment," said Dr Anup.

Dr Anup also said it is not necessary that everyone gets diabetes. It is likely in those people who are prone to this dysfunction. "Those who would have developed it in another five-10 years will have it earlier," said Dr Anup.