

Is It a Cold or the Flu?

The cold and flu are both respiratory illnesses, but they are caused by different types of viruses with different symptoms. Use this chart to learn the difference between the two.

Signs and Symptoms	Influenza	Cold
Fever	Usually present	Rare
Aches	Usual, often severe	Slight
Chills	Fairly common	Uncommon
Tiredness	Moderate to severe	Mild
Symptom onset	Symptoms can appear within 3 to 6 hours	Symptoms appear gradually
Coughing	Dry, unproductive cough	Hacking, productive cough
Sneezing	Uncommon	Common
Stuffy nose	Uncommon	Common
Sore throat	Uncommon	Common
Chest discomfort	Often severe	Mild to moderate
Headache	Common	Uncommon

If you or a family member is experiencing symptoms that sound more like the flu than a cold, download our list of helpful questions to ask your doctor and call your doctor right away.

There are prescription medicines that can actually help prevent you from getting the flu – or shorten the duration if you already have it. But you must start treatment within 48 hours of first symptoms.