

Understanding the Flu



What is the flu?

The flu is a virus that infects the nose, throat, and sometimes the lungs. The flu is easily passed from one person to the next, so the best way to prevent getting the flu is by getting a flu vaccine every year and frequent handwashing.



Flu signs and symptoms:

Signs and symptoms of the flu usually begin 1 to 4 days after being infected with the flu. These may include:

- Suddenly feeling very sick
- Fever and chills
- Cough and sore throat
- Runny or stuffy nose
- Body aches
- Headache
- Feeling very tired (fatigue)
- Vomiting and diarrhea (more common in young children)



When are people with the flu contagious?

People can spread the flu during the first 3 to 4 days of becoming sick. However, some people can infect others 1 day before feeling sick, and up to 5-7 days after becoming sick.



How do I prevent the flu?

- Get a flu vaccine every year
- Stay away from people who are sick
- Use tissue to cover coughs and sneezes (throw tissues away)
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth (germs spread this way)
- Wash your hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, (or use hand sanitizer that is at least 60 percent alcohol) especially after coughing, sneezing, or using the restroom



I heard the flu vaccine is not very effective this year. Should I still get one?

A person who has gotten the flu vaccine, and who has later been exposed to the flu may have a less severe illness if they do get sick with the flu. So it is recommended that you still get the flu vaccine even if it is less effective that year.



The flu, respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) and COVID-19 can cause serious illness. Younger children, especially those younger than 2 years old, people older than 65 years, and people with certain medical conditions are considered at higher risk.

What do I do if I get the flu?

- Rest and increase fluids
- Use tissues to cover all coughs and sneezes (throw tissues away)
- Wash your hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds (or use hand sanitizer that is at least 60 percent alcohol), especially after coughing, sneezing, or using the restroom
- Stay home and avoid contact with others as much as possible until after 24 hours after your fever is gone
- Wear a mask if you must go out in public
- Call your doctor when you first get sick if you are worried, or if you are in a high-risk group
- Take fever-reducing medicine or specific flu medicine that can help with flu symptoms



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Will the flu vaccine protect me from COVID-19?

The flu vaccine will not protect you from COVID-19. Keeping a safe distance, wearing a mask, and washing your hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds (or use hand sanitizer that is at least 60 percent alcohol) will help prevent COVID-19.

How do I know if I have a cold, the flu, RSV or COVID-19?

Tests are available to diagnose the flu, RSV and COVID-19. Because symptoms of colds, the flu, RSV and COVID-19 may look the same, it is important to call your doctor. Here is a helpful comparison of common characteristics of each:



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SYMPTOMS	COLD	FLU	CORONAVIRUS (COVID-19)	RSV
HOW IT STARTS	Starts a little at a time	Starts quickly all at once	May appear 2-14 days after exposure	3-8 days after exposure
HEADACHE	Rare	Common	Sometimes	Common in adults
FEVER	Rare	Common, lasts 3-4 days	Common	Common
BODY ACHES & PAINS	Sometimes	Common, often severe	Common	Rare
CHILLS	Rare	Common	Common	Common
TIREDNESS/WEAKNESS	Sometimes	Common, can last 2-3 weeks	Common	Common
RUNNY/STUFFY NOSE	Common	Sometimes	Sometimes	Common
SNEEZING	Common	Sometimes	Rare	Common
SORE THROAT	Common	Sometimes	Common	Common
CHEST DISCOMFORT/COUGH	Common - mild to moderate, hacking cough	Common, can be severe	Common, can be severe	Common
SHORTNESS OF BREATH/PROBLEMS BREATHING	Sometimes	Sometimes	Common	Common
NEW LOSS OF TASTE/SMELL	Rare	Rare	Common	Rare
DIARRHEA/VOMITING	Rare	Sometimes (more common in children than adults)	Sometimes	Rare
COMPLICATIONS	Sinus congestion, ear ache	Bronchitis, pneumonia, can be life-threatening	Pneumonia, stroke, heart attack, organ failure, can be life threatening	Common for infants and older adults
INFECTION WITH NO SYMPTOMS	Rare	Rare	Sometimes	Rare

SOURCES:

<https://www.cdc.gov/flu/symptoms/symptoms.htm>
<https://www.cdc.gov/flu/symptoms/flu-vs-covid19.htm>
<https://www.healthline.com/health-news/flu-allergies-coronavirus-different-symptoms#Despite-symptoms,-its-not-the-flu>
<https://www.cdc.gov/rsv/>

If you do not have a doctor, call 1-877-THR-WELL (1-877-847-9355).

