

HEALTH CARE

How to know if you have a cold or the flu

Do you have a cold? Or perhaps it's the flu? The flu (influenza) 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 differentiate between them. Here's a quick guide to help you tell them apart.

The common cold

According to the Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety, over two hundred different viruses have been identified as possible causes of the common cold. Cold-causing viruses live in our noses and throats and are carried on the droplets we expel when talking, coughing or sneezing. Contrary to popular belief, colds are not very contagious, but require close personal and prolonged contact for the cold virus to spread. Cold symptoms usually persist for two to seven days.

How do I reduce the likelihood of catching a cold?

Canadians can help prevent the spread of the cold by:

- Washing their hands frequently, especially in contact with anyone suffering from a cold
- Keeping their distance from people with colds, especially when they cough or sneeze
- Eating well-balanced meals, exercising and trying not to get chilled or over-tired

The flu

Influenza, commonly called the 'flu,' is a highly contagious viral illness caused by only a select few influenza A and B viruses. That's why there is a vaccine for influenza and not for the common cold.

According to the PHAC, unlike the common cold, the flu is a serious illness that leads to 4,000-8,000 deaths each year. The flu lives in the respiratory system and is characterized by a sudden onset of fever, chills, fatigue, severe headache and muscle aches.

There is no such thing as the "stomach flu," although occasionally nausea and vomiting can be symptoms of the virus. Flu symptoms usually persist for two to three weeks.

How do I reduce the likelihood of catching the flu?

Canadians can help prevent the spread of the flu by:

Cold vs flu

If you come down with the flu, it is important to see your doctor within 24-48 hours of symptoms onset for a diagnosis so they can prescribe an antiviral treatment, which are the only medicines available to attack the virus and prevent its spread.

Here's an easy reference chart showing the difference between cold and influenza.

Signs & Symptoms	Influenza (The flu)	Cold
Onset	Sudden	Gradual
Fever/Chills	Common	Rare
Cough	Usual; severe	Less common; mild to moderate
Headache	Prominent	Rare
Muscle aches and pains	Usual and often severe	Slight
Fatigue and weakness	Usually; lasts up to 2-3 weeks	Very mild

Source: Canadian Coalition for Immunization Awareness & Promotion, www.immunize.cpha.ca

- Washing their hands frequently
- Covering sneezes and coughs, preferably with a tissue or shirt sleeve
- Getting an annual influenza vaccination
- Taking an antiviral medication to prevent getting the flu if someone with whom you've been in contact has been diagnosed with influenza

—News Canada



Healthy tips

Ten ways to warm your heart this holiday season

Finding new ways to 'warm your heart' as you celebrate the season is a great way to create traditions that can carry on for years to come.

Here's list of ideas to help keep you and your family healthy and still enjoy the season.

1. Pick a "heart smart" winter activity such as tobogganing, skating or skiing that the whole family can do together.

2. Organize a caroling party. You will warm the hearts of your neighbours as you make your way from house to house spreading holiday cheer.

3. Set up a holiday treasure hunt. Create clues that will send them to the tree and other special holiday places throughout the house and yard.

4. Snuggle up by the fire. With the hectic pace of the holidays, unplugging and spending time together is more important than ever.

5. Feed your feathered friends. Making popcorn garlands to leave out for the birds is a fun and inexpensive activity for the whole family.

6. Kick up your heels. Whether it's in a ballroom or the kitchen, grab your sweetheart and get your pulse moving to the beat of your favourite tunes.

7. Make time to reach out. Friends, neighbours and family members will appreciate a thoughtful gesture. Drop a card in the mailbox of an older neighbour or leave homemade goodies for the letter carrier.

8. Share a heartwarming story. The holiday season is difficult for many people. Share your time reading at a seniors' residence or children's hospital in your area.

9. Take in the sights. Tour around your neighbourhood or the mall to check out the bright lights and decorations.

10. Park your stress—away from the front door. Save yourself the frustration of finding the closest parking space by planning to park at the far end of the parking lot.

—News Canada

Tips to help you stay healthy while having fun in the sun

1. Seek travel advice from your doctor at least one month prior to departure. The best way to protect yourself from getting Hepatitis A or B is to get vaccinated, an easy process that will provide you with long-term protection.

2. Practise good hygiene such as frequent hand washing.

3. Check with your hotel to ensure your drinking water is purified. If they can't confirm it, buy bottled water from the store.

For more information about hepatitis visit the Canadian Liver Foundation web site on www.liver.ca.

—News Canada



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