



Information on the Common Cold and Influenza

Once school starts, it seems the cold and flu season is just around the corner. Can you tell the difference between a common cold and influenza (flu)?

The Common Cold

For the first few days, you may develop watery nasal secretions. Later, these become thicker and darker. Dark mucus does not necessarily mean that you have developed a bacterial infection. Antibiotics will not help a virus, but will help a bacterial infection.

You may get a mild cough. It won't get much worse, but it is likely to last into the second week of your illness. Usually there is no fever—in fact, fever and more severe symptoms may indicate that you have the flu and not a cold.

Cold symptoms settle in between one and four days after you are infected by a cold virus and typically last for about three days. At that point the worst is over, but you may feel congested for a week or more. During the first three days that you have cold symptoms, you are contagious. This means you can pass the cold to others.

One to three days after catching a cold virus, symptoms begin suddenly.

- runny or stuffy nose
- itchy or sore throat
- cough
- congestion
- slight body aches or a mild headache
- sneezing
- watery eyes
- low-grade fever
- mild fatigue

How a cold is spread

The cold virus is spread by hand-to-hand contact, airborne fluid, and contact with surfaces or objects.

Blowing the nose, coughing or sneezing, and then touching a person can transmit the virus. If a person sneezes or coughs, the secretions can become airborne and land on another person. If the secretions land on objects such as toys, computer keyboards or other surfaces, the virus will live up to 3 hours. All a person has to do is touch the contaminated surface and they can become infected.

Influenza (flu)

The flu is a contagious respiratory illness caused by influenza viruses. It can cause mild to severe illness. Some people, such as older people, young children, and people with certain health conditions (such as asthma, diabetes, or heart disease), are at higher risk for serious flu complications. The best way to prevent the flu is by getting a flu vaccination each year.

Symptoms of flu include:

- fever (usually high)
- headache
- extreme tiredness
- dry cough
- sore throat
- runny or stuffy nose
- muscle aches
- Stomach symptoms, such as nausea, vomiting, and diarrhea, also can occur but are more common in children than adults

How Flu Spreads

Flu viruses are thought to spread mainly from person to person through coughing or sneezing of people with influenza. Sometimes people may become infected by touching something with flu viruses on it and then touching their mouth or nose. Most healthy adults may be able to infect others beginning 1 day before symptoms develop and up to five (5) days after becoming sick. That means that 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.

Stop the spread of both a cold and the flu.

Take everyday actions to stay healthy.

- Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze. Throw the tissue in the trash after you use it. If you do not have a tissue cough or sneeze into your sleeve.
- Wash your hands often with soap and water, especially after you cough or sneeze.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth. Germs spread that way.
- Stay home if you get sick.
- If you have a fever, stay home for at least 24 hrs after that fever has ended
- Get a flu vaccine when it becomes available.