



general physician pc
primary care



The Flu: What You Need to Know

What is the difference between a cold and the flu?

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 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, and symptoms are more common and intense. Colds are usually milder than the flu. People with colds are more likely to have a runny or stuffy nose. Colds generally do not result in serious health problems, such as pneumonia, bacterial infections, or hospitalizations. Flu can have very serious associated complications.

How can you tell the difference between a cold and the flu?

Because colds and flu share many symptoms, it can be difficult (or even impossible) to tell the difference between them based on symptoms alone. Special tests that usually must be done within the first few days of illness can tell if a person has the flu.

What are the symptoms of the flu versus the symptoms of a cold?

The symptoms of flu can include fever or feeling feverish/chills, cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, muscle or body aches, headaches and fatigue (tiredness). Cold symptoms are usually milder than the symptoms of flu. People with colds are more likely to have a runny or stuffy nose. Colds generally do not result in serious health problems.

**It's important to note that not everyone with flu will have a fever.*

Certain people are at high risk of serious flu-related complications (including Young Children, people 65 and older, Pregnant Women, American Indian and Alaska Natives, Residents of Nursing Homes and Long Term Care Facilities, and people with certain medical conditions including Diabetes, Asthma, Heart Disease, Kidney Disease, Weakened Immune Systems, and Extreme Obesity with BMI of 40 or more).

How Flu Spreads

Most experts believe that flu viruses spread mainly by tiny droplets made when people with flu cough, sneeze or talk. These droplets can land in the mouths or noses of people who are nearby. Less often, a person might also get flu by touching a surface or object that has flu virus on it and then touching their own mouth, nose, or possibly their eyes.

Period of Contagiousness

You may be able to pass on the flu to someone else before you know you are sick, as well as while you are sick. Although people with the flu are most contagious in the first 3-4 days after their illness begins, some otherwise healthy adults may be able to infect others beginning 1 day before symptoms develop and up to 5 to 7 days after becoming sick. Some people, especially young children and people with weakened immune systems, might be able to infect others with flu viruses for an even longer time.

Onset of Symptoms

The time from when a person is exposed to flu virus and infected to when symptoms begin is about 1 to 4 days, with an average of about 2 days.

Complications of Flu

Complications of flu can include bacterial pneumonia, ear infections, sinus infections, and worsening of chronic medical conditions, such as congestive heart failure, asthma, or diabetes.

What are the emergency warning signs of flu sickness?

SEEK MEDICAL EVALUATION ASAP IF YOU HAVE THE FOLLOWING!!

- Difficulty breathing or shortness of breath
- Pain or pressure in the chest or abdomen
- Sudden dizziness
- Confusion
- Severe or persistent vomiting
- Flu-like symptoms that improve but then return with fever and worse cough

How long should I stay home if I'm sick?

The CDC recommends that you stay home for at least 24 hours after your fever is gone except to get medical care or other necessities. Your fever should be gone without the use of a fever-reducing medicine, such as Tylenol®. You should stay home from work, school, travel, shopping, social events, and public gatherings.

What should I do while I'm sick?

- Stay away from others as much as possible to keep from infecting them.
- If you must leave home, for example to get medical care, wear a facemask if you have one (these can be purchased in your local pharmacy)
- Cover coughs and sneezes with a tissue.
- Wash your hands often to keep from spreading flu to others.
- Drink plenty of fluids to avoid dehydration.

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