

Is it a Cold or the Flu? For Your Safety, Know the Difference!

It is sometimes hard to tell if you have a cold or the flu (also called influenza), because their symptoms are so similar. However, the flu may be more dangerous for your health than a cold, because it can lead to life-threatening illnesses such as pneumonia – so it is important to know the difference between the two. Here are some similarities and differences:

Usual Cold Symptoms	Usual Flu Symptoms
Starts gradually, usually lasts less than one week	Starts quickly, usually lasts for a couple of weeks
Feeling a little tired	Feeling very weak and tired
Coughing	Bad coughing
Runny nose	Runny nose
Sneezing	No sneezing
No fever or just a slight fever (1-2 degrees above usual)	Fever
Milder: muscle aches, headache, watery eyes	More severe: muscle aches, chills, headache, eye pain
Sore throat	Sore throat

What causes a cold or the flu?

A cold and the flu are both caused by viruses. Over 100 different kinds of viruses can cause a cold, but fewer viruses cause the flu. This is why there is no cure for a cold, but there is a flu shot that helps to protect against getting the flu.

How can you feel better while you are sick?

It is important to know that once you are sick with a cold or the flu, **no antibiotics** or any other medicine will cure you. In fact, you should only take antibiotics when your doctor tells you that you really need them. But there are some things you can do to feel better:

- Drink fluids like water, fruit juices, and clear soups
- Rest as much as you can
- Don't smoke or drink alcohol
- For a sore throat, gargle with salt water several times a day, or use throat sprays or lozenges



Is there medicine that can help you feel better?

Yes! Non-prescription cough and cold medicine from your local drugstore may help reduce your symptoms, especially if you take it right after you get sick. But make sure to read the labels carefully:

- **Do NOT give aspirin or other "Salicylates" to children or teenagers who have a cold or the flu!** Young people may get sick or even die from a condition called Reye's Syndrome, which is linked to salicylate-containing medicines and cold or flu symptoms. Ask your doctor for more information.
- Also, make sure what's on the label treats your symptoms! Read on for more information...

What Medicine Labels Should Contain

To Treat:

Stuffy nose
Cough
Mucus stuck in lungs
Runny nose & sneezing
Fever, headaches, minor aches & pains

Label Should Contain:

Nasal decongestant
Cough suppressant
Expectorant
Antihistamine
Pain reliever (Analgesic)

When should you call your doctor?

You usually do not have to call your doctor when you're sick with a cold or the flu. But if any of these things happen, you should call your doctor:

- Your symptoms get worse, not better
- Your cold symptoms last more than 10 days
- After feeling a little better, you start to get worse, with more serious symptoms, like: nausea, chills, vomiting, high fever, shaking, chest pain, or coughing up thick yellow-green mucus.

How can you keep from getting a cold?

- Wash your hands! It is possible to get a cold simply by shaking a person's hand or touching a doorknob.
- Keep away from someone who has a cold.
- Try not to touch your eyes, nose, or mouth, where germs can enter.
- Sneeze or cough into a tissue, then throw it away.
- Clean surfaces with germ-killing disinfectant.

How can you keep from getting the flu?

You can get either a flu shot or prescription medicine from your doctor. Usually, the flu shot is more effective, unless you are somebody who should not get the shot.

Who should get the flu shot? Who shouldn't?

Almost everybody should get a flu shot in order to help protect against the flu. These people in particular should get a flu shot:

- People ages 65 and older
- People at nursing homes
- Anyone over 6 months old with health problems (like asthma) or long-term diseases (like AIDS or heart disease)
- Healthcare workers and anybody who is usually in contact with the elderly



Your doctor will probably ask you to get a flu shot between mid-October and mid-November, because flu is most common during winter. After getting the shot, you may feel sore, weak, or feverish for some days.

Some people should **NOT** get the flu shot:

- People with certain allergies (eggs, etc.)
- People who have an illness (like pneumonia)
- Anybody with a high fever
- Pregnant women

**Always talk to your doctor
before getting a flu shot!**

Who should take prescription medicine to help prevent flu?

Taking prescription medicine to help prevent flu is an alternative for those people who should not get a flu shot. Taking this medicine within 48 hours of first getting the flu symptoms can help you recover more quickly. If you are interested in this option, talk to your doctor.



Any more questions about colds and flu?

Contact your Primary Care Physician,
Or call the MetroPlus Care Management Action Line at:

1-800-579-9798



The information contained in this publication should not be used as a substitute for the medical care and advice of your Primary Care Physician. There may be variations in treatment that your Primary Care Physician may recommend based on individual facts and circumstances. Source: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Food and Drug Administration.

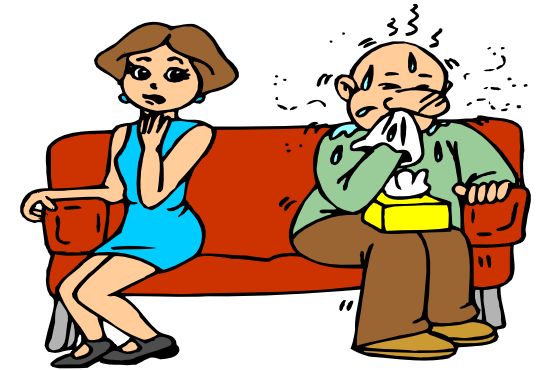
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