



Respiratory viruses

The cold and flu are some of the most common respiratory tract infections. They are often mixed up as many of their symptoms are similar. Not everyone reacts the same way, vulnerable people can experience serious consequences, like pneumonia, while others will only be slightly afflicted.

Description

The flu is very contagious. It affects the nose, the throat and the lungs. It is caused by the influenza virus which is usually more prevalent at the end of fall and the beginning of spring.

The cold is more frequent and common than the flu. It can also be caused by different viruses.

Symptoms

Signs and symptoms of the flu can present themselves up to three days after the exposition to the virus. For the cold, it can take 4 to 8 days after exposition for symptoms to appear.

Signs and symptoms	Flu	Cold
Fever	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Usual• Sudden onset	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Absent or slight
Cough	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Usual• Sudden onset	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Usual• Slight or moderate
Headache	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Usual	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Rare
Pain and muscle ache	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Sometimes intense	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Rare• Slight
Fatigue	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Usual• Intense• Lasts a few days, sometimes longer	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Usual• Slight
Nausea and vomiting	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Rare in adults• Usual in kids• Often associated with diarrhea and stomach aches in kids	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Rare• Slight
Runny nose or congestion	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Rare, more frequent in kids	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Usual
Sneezing	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Rare	
Sore throat	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Usual	



Flu and cold

Modes of transmission

Respiratory infections are transmitted by :

- Droplets projected in the air from the mouth or nose during a coughing or sneezing episode
- Contact of a contagious individual with another (ex. hands contaminated by secretions)
- Contact with an environment and/or objects contaminated by respiratory secretions.

With the flu, you can usually pass on the virus one day before the onset of symptoms and up to 5 days after the beginning of symptoms.

With the cold, you can pass on the virus until symptoms have disappeared.

Treatment

Most healthy individuals heal quickly and without treatment. In the case of the flu, the cough and fatigue can last up to three weeks and even more.

You can alleviate symptoms by :

- Resting
- Hydrating well

Take acetaminophen or ibuprofen as needed, while following dosage and frequency recommendations for the product. Always check that it does not present any danger to your health by consulting with a healthcare professional.

Mesures of prevention and control of infections

The best way to protect yourself from complications of the flu or COVID-19, is to be vaccinated against those infections each year. Some hygienic measures can also reduce the risk of transmission of respiratory tract infections:

- Washing your hands frequently
- Cleaning and disinfecting frequently touched surfaces (counters, tables, desks)
- Covering both your mouth and your nose when coughing or sneezing
- Blowing your nose with a tissue, putting it in the garbage and washing your hand immediately

To ensure the safety of your family, avoid visiting them while sick.

Additional precautions are put in place in healthcare centers for people presenting with signs and symptoms of respiratory infection.

Advice

This information does not replace the advice of a healthcare professional. For any question regarding your health, call Info-Santé, at 811 or see a healthcare professional.