



How to Tell the Difference between a Cold and the Flu

The cold and flu are both respiratory illnesses, but they are caused by different types of viruses. Flu symptoms usually come on quickly (within 3-6 hours) and consist of a fever, body aches, dry cough, and extreme tiredness. Cold symptoms are less severe and people experience a stuffy nose, productive cough, slight tiredness, and limited body aches.

Use the chart below as a quick reference to determine if what you have is just a cold or if it's the flu.

SYMPTOMS	COLD	FLU
Fever	Rare	Usually Present
Aches	Slight	Usual, often severe
Chills	Uncommon	Fairly Common
Tiredness	Mild	Moderate to severe
Sudden Symptoms	Symptoms appear gradually	Symptoms can appear within 3-6 hours
Coughing	Hacking, productive cough	Dry, unproductive cough
Sneezing	Common	Uncommon
Stuffy nose	Common	Uncommon
Sore throat	Common	Uncommon
Chest Discomfort	Mild to moderate	Often severe
Headache	Uncommon	Common

For a Cold

What Works

If you catch a cold, you can expect to be sick for about a week. But that doesn't mean you have to be miserable. These remedies may help:

- **Water and other fluids.** You can't flush a cold out of your system, but drinking plenty of liquids can help. Water, juice, clear broth or warm lemon water with honey helps loosen congestion and prevents dehydration. Avoid alcohol, coffee and caffeinated sodas, which make dehydration worse.



- **Salt water.** A salt water gargle — 1/2 teaspoon salt in an 8-ounce glass of warm water — can temporarily relieve a sore or scratchy throat.
- **Saline nasal sprays.** Over-the-counter saline nasal sprays combat stuffiness and congestion. Unlike nasal decongestants, saline sprays don't lead to a rebound effect — a worsening of symptoms when the medication is discontinued — and most are safe and nonirritating, even for children.
- **Over-the-counter cold medications.** Nonprescription decongestants and pain relievers offer some symptom relief, but they won't prevent a cold or shorten its duration, and most have some side effects. If used for more than a few days, they can actually make symptoms worse. Keep in mind that acetaminophen (Tylenol, others) can cause serious liver damage or liver failure if taken in high doses. It's common for people to take Tylenol in addition to flu medications that also contain acetaminophen, which can lead to drug overdoses. Read the labels of any cold medication carefully to make sure you're not overdosing.
- **Humidity.** Cold viruses thrive in dry conditions — another reason why colds are more common in winter. Parched air also dries the mucous membranes, causing a stuffy nose and scratchy throat. A humidifier can add moisture to your home, but it can also add mold, fungi and bacteria if not cleaned properly. Change the water in your humidifier

What Doesn't Work

The list of ineffective cold remedies is long. A few of the more common ones that don't work include:

- **Antibiotics.** These destroy bacteria, but they're no help against cold viruses. Avoid asking your doctor for antibiotics for a cold or using old antibiotics you have on hand. You won't get well any faster, and inappropriate use of antibiotics contributes to the serious and growing problem of antibiotic-resistant bacteria.
- **Antihistamines.** Although antihistamines can help the runny nose, watery eyes and sneezing that occur with allergies, they have the opposite effect on cold symptoms, further drying nasal membranes and impeding the flow of mucus.
- **Not eating.** Despite the old adage "Starve a cold, feed a fever," there's no evidence that avoiding food shortens a cold's duration or reduces symptoms.

For the Flu

What is Influenza?

Influenza (also called flu) is a viral infection of the nose, throat, trachea, and bronchi (air passages). Outbreaks occur almost every year, usually in late fall and winter (seasonal flu). Flu viruses are almost always spread from person to person by droplets that are coughed or sneezed into the air. They can also be spread by the hands of an infected person who has touched their mouth or nose.



What are the symptoms?

Symptoms of seasonal flu tend to start suddenly. The usual symptoms are:

- Chills and fever (often 101 to 103 degrees F)
- Headaches and general muscle aches
- Sore throat, runny nose and cough
- Fatigue and lethargy
- Occasional vomiting and diarrhea

How is the flu treated?

Flu symptoms are usually managed at home with non-prescription medication. Get plenty of rest. Drink a lot of liquid such as water, juice, and non-caffeinated beverage. Acetaminophen or ibuprofen may be taken for control of fever and discomfort. Decongestants may help relieve runny nose. A routine prescription of anti-viral medication for mild disease, or for any case in an otherwise healthy person where hospitalization is not being considered, is discouraged strongly by the Kansas Dept. of Health and the CDC (Center for Disease Control and Prevention). Self-isolation is a CDC recommendation through the illness until free of fever (less than 100 degrees F.) occurs for 24 hours while on no fever reducing medication. If possible, college students are encouraged to return to their family homes until they no longer have fever and well enough to manage independently.

How long will the effects last?

Symptoms usually last for 3-7 days. Improvement of symptoms usually begins within 2 days.

Should I Seek Medical Attention For Influenza?

Most healthy people with flu-like symptoms can be managed at home with non-prescription medications, (Acetaminophen or Tylenol, and decongestants), drinking plenty of fluids, and getting plenty of rest. A routine prescription of antiviral medication for mild disease, or for any case in an otherwise healthy person where hospitalization is not being considered, is not recommended.

You should seek medical care with influenza symptoms if you have any of the following conditions:

- Chronic lung conditions, including asthma
- Pregnancy



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- Diabetes, heart disease, kidney disease
- Immunosuppression
- Chronic gastrointestinal, clotting or platelet disorders, or neuromuscular conditions

It is also advisable to seek medical attention if you are experiencing any of the following symptoms:

- Difficulty breathing or shortness of breath
- Persistent vomiting or unable to drink adequate fluids
- Progressive lethargy, diminished alertness or confusion
- Pain or pressure In the chest or abdomen
- Persistent fever over 101 degrees F, or flu-like symptoms improve but return with fever and worse cough

If you need to make an appointment for a medical evaluation, please call **Student Health Services at (620)-235-4452.**

Try to Avoid Getting a Cold or the Flu

Follow these tips to reduce the risk of contracting the flu, a cold or other communicable diseases:

1. Avoid close contact with people who are sick. When you are sick, keep your distance from others to protect them from getting sick too.
2. Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue or the bend in your elbow when coughing or sneezing. It may prevent spread of disease to those around you.
3. Washing your hands often will help protect you from germs. Wash your hands with soap and warm water for 20 seconds or clean them with an alcohol-based hand cleaner.
4. Germs are often spread when a person touches something that is contaminated with germs and then touches his or her eyes, nose, or mouth.
5. Get plenty of sleep, be physically active, manage your stress, drink plenty of fluids and eat nutritious food.
6. **The single best way to prevent the flu is to get the flu vaccine each year.** All PSU students, faculty, and staff are encouraged to receive an influenza vaccination. Flu shots will be available Mid-September at Student Health Services – appointments may be made online by visiting our website www.pittstate.edu/health, or call (620)-235-4452.