

How can you tell the difference between a cold and the flu?

Because colds and flu share many symptoms, it can be difficult (or even impossible) to tell the difference between them based on symptoms alone. Special tests that usually must be done within the first few days of illness can be carried out, when needed to tell if a person has the flu. Use this chart as a general guideline.

Symptoms	H1N1 (Swine Flu)	Flu	Cold
Fever	High fever is common, but sometimes absent	Fever is usually present with the flu in up to 80% of all flu cases. A temperature of 100°F or higher for 3 to 4 days is associated with the flu.	Fever is rare with a cold.
Coughing	Cough is common	Usually a non-productive (non-mucus producing) cough is usually present with the flu (sometimes referred to as dry cough).	A hacking, productive (mucus-producing) cough is often present with a cold.
Aches	Body aches are common	Severe aches and pains are common with the flu.	Slight body aches and pains can be part of a cold.
Stuffy Nose	Runny/stuffy nose is common	Stuffy nose is not commonly present with the flu, but a runny nose occurs sometimes.	Stuffy nose is commonly present with a cold and typically resolves spontaneously within a week.
Chills	Chills are common	60% of people who have the flu experience chills .	Chills are uncommon with a cold.
Tiredness	Fatigue or tiredness can be extreme	Tiredness is moderate to severe with the flu.	Tiredness is fairly mild with a cold.
Sneezing	Sneezing sometimes	Sneezing occurs sometimes with the flu	Sneezing is commonly present with a cold.
Sudden Symptoms	Dizziness	The flu has a rapid onset within 3-6 hours. The flu hits hard and includes sudden symptoms like high fever, aches and pains.	Cold symptoms tend to develop over a few days.
Headache	Headache is common	A headache is very common with the flu, present in 80% of flu cases. Can be severe.	A headache is fairly uncommon with a cold.
Sore Throat	Sore throat is common	Sore throat is not commonly present with the flu.	Sore throat is commonly present with a cold.

Chest Discomfort	Respiratory symptoms sometimes	Chest discomfort is often severe with the flu.	Chest discomfort is mild to moderate with a cold.
Nausea	Nausea is common, vomiting sometimes	Nausea and vomiting occurs sometimes	Nausea is sometimes present
Other Symptoms	Diarrhea sometimes	Diarrhea is not common. Extreme exhaustion can occur suddenly and can be severe.	Itchiness in nose, throat or eyes is common with a cold.
Urgent medical attention is needed if symptoms include:	Difficulty breathing or shortness of breath Pain or pressure in the abdomen Sudden dizziness or confusion Severe or persistent vomiting	Any increased discomfort of above symptoms, including but not limited to: Pain or pressure in the chest Near-fainting or fainting Confusion	An inability to swallow Stiff neck or sensitivity to bright lights Cold symptoms worsen after the third day

If you are sick with the flu, you may be ill for a week or longer. You should stay home and keep away from others as much as possible, including avoiding travel and not going to work or school, for at least 24 hours after your fever is gone except to get medical care or for other necessities. (Your fever should be gone without the use of fever-reducing medicine.)

If you leave the house to seek medical care, wear a facemask, if available and tolerable, and cover your coughs and sneezes with a tissue. In general, you should avoid contact with other people as much as possible to keep from spreading your illness, especially people at increased risk of severe illness from influenza.

With seasonal flu, people may be contagious from one day before they develop symptoms to up to 7 days after they get sick. Children, especially younger children, might potentially be contagious for longer periods. People infected with the novel H1N1 are likely to have similar patterns of infectiousness as with seasonal flu.

If you come to work presenting flu-type symptoms and or a fever, you may be requested to leave the office and either work from home or take PTO.

If you have any questions about your symptoms, please call your doctor or the United Healthcare Care24 line – 1-888-887-4114

<http://www.cdc.gov/H1N1FLU/>

<http://www.cdc.gov/H1N1flu/qa.htm>

<http://www.webmd.com/cold-and-flu/flu-guide/swine-flu-faq-1#symptoms>
Symptom Checker