



COVID-19 and the Flu: What's the Difference?

Flu season happens every year in the U.S. in the fall and winter. COVID-19 has similar symptoms. How do you know if someone has the flu or COVID-19? What are the differences between these 2 illnesses? Can you get both at the same time? See how they compare below.

Can you get the flu and COVID-19 at the same time?

Yes, medical experts say that you can have both infections at the same time.

Aspects of illness	Flu (influenza)	COVID-19
Cause	Different types of flu viruses that spread each year	A type of coronavirus called SARS-CoV-2
How it spreads	It spreads from person to person through coughing, sneezing, talking, or touching infected surfaces and touching your eyes, nose, or mouth	It spreads from person to person through coughing, sneezing, talking, or touching infected surfaces and touching your eyes, nose, or mouth. Current research shows that it spreads more easily than the flu, but not as easily as measles.
Prevention	Wash your hands often, stay home if you feel ill, limit contact with other people, and avoid people who are sick.	Wash your hands often, stay home if you feel ill, limit contact with other people, and avoid people who are sick. Wear a face mask when around other people. Stay 6 feet or more away from others in public places. Follow instructions in your area for avoiding crowds and events.
Vaccine	Different types of flu vaccines are available each year. Getting a vaccine can help prevent or lessen symptoms of the flu. Talk with your healthcare provider about the type of vaccine	The FDA has approved several vaccines to prevent COVID-19, including in those who are pregnant or

that's best for you and when to get it. If you are sick with any infection, get the flu vaccine as soon as you recover.

The vaccines are given as a shot (injection) in the arm muscle. A 1-dose vaccine (Johnson & Johnson) or 2-dose vaccine (either Pfizer or Moderna) may be given.

If you get the **2-dose vaccine**, the second dose is given several weeks after the first. Experts recommend a third dose of the 2-dose vaccine in some people with a very weak immune system. This extra dose is needed to help build up antibodies to fight the virus.

A **Pfizer booster dose** is advised at least 6 months after the first doses in certain people based on age and risk. Talk with your healthcare provider. The FDA is exploring booster doses of the other types of COVID-19 vaccines. No final recommendation has been made.

Some people have no symptoms. In other people, they can be mild to severe, and can include:

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Symptoms

- Fever
- Chills
- Body aches
- Cough
- Sore throat
- Stuffy or runny nose
- Headache
- Tiredness
- Vomiting and diarrhea, more often in children
- Fever
- Chills
- Body aches
- Cough
- Sore throat
- Stuffy or runny nose
- Headache
- Tiredness
- Feeling short of breath
- New loss of taste or smell
- Nausea
- Vomiting
- Diarrhea

When symptoms start

Usually 1 to 4 days after infection

Usually 5 days after infection, but can start 2 to 14 days after infection

How long a person is contagious	<p>A person can spread the flu at least 1 day before symptoms start. Older kids and adults are most contagious for the first 3 to 4 days of symptoms. They can spread the virus up to 7 days after symptoms start. Babies and people with weak immune systems can be contagious longer</p>	<p>Researchers are still learning about this. It's possible for a person to spread the virus about 2 days before symptoms start. They can spread the virus up to 10 days after symptoms start. People with no symptoms (asymptomatic) or who had symptoms that have gone away can still spread the virus for at least 10 days after testing positive for COVID-19 with a viral test.</p>
Testing	<p>There are different kinds of rapid flu tests. The tests are done by wiping a swab inside your nose or throat. The results can come back in 10 minutes to several hours. A saliva-based test is being developed.</p>	<p>There are different kinds of tests for COVID-19. Some check for active infection. Others check for antibodies in the blood that are a sign of a past COVID-19 infection.</p>
	<p>In some areas, a single test from the CDC for both flu and SARS CoV-2 may be available. This test is used to help public health experts track infection rates. It won't replace separate flu and COVID-19 tests.</p>	<p>In some areas, a single test from the CDC for both flu and SARS CoV-2 may be available. This test is used to help public health experts track infection rates. It won't replace separate flu and COVID-19 tests.</p>
Treatment	<p>The flu may be treated with antiviral medicine. This can help ease symptoms. It can also shorten the amount of time you're sick. These medicines need to be taken as soon as possible when you start to feel sick. Antibiotics are not used because they don't work on the flu virus. But antibiotics may be used to prevent or treat an infection by bacteria that can sometimes happen after having the flu. Other treatment for the flu includes care to ease symptoms. This includes rest, drinking plenty of fluids, and pain and fever medicine as needed. In severe cases, you may need time in the hospital to treat complications from flu.</p>	<p>The FDA has approved an antiviral medicine called remdesivir for people in the hospital. It is for people 12 years and older who weigh more than about 88 pounds (40 kgs). Remdesivir is approved only for people who need to be treated in the hospital. In certain cases, it may also be used for people younger than 12 years or who weigh less than about 88 pounds (40 kgs). Antibiotics are not used because they don't work on the virus that causes COVID-19. But antibiotics may be used to prevent or treat an infection by bacteria that may happen after getting COVID-19.</p>
Possible complications	<p>Can include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bacterial infections • Ear infection 	<p>Can include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Acute respiratory distress syndrome (ARDS) • Bacterial infections

- Inflammation of muscle tissues (myositis or rhabdomyolysis)
- Inflammation of the brain (encephalitis)
- Inflammation of the heart (myocarditis)
- Multiple-organ failure
- Pneumonia
- Sepsis
- Sinus infection
- Worsening of chronic conditions of the lungs, heart, and nervous system
- Worsening of diabetes
- Heart attack
- Inflammation of muscle tissues (myositis or rhabdomyolysis)
- Inflammation of the brain (encephalitis)
- Inflammation of the heart (myocarditis)
- Multiple-organ failure
- Pneumonia
- Respiratory failure
- Sepsis
- Stroke
- Worsening of chronic conditions of the lungs, heart, and nervous system
- Worsening of diabetes
- Multisystem inflammatory syndrome in children (MIS-C), a rare complication that causes inflammation of blood vessels and organs

Why getting a flu vaccine is important now

A flu vaccine doesn't protect you from COVID-19. But it can reduce your risk of serious illness or death from the flu. The flu vaccine may help keep you out of the hospital. This is extra important while the COVID-19 pandemic is using a lot of medical resources.

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