

Cold, Flu or COVID-19 – Take steps to keep yourself and others safe



Flu season is always a risky time, when we can unintentionally pass a cold or the flu between ourselves and those around us. This flu season, with the added risks of COVID-19, safety is more important than ever. To protect against viruses this flu season, you must be able to spot the signs and symptoms of a typical cold, the annual flu and COVID-19, and take steps to keep yourself and others healthy.

The flu season in the U.S. typically ranges from November to April. While it is a myth that cold temperatures during these months cause colds, it is true that cold weather keeps people indoors, making transmission and exposure to viruses more likely.

Here are some tips to help you limit exposure to colds, the flu and COVID-19:

- Practice social distancing
- Wear a mask indoors while in close contact with others
- When feasible, limit the number of people in enclosed spaces
- Regularly clean and wipe down shared surfaces such as countertops, keyboards and phones
- Avoid touching your mouth, nose and eyes, and wash hands thoroughly and often
- Get the COVID-19 vaccination and booster as well as a flu shot, if possible
- Eat healthy foods to strengthen your immune system
- Exercise moderately to maintain a healthy immune system

- Ask your doctor about vitamin supplements to help support your immune system
- Drink plenty of water to stay hydrated
- Get plenty of rest
- Try to avoid people who are sick, and stay home if you feel sick

Ask your supervisor or safety professional about specific steps to limit exposure in your workplace.

SPOT THE SYMPTOMS

While you might be familiar with symptoms of a cold or the flu, it's crucial to know the differences between these illnesses and COVID-19.

Cold Symptoms:

- Sore throat
- Cough, chest discomfort
- Mild fatigue
- Runny nose
- Fever and headache are rare
- Symptoms may be gradual

Flu Symptoms:

- High fever 102-104 degrees Fahrenheit
- Headache
- Extreme fatigue
- Dry cough and sore throat
- Runny or stuffy nose
- Muscle or body aches
- Nausea, vomiting and diarrhea
- Symptoms show up abruptly



COVID-19 Symptoms

- Fever or chills
- Cough
- Shortness of breath or difficulty breathing
- Fatigue
- Headache
- New loss of taste or smell
- Sore throat
- Muscle or body aches
- Congestion or runny, stuffy nose
- Nausea, vomiting and diarrhea
- Symptoms may appear 2-14 days after exposure to the virus

Some of these overlapping symptoms can be confusing, but it's important to keep in mind that each person's experience with a cold, the flu or COVID-19 may be different. Symptoms may be more severe or, in some COVID-19 cases, there may be no symptoms at all. ¹ According to the CDC, due to the similarity of some of these symptoms, testing is key to determining whether or not you are positive for one or more than one of these illnesses. Once you know what is causing your symptoms, talk to your doctor about treatment options and take steps to stop the spread.

STOP THE SPREAD

Illnesses such as a cold, the flu and COVID-19 are typically spread in respiratory droplets and small particles caused by breathing, coughing and sneezing. They usually spread from person to person, though the CDC cautions that sometimes people can become infected by touching their eyes, nose or mouth with hands that have viruses on them. Though periods of contagiousness for these viruses can differ, healthy adults infected with them may be able to infect others before they feel symptoms and for some time after.

To prevent the spread of germs, always cover your nose and mouth when you sneeze or cough. Use tissues when you sneeze or if you have the sniffles, but don't just throw tissues

on the floor; make sure to immediately toss them into the trash. If tissues aren't available, sneeze into your sleeve – it is another great weapon against germs. You should also wash your hands frequently, especially after sneezing, coughing or coming in contact with other people. Any kind of soap is effective in removing germs if you vigorously rub your hands together under running water for at least 15-30 seconds.

STAY HOME WHEN SICK

There are few hard and fast rules to help you decide when it's time to stay home but it is generally a good idea to avoid going into work when you feel sick. This is especially true if you work around children, older people or people with certain health conditions, all of whom can be at risk for serious flu and COVID-19 complications. Complications may include bacterial pneumonia, dehydration and worsening of chronic medical conditions, such as congestive heart failure, asthma or diabetes. Children may develop sinus problems and ear infections.

With a cold or the flu, you should stay home if you cannot control your sneezing and coughing or if you have a fever, as that is likely when you are the most contagious. When in doubt, call your physician. Don't overtax your immune system by going to work if you're really suffering. Common colds can become more serious bacterial infections such as sinusitis and influenza can turn into pneumonia or worse.

If you suspect you have COVID-19, whether due to symptoms or exposure to someone who has or suspects they have COVID-19, you should stay home until you confirm you are not infected or until you are no longer contagious. Talk to your doctor about appropriate next steps, and speak with your supervisor, safety professional or HR contact about time away from work. While this flu season may be different, these steps can help protect you, your co-workers and your loved ones all season long.