



# DO I HAVE A COLD, THE FLU OR ALLERGIES?

## Know the difference.

When your throat hurts and your body aches all over, it may be hard to know whether you have seasonal influenza (flu), the common cold or airborne allergies. The flu and cold are caused by different viruses. Allergies are the result of your immune system overreacting to a substance called an allergen, such as mold or ragweed, which is usually harmless. This chart may help you

determine the difference between these three conditions.

It is important to note that not everyone will experience all of these symptoms. Your doctor may conduct special tests, such as swabbing your nose or throat or allergy testing, to know for certain whether you're dealing with seasonal flu, a common cold or airborne allergies.

SYMPTOMS	COMMON COLD	INFLUENZA (FLU)	AIRBORNE ALLERGIES
SEASON	Year-round	October – May ("Flu Season")	Seasonal (depending on what substances trigger your allergies)
ONSET	Gradual	Sudden	Sudden (can last weeks or months)
FEVER	Sometimes (mild)	Common (100-102 F; lasts 3-4 days)	Never
CHILLS	Rare	Common	Never
COUGH	Common (mild)	Common (can be severe)	Sometimes
SORE THROAT	Common	Sometimes	Sometimes
RUNNY/STUFFY NOSE AND SNEEZING	Common	Sometimes	Common
BODY ACHES	Rare (slight)	Common (severe)	Never
HEADACHES	Rare	Common (intense)	Rare
FATIGUE	Sometimes (mild)	Common (intense)	Sometimes
COMPLICATIONS	Asthma, sinusitis, ear infection	Bronchitis, pneumonia, sinusitis	Asthma, sinusitis, ear infection, anaphylaxis

### What are the best ways to prevent catching a cold or the flu or experiencing allergies?

To avoid both the cold and flu, wash your hands often and avoid others who are sick. It is also recommended that you receive the flu vaccine every year for additional protection from the flu.

The best way to prevent allergies is to reduce exposure to allergens. For example, limit your time outdoors when allergen counts are high. Also, wash your clothes and sheets often, remove your shoes when you go inside and replace air filters regularly.

## What are the available treatment options?

Over-the-counter products are available for cold, flu and allergy. Your doctor may prescribe an anti-viral medication to decrease the duration and intensity of the flu. Severe allergies may require a visit with your physician.

## When should you call a doctor?

- Cold: If symptoms have not improved in a week or you develop a significant or persistent fever
- Flu: When you first have symptoms
- Allergy: If you have symptoms for longer than three months, your allergies are interfering with work or sleep and/or you've tried over-the-counter drugs with no relief

## Sources:

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2. Kim, Steven. (2015, March). Is It a Cold or the Flu? <http://www.healthline.com/health/cold-flu/cold-or-flu#Overview1>
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