

November 2019



Paragon Orthopedic Center Grants Pass, Oregon

Is It a Cold, or Is It the Flu?

Maybe you've heard some buzz around the water cooler about people starting to get sick now that the weather is changing. Friends tell you they do not feel well, but don't know if it is the flu. Do you know how to tell if what you have is only a cold? And when should you go see your healthcare provider? Get informed before you're feeling ill. Here is a straightforward graphic that can help at a glance.

SYMPTOMS	COLD	INFLUENZA
Onset	Gradual	Sudden
Cough	Hacking	Dry
Headache	Rare	Noticeable
Muscle Aches	Uncommon, or mild	Usual, often severe
Sneezing	Typical	Sometimes
Stuffy Nose	Common	Sometimes
Sore Throat	Common	Sometimes
Chest Discomfort	Uncommon or mild	Common
Elevated Temperature/Fever	Temperature less than 100°F	Temperature \geq 100°F
Tiredness/Exhaustion	Mild	Lasting more than a week; moderate to severe; early, sudden onset

For both the cold and the flu, you can spread the virus before you have symptoms. For the flu, you may be contagious 1-4 days **before** any symptoms begin and continue to be contagious for about 5-7 days, up to 2 weeks. This period of being contagious before your symptoms begin is why you will hear of someone spreading flu on intercontinental airplanes because they were unknowingly contagious in that contained space. A cold is contagious approximately 1 day after exposure to the virus and can continue for 5-7 days. According to the CDC, it is impossible to definitively tell if you have the flu based on symptoms because they do vary. You should see a professional if you are concerned, if you are at high risk for flu-related complications, and/or your symptoms are causing great discomfort. To be sure you have the flu, you need to be seen by a healthcare provider and tested. The test requires swabbing your throat or nose and the results are fairly quick, taking from 10-20 minutes. However, according to the CDC, these tests are only 50-70% accurate with many false negatives. A provider can diagnose you as positive based on your symptoms and exam, even if the test says negative. Antiviral medication can reduce the length of your illness and prevent serious complications that might require hospitalization, such as pneumonia. You cannot get antiviral medicine over the counter, so you must see your healthcare provider. There is no cure for viral colds. Whether it's a cold or the flu, please protect others while you are sick by frequently washing your hands and covering your coughs/sneezes. Hospitals request you wear a mask to protect others. The CDC recommends you stay at home for the flu 24 hours after your fever is gone.

Paragon Orthopedic Center wishes you a healthy winter season!

The following articles were referenced for this newsletter:

<https://epmonthly.com/article/accurate-rapid-flu-tests/>

<https://www.cdc.gov/flu/index.htm>

https://www.medicinenet.com/how_long_is_a_cold_or_flu_contagious/article.htm

