

# Cold and Flu

**What is the difference between a Cold and the Flu?**

**How can I help stop the spread of a Cold or the Flu?**

**What is the recommended treatment for recovery?**

## Cold or Flu?

The common cold and flu (influenza) have similar symptoms. Both illnesses attack the upper respiratory system (nose, throat, bronchial tubes, lungs), but mistaking one for the other can lead to serious health complications. It is important to know the difference between the two so proper medical care can be sought when necessary.

## What is the difference between a Cold and the Flu?

Cold symptoms include:

- Sneezing
- Runny nose
- Coughing
- Sore throat
- Head and body aches
- Congestion of ears, nose, and head
- Mild fatigue
- Low fever - less than 101°F

Flu symptoms include:

- Rapid onset of symptoms
- Severe body aches and/or headache
- Dry cough
- Extreme fatigue and weakness
- Chills and sweats
- Nasal congestion
- Loss of appetite
- High fever - greater than 101°F (fever lasts from one to seven days)

Although conditions such as diarrhea, nausea, and vomiting can sometimes be related to the flu, it does not typically have an effect on the stomach or intestines.

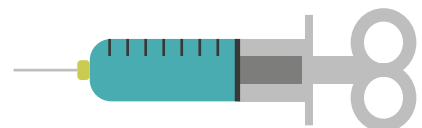
## What causes a Cold or the Flu?

Both illnesses are caused by viruses that spread via airborne droplets (e.g., sneezing, coughing) and by direct (hand-to-hand) or indirect (using shared objects such as a telephone, drinking cups, etc.) contact with an infected individual. Although over 200 different cold viruses are known to exist, the rhinovirus is the most common cause of a cold. It is estimated the average person experiences 2-4 colds per year. The flu is caused by types of viruses called influenza A, B, and C. An annual flu shot is the first defense in reducing one's risk for catching the flu.

## What is the recommended treatment?

The cold and flu are caused by viruses; therefore antibiotics are usually not prescribed. However, if a secondary bacterial infection occurs, such as pneumonia, an antibiotic may be used. Although these viruses need to run their course, some general treatment measures that can help alleviate symptoms and discomfort include:

- Getting plenty of rest
- Drinking plenty of fluids
- Sucking on ice or throat lozenges
- Gargling with warm salt water several times a day (mix 1/2 tsp of salt in an 8 oz glass of warm water)
- Using a humidifier
- Stop smoking and alcohol use
- Taking over-the-counter medicines to relieve pain or to treat other symptoms such as:
  - Acetaminophen (Tylenol)
  - Ibuprofen (Advil, Motrin)
  - Decongestant (Sudafed)
  - Cough Medicine (Robitussin)
- Antiviral medications may be prescribed to treat the flu (must be taken within 48 hours of the onset of symptoms)



### **Who should receive an annual Flu shot?**

An annual flu shot is recommended for everyone older than six months of age, with rare exceptions. People with severe egg allergies, allergic reactions to a past dose of the flu vaccine, a history of Guillain-Barré after a dose of flu vaccine, and people who are moderately or severely ill at the time of the flu vaccine should consult with a health care provider before receiving the vaccine. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) strongly recommend the following individuals receive an annual flu shot:

- People age 50 and older
- People with long-term health problems such as heart disease, lung disease, asthma, kidney disease, and diabetes
- People who are immunosuppressed
- People aged 6 months through 18 years and receiving long-term aspirin therapy
- People who are morbidly obese
- Physicians, nurses, family members, or anyone else in close contact with people at risk for serious influenza

### **When should an annual Flu shot be received?**

The flu season is usually at its peak between January and March, therefore it is recommended flu shots be administered starting mid-October. It usually takes 2 weeks to develop protection against the flu; however, the vaccine may last up to one year.

**Note: Because the flu virus changes often, it is necessary to receive an updated vaccine annually.**

### **Does the Flu shot cause health problems?**

Over the years, hundreds of millions of Americans have safely received the inactive flu vaccine (the flu shot). The most common side effects are soreness, redness, tenderness or swelling where the flu shot was given.

Although it is rare, serious allergic reactions can occur. If signs of a serious reaction are experienced (e.g., difficulty breathing, wheezing, hives, paleness, weakness, a fast heart beat, or dizziness) medical attention should be sought immediately.

### **References**

- [www.mayoclinic.com](http://www.mayoclinic.com) (Mayo Clinic)
- [www.who.int](http://www.who.int) (World Health Organization)
- [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov) (Centers for Disease Control)
- [www.fda.gov](http://www.fda.gov) (U.S. Food and Drug Administration)