

Colds, the Flu, and You: All About Viruses

Plan Logo

Variable Information

What are colds and the flu?

Colds and the flu are respiratory infections caused by viruses. They are spread from one person to another by coughing or sneezing. **Antibiotics cannot help viruses. Antibiotics only work against infections caused by bacteria.**

What's the difference?

Because colds and the flu have similar symptoms, it can be difficult to tell them apart. The flu generally comes on more quickly than a cold and is often more severe. Colds do not usually cause serious health problems like pneumonia or bacterial infections, while the flu can lead to these and other serious illnesses.

Preventing a cold or the flu?

There is no medicine to prevent a cold. **You should get a flu shot each year if you are 50 years or older, pregnant during flu season, or have a long-term illness. Check with your doctor first.**

Steps to help prevent the spread of colds or the flu

- Avoid close contact with people who are sick
- Stay home when you are sick
- Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when you sneeze
- Wash your hands often and carefully
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth
- Get plenty of sleep each night
- Eat healthy foods as part of your daily diet
- Don't share personal items such as cups, glasses, forks, spoons, or toothbrushes
- Clean telephone headsets regularly

What to do if you get sick

1. **Get plenty of rest.**
2. **Drink plenty of water.**
3. **Avoid smoking and drinking alcohol.**
4. **Ask your doctor which medicines are right for you.**
5. **Use a cool-mist humidifier.**

When should I call my doctor?

Call your doctor if you have serious concerns about:

- **Breathing problems**
- **Chest pain or pressure**
- **High fever**
- **Feeling faint or fainting**
- **Symptoms that get worse or continue over several days**

This material is sponsored by Abbott Laboratories to help the public learn more about the appropriate use of antibiotics.

