

Common Cold vs. Influenza

The flu and the common cold are both respiratory illnesses but they are caused by different viruses. Because these two types of illnesses have similar flu-like symptoms, it can be difficult to tell the difference between them based on symptoms alone. In general, the flu is worse than the common cold. The flu usually comes on suddenly.

People with the influenza virus are likely contagious from the day or so before symptoms first appear until about five days after symptoms begin, though sometimes people are contagious for as long as 10 days after symptoms appear. If you have a cold, you are likely contagious for the first 3 days of having symptoms.

SYMPTOMS	COLD	FLU
Fever	Rare	Usually present
Chills	Mild	Moderate-Severe
Headache	Uncommon	Common
Body aches	Slight	Severe
Fatigue/Weakness	Mild	Moderate-Severe
Nasal Congestion	Common	Sometimes
Sneezing	Yes	No
Sore Throat	Common	Sometimes
Chest Discomfort	Mild-Moderate	Severe
Cough	Hacking, Productive (mucous producing)	Non-productive (non-mucus producing)
Treatment	Antihistamines, Decongestants, Cough Suppressants, Pain Relievers	Antiviral medications per doctor

Flu symptoms should subside in 3-5 days, although cough and weakness may persist.

Cold symptoms usually last 5-14 days, but should start to improve within 7 days.

Prevention:

- **Get an annual flu shot**
- Try to avoid close contact with sick people.
- If you are sick with flu-like illness, CDC recommends that you **stay home for at least 24 hours after your fever is gone** except to get medical care or for other necessities. Your fever should be gone without the use of a fever-reducing medicine.
- While sick, limit contact with others as much as possible to keep from infecting them.
- Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue or your elbow area when you cough or sneeze. Throw the tissue in the trash after you use it.
- **Wash your hands** often with soap and water. If soap and water are not available, use an alcohol-based hand rub.

- Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth. Germs spread this way.
- Scrub your stuff. Keep surfaces clean, especially when someone nearby has cold.

Lifestyle and home remedies:

- Drink plenty of liquids. Choose water, juice, lemon water, and warm soups to prevent dehydration. Avoid alcohol, caffeine, and milk products.
- Rest. Get more sleep to help your immune system fight infection.
- Adjust your room's temperature and humidity. Keep your room warm, but not overheated. If the air is dry, a cool-mist humidifier or vaporizer can moisten the air and help ease congestion and coughing. Be sure to keep the humidifier clean to prevent the growth of bacteria and molds.
- Soothe your throat. A saltwater gargle — 1/4 to 1/2 teaspoon salt dissolved in an 8-ounce glass of warm water — can temporarily relieve a sore or scratchy throat.
- Use saline nasal sprays to help relieve nasal congestion.
- Stop smoking

Notify physician if:

- Shortness of breath or chest pain
- Blood-tinged sputum
- Mental status changes
- Headache with neck pain