

## Is It Flu or Cold Symptoms?

How do you know if you have flu or cold symptoms? Take your temperature, say many experts. Whether it's seasonal or swine influenza, the symptoms often mimic cold symptoms with nasal congestion, cough, aches, and malaise. But a common cold rarely has symptoms of fever above 101 degrees F. With flu symptoms, you will probably have a fever initially with the flu virus and you will feel miserable. Body and muscle aches are also more common with the flu. This table can help determine if you have cold or flu symptoms.

<b>Symptoms</b>	<b>Cold</b>	<b>Flu</b>
Fever	Sometimes, usually mild	Usual; high (100-102 F; occasionally higher, especially in young children); lasts 3 to 4 days
Headache	Occasionally	Common
General Aches, Pains	Slight	Usual; often severe
Fatigue, Weakness	Sometimes	Usual; can last 2 to 3 weeks
Extreme Exhaustion	Never	Usual; at the beginning of the illness
Stuffy Nose	Common	Sometimes
Sneezing	Usual	Sometimes
Sore Throat	Common	Sometimes
Chest Discomfort, Cough	Mild to moderate; hacking cough	Common; can become severe
<b>Prevention</b>	Wash your hands often; avoid close contact with anyone with a cold	Wash your hands often; avoid close contact with anyone who has flu symptoms; for seasonal flu, get the annual flu shot; ask your doctor about antiviral medicine for either seasonal or swine flu.

## When Do I Call The Doctor With Flu or Cold Symptoms?

If you already have flu or cold symptoms, it's important to call your doctor if you also have any of the following severe symptoms:

- **Persistent fever:** This can be a sign of another bacterial infection that should be treated.
- **Painful swallowing:** Although a sore throat from a cold or flu can cause mild discomfort, severe pain could mean [strep throat](#), which requires treatment by a doctor.
- **Persistent coughing:** When a cough doesn't go away after two or three weeks, it could be bronchitis, which may need an antibiotic. Postnasal drip or sinusitis can also result in a persistent cough. In addition, asthma is another cause of persistent coughing. [Asthma medications](#) such as steroids, anti-inflammatory medications, and [bronchodilators](#) are necessary to treat asthma.
- **Persistent congestion and headaches:** When colds and [allergies cause](#) congestion and blockage of sinus passages, they can lead to sinus infection. If you have pain around the eyes and face with thick nasal discharge after a week, you may have a bacterial infection and need an antibiotic.

## Can I Prevent Flu or Cold Symptoms?

**The most important prevention measure for preventing colds, seasonal flu, and swine flu is frequent hand washing.** Hand washing by rubbing the hands with warm soapy water for at least 20 seconds helps to slough germs off the [skin](#).

In addition to hand washing to prevent flu or cold symptoms, you can also get a flu shot to prevent seasonal influenza. Seasonal flu activity in the United States generally peaks between late December and early March, so the CDC recommends getting a flu shot in October or November. Within two weeks of getting a flu shot, antibodies develop in your body and provide protection against flu symptoms.

If you do get flu symptoms, call your doctor. If there's some chance that you may have been exposed to swine flu, your doctor may want to take samples and send them away for testing. Whether you have seasonal flu or swine flu, taking prescription antiviral drugs like Tamiflu and Relenza could help. So long as they're used within the first 48 hours of flu symptoms, the medications may help shorten recovery time. Antivirals may also help prevent seasonal or swine flu if you have been exposed to someone with flu symptoms.