

Chilling news from Italy's COVID epicenter: 5 months after infection, half of survivors still suffer symptoms

Six months ago, Bergamo was a [startling warning sign](#) of the virus's fury, a city where sirens rang through the night and military trucks lined up outside the public hospital to ferry away the dead. Bergamo has dramatically curtailed the virus's spread, but it is now offering another kind of warning, this one about the long aftermath, where recoveries are proving incomplete and sometimes excruciating.

Those who survived the peak of the outbreak in March and April are now negative. The virus is officially gone from their systems.

"But we are asking: Are you feeling cured? Almost half the patients say no," said Serena Venturelli, an infectious-disease specialist at the hospital.

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Bergamo doctors say the disease clearly has full-body ramifications but leaves wildly differing marks from one patient to the next, and in some cases few marks at all. Among the first 750 patients screened, some 30 percent still have lung scarring and breathing trouble. The virus has left another 30 percent with problems linked to inflammation and clotting, such as heart abnormalities and artery blockages. A few are at risk of organ failure.

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For the patients who have been able to regain a semblance of their lives, the last barrier is the trauma itself — the raw memory of being in a hospital where so many were dying, and wondering if they might be next.

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