

Common Flu or Cold

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Overview

Flu and the common cold are both respiratory illnesses but they are caused by different viruses. Because these two types of illnesses have similar symptoms, it can be difficult to tell the difference between them based on symptoms alone. In general, flu is worse than the common cold, and symptoms are more common and intense. Colds are usually milder than flu. People with colds are more likely to have a runny or stuffy nose. Colds generally do not result in serious health problems, such as pneumonia, bacterial infections, or hospitalizations. Flu can have very serious associated complications.

Symptoms

The symptoms of flu can include fever or feeling feverish/chills, cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, muscle or body aches, headaches and fatigue (tiredness). Cold symptoms are usually milder than the symptoms of flu. People with colds are more likely to have a runny or stuffy nose. Colds generally do not result in serious health problems.

Signs and symptoms	Influenza	Cold
Symptoms onset	Abrupt	Gradual
Fever	Usual	Rare
Aches	Usual	Slight
Chills	Fairly Common	Uncommon
Fatigue, Weakness	Usual	Sometimes
Sneezing	Sometimes	Common
Stuffy Nose	Sometimes	Common
Sore Throat	Sometimes	Common
Chest Discomfort, Cough	Common	Mild to Moderate
Headache	Common	Rare