A new challenge: post-COVID syndrome in adolescents

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Introduction
Post-COVID syndrome (or long COVID) is a set of symptoms occurring after a documented SARS-CoV-2 infection and persisting for more than 2 months. The pediatric population is also affected, especially pre-adolescents and adolescents.

Clinical presentation
To date 75 patients have been addressed to our consultation by their general practitioner. The mean age is 14 years, 2/3 are girls (fig.1). The symptoms are multiple (fig.2), non-specific, and are similar to those described in adults (fig.3). In teenagers, symptoms can overlap with other diagnosis, as chronic fatigue syndrome, depression and functional disorders.

Functional impact
The PedsQL questionnaire (assessing 4 aspects of teenagers’ daily life) shows an impact of these symptoms on the quality of life, schooling and daily activities being the most affected. Reassuringly, peer relationships seem preserved (table 1).

Global care
If necessary, patients can be referred to additional exams and/or to specialized consultations in our multidisciplinary group. Patients with symptoms due to physical activity (fatigability, shortness of breath, dysautonomia) can benefit from a progressive and individualized reconditioning program with an adapted sport coach. We care about our global follow-up to patients and families. School attendance is supported by making individual arrangements if required, through close collaboration with the education system.

Evolution
Almost half of our patients showed complete recovery to this date. Repetition of the questionnaires 3-6 months after the beginning of the follow-up shows a trend towards improvement, however a longer follow-up period would be necessary to confirm these observations.

Conclusion
Post-COVID syndrome is more frequent in adolescents than pre-adolescents, and girls are more affected. Symptoms are multiple, and can have a strong impact on quality of life.