



Cold vs. flu facts

- The common cold and the flu share many symptoms, and it can be difficult or sometimes impossible to tell the difference based on symptoms alone. Medical tests can identify the flu.
- A cold and the flu are both caused by viruses, but these viruses are different. Flu viruses are far more capable of causing more harm to the patient than cold viruses.
- The flu and the common cold are both respiratory illnesses; flu can be far more serious and may cause significant problems in the respiratory system.
- Symptoms of the common cold versus the flu may be distinguishable in a number of patients.

What is the common cold?

The common cold is a viral infection of the upper respiratory system (nose, throat, sinuses, Eustachian tubes, trachea, larynx, and bronchial tubes). About 30%-50% of colds are caused by rhinoviruses; however, more than 200 different viruses may cause the common cold. Colds are contagious and have an incubation period of about one to seven days (time from infection to appearance of symptoms). A cold lasts about seven to 10 days; however, depending upon the viral strain, it can last up to two weeks. Colds are usually a mild respiratory illness.

What is influenza?

Influenza (commonly termed the flu) is a viral infection of the upper respiratory and/or lower respiratory system caused by influenza viruses. These viruses usually cause more serious symptoms than cold-causing viruses. The flu is contagious and has an incubation period of about one to four days. The flu's duration varies from about five days to two weeks depending upon the severity of the infection.

How to Determine A Cold vs The Flu

Cold	Symptoms	Flu
People with a cold will sneeze more often but not enough to be a reliable sign.	Sneezing	Many people catch the flu from sick people coughing and sneezing.
Mostly Uncommon	Headaches	High Probability
High Probability	Sore Throat	Not Common
Uncommon	Fever	High Probability
Not Usually	Chills	Probability
Minor Aches/Pains	Aches	Severe Aches/Pains
A few days	Development	Very Quickly
Mild	Tired Feeling	Severe
Hacking with mucus	Coughing	Cough/(little mucus)
Usually Common	Clogged Nose	Not Common
Mild	Chest Discomfort	Severe

The Flu is a serious and potentially fatal condition in some individuals. If you think you have the flu, see a health care professional as soon as possible! Antiviral medications, like Tamiflu, can help shorten the duration and make it easier to recover. Stay hydrated and use over the counter medicine like Tylenol or Advil to help control the body aches and fever.