

Indiana Teen With COVID Leaves Hospital After 6 Months, 160 Days on a Ventilator

BY **ARISTOS GEORGIU** ON 1/7/22 AT 7:19 AM EST

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An Indiana teenager who was hospitalized for six months due to COVID-19 has finally been discharged.

Sixteen-year-old Bedford resident Wesley Fox left Peyton Manning Children's Hospital in Indianapolis on Wednesday and will now undergo rehab, WTHR reported.

"It's surreal that I am actually leaving now after six months of being here," Fox said.

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During his time in hospital, Fox spent eight days on an ECMO (extracorporeal membrane oxygenation) machine—a life support device that pumps and oxygenates a patient's blood outside the body, in cases where the heart and lungs are unable to do so adequately.

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The 16-year-old also spent 160 days of his time at Peyton Manning Children's Hospital on a ventilator to assist with his breathing.

Fox was attended to by 12 medical caregivers—from seven different specialties—and also underwent more than 230 hours of physical and occupational therapy.

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Fox caught COVID-19 in July last year at the same time as his mother, when both were unvaccinated. In the initial stage of his disease, the teenager experienced problems with his olfactory system.

"I remember not being able to eat anything because everything had a very stale taste to it," he said. "Our food was not stale at home, but everything tasted like it had gone bad a week prior. It was just awful."

The teen's condition quickly worsened and he was soon admitted to hospital after experiencing difficulty breathing and severe headaches.

"We weren't at the hospital for an hour when they had him intubated at our local hospital in Bedford. Then we came with a helicopter from there to here," his mother, Molly Fox, told WTHR. "We had several calls with different doctors saying, 'Your son is probably not going to make it. These are our options, and we don't know if they will work.'"

Dr. Kay Sighting, a doctor at Peyton Manning Children's Hospital, said the teen's lungs were severely damaged when he arrived, and the fact that medical staff had to sedate him heavily when he arrived "debilitated him."

During the teen's time in hospital, his parents went to visit as often as they could and would stay close to the facility once a week.

"We sat there at the edge of his bed and said, 'What are we supposed to do? How are we supposed to figure this out? What are we going to do?' It's something I wouldn't wish on anybody," Molly Fox said.

"We held onto each other pretty tight, but we also had a huge support system at home that has not only physically helped us but also through love and prayers. There are literally people all over the United States that have sent up prayers for this kid."

The teenager started to show signs of recovery in October last year and his condition improved sufficiently in recent weeks for hospital staff to discharge him. Fox said he is now looking forward to getting stronger in rehab.

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The 16-year-old said he didn't think he would get severely ill with the disease until his condition started to worsen.

"I thought I was healthy enough that even if I did catch COVID, it would just be a cold and then I would bounce back from it but here we are six months later," he said.

While most people with COVID-19 get better within a few weeks of illness, some people experience ongoing problems after contracting the disease—sometimes referred to as Long COVID—that in some cases can last months, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

COVID-19 cases as severe as Fox's are rare, but Sighting, said it is not uncommon for children to be hospitalized with the disease. In fact, doctors have noticed an increase in child hospitalizations in recent weeks amid the latest COVID-19 surge, fueled by the Omicron variant, which has resulted in record numbers of cases.

"We are seeing an increased number of children being admitted with COVID. We are seeing in the community the highest rates we have seen for pediatric patients with COVID," she said.

"Generally the vast number of children will do very well with this, but there are kids who are getting really sick. Previously healthy children getting really sick and that's what is really concerning to us."



Stock image showing a teenager in hospital having their oxygen saturation checked. A 16-year-old from Indiana who spent six months in hospital was finally discharged on Wednesday.

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