

HOW TO TELL THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE INFLUENZA or A COLD

Health Facts

Something's got you down...you think it's just a cold, but...

You're not feeling well. Your nose is running and you're sneezing. Your whole body aches - it must be a cold, right? On second thought, you also have a fever and a sore throat. Maybe it's the influenza. The common cold and influenza (flu) symptoms are often very similar. Check the chart below to help you determine if your symptoms are a simple cold, or the influenza.

Symptom	Cold	Influenza
Fever	Rare	Usual, high fever (102°F/39°C - 104°F/40°C), sudden onset, last 3-4 days. Note: the elderly and people who are immunocompromised may not develop a fever.
Headache	Rare	Usual, can be sudden
Muscle aches and pains	Sometimes, generally mild	Usual, often severe
Tiredness and weakness	Sometimes, generally mild	Usual, severe, may last up to 2-3 weeks
Extreme tiredness	Unusual	Usual; early onset, can be severe
Runny, stuffy nose	Common	Common
Sneezing	Common	Sometimes
Sore throat	Common	Common
Chest discomfort, coughing	Sometimes, mild to moderate	Common, can be moderate to severe. Cough may last for weeks.
Complications	Can lead to sinus congestion or infection, and ear aches*	Can lead to pneumonia and respiratory failure, and become life-threatening. Can worsen a chronic condition.

PREVENTION	Frequent hand washing (<i>see additional Fact Sheet</i>). Cover your coughs and sneezes.	Annual influenza vaccination. Pneumococcal vaccine for those at risk of complications. Frequent hand washing. Cover your coughs and sneezes.
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*Colds do not generally result in serious health problems such as pneumonia or bacterial infections.

NOTE: Children may also experience the croup, ear infections, nausea, vomiting and diarrhea when they have the influenza-symptoms that are not common in adults.

Adapted from: Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care

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