Can COVID-19 Cause ARDS?
Yes, severe COVID-19 can cause ARDS. COVID-19 damages the wall and lining of the air sacs and capillaries of the lungs. This damage causes fluid and tissue buildup and as a result, the walls of the air sacs become much thicker than normal. In response to the infection the body sends out cells to fight the virus, which causes an inflammatory reaction.

This reaction can cause additional fluid and tissue buildup along the walls of the air sacs. As the walls become thicker, it is much harder for oxygen to pass through to the rest of the body and attributes to the shortness of breath feeling people may experience.

Source: https://health.clevelandclinic.org/heres-the-damage-coronavirus-covid-19-can-do-to-your-lungs/