

COVID immunity could last years, even decades, study suggests — but we can't know for sure

[W]e won't know exactly how long immunity lasts without continuing to study those who have recovered from COVID-19. However, [a] new study, posted Nov. 16 to the preprint database [bioRxiv](#), does provide strong hints that the protection is long-lived — although clearly not in all people, as there have been several cases of individuals being reinfected with the coronavirus after recovering.

The research dives into the ranks of the human immune system, assessing how different lines of defense change after a COVID-19 infection.

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Memory T and B cells that recognize the virus appear extremely stable, the authors noted. "Essentially no decay of ... memory B cells was observed between days 50 and 240," or eight months later, Marc Jenkins, an immunologist at the University of Minnesota Medical School, who was not involved in the study, said in an email.

"Although some decay of memory T cells was observed, the decay was very slow and may flatten out at some point," Jenkins added. There's reason to believe that the number of memory T cells may stabilize sometime after infection, because T cells against a related coronavirus, SARS-CoV, have been found in recovered patients up to 17 years later, according to a study published July 15 in the journal [Nature](#).

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