

Is it the flu?



Influenza, or the flu, circulates every winter and leaves thousands of people sick with a cough, aches, fever, and fatigue. The flu is much more serious than a cold: thousands of people die each year from flu-related complications. Unfortunately, many people don't realize they have the flu until it's too late. By then, they may have exposed people at work, school, or other public places. Here's how to know if you have the flu, or just a cold:

Symptom	Cold	Flu
Stuffy Nose	Yes	Sometimes
Cough	Sometimes, usually mild	Yes, can be severe
Fever	Not typical	Yes, usually 101-102°F
Chills	No	Yes
Headache	Not typical	Yes, can be severe
Body aches	Slight	Yes, can be severe
Fatigue	Sometimes, mild	Yes, may last a week or longer
Exhaustion	No	Yes
Sneezing	Yes	Sometimes
Sore Throat	Yes, one of the first symptoms	Yes, can be severe

When you come down with a cold, your symptoms usually appear very gradually over a few days. They often start with a sore throat followed by a runny nose. The flu often hits hard, very quickly. Symptoms appear suddenly and the exhaustion and aches can quickly become severe.

If in doubt, try to stay home and stay away from others when you're sick. In particular, try to avoid exposing young children and older adults, who may be more likely to suffer from flu-related problems. Wash your hands frequently and encourage others in your household to do the same.

If you think you have the flu, call your doctor right away. You may be able to take an antiviral medication (brand name: Tamiflu), which can decrease your symptoms and the amount of time you are sick. Antiviral medications should be taken within 48 hours of the start of symptoms.

Finally, talk to your doctor about getting a flu shot each year: it's the number one way to help avoid getting – and spreading – the flu!

Sources: Centers for Disease Control, U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

MINIMIZE YOUR RISK of catching THE FLU

WASH HANDS

often



Use soap and water (warm or cold) to make sure your hands are clean.

AVOID TOUCHING

your eyes, nose or mouth



The flu virus could be here.

GET THE FLU VACCINE



The flu vaccine reduces the risk of flu illness by about 50% to 60% among the overall population.