

Family Physician FAQs: COVID-19 or the Flu?

What causes COVID-19 and the flu?

- COVID-19 is caused by a new coronavirus (called SARS-CoV-2).
- Seasonal flu can be caused by different subtypes of Influenza A or Influenza B viruses. The subtypes of these viruses vary each year, which requires annual vaccinations.

Can I get both viruses at the same time?

- You can be infected with both COVID-19 and the flu at the same time, so it's very important to get flu shots this year.

When do symptoms appear?

- Typically, COVID-19 symptoms appear 5 days after exposure to the virus. Symptoms can appear as early as 2 days or as late as 14 days after infection.
- With the flu virus, a person typically develops symptoms 1-4 days after infection.

What are the major symptoms?

- COVID-19 has a wide range of symptoms. These symptoms may indicate infection: fever, cough, shortness of breath, fatigue, muscle or body aches, headache, loss of taste or smell, nausea/vomiting, diarrhea, sore throat, runny/stuffy nose.
- People with influenza (flu) often feel *some or all* of these symptoms: fever, cough, sore throat, runny/stuffy nose, muscle body aches, headache, fatigue, vomiting and diarrhea.

Who is more likely to get serious complications?

- Older adults and those with heart disease, lung disease or diabetes seem to be at higher risk of serious complications from COVID-19.
- Adults over 65 and older people of any age with certain chronic medical conditions (asthma, diabetes, heart disease), pregnant women, and children younger than 5 are at increased risk from the flu.

How long am I contagious?

- For both COVID-19 and the flu, it is possible to spread the virus to others before experiencing any symptoms.

A quick resource to help answer your patients' most likely questions about the viruses and what to expect this flu season.

- People can spread COVID-19 for about 2 days before experiencing signs or symptoms and remain contagious for at least 10 days after signs or symptoms first appear.
- People with the flu are usually contagious one day before showing symptoms and remain contagious for about 7 days.

What are the complications from COVID-19 and the flu?

- COVID-19 and flu share many complications like pneumonia, respiratory failure, infections in the blood (sepsis), kidney failure, among others.
- Additional COVID-19 complications include blood clots in the veins and arteries of the lungs, heart, legs, or brain, and Multisystem Inflammatory Syndrome in children.

Is there treatment for COVID-19 or the flu?

- There is no one treatment for COVID-19 and no drugs are currently approved by the FDA for treatment.
- There are prescription drugs approved to treat Influenza.

Are there tests for COVID-19 and the flu?

- There are several tests for COVID-19. Some require a nasal swab and others require a blood test.
- Flu tests are typically done in the physician's office using a nasal swab.
 - [Additional flu testing information from the CDC](#)

Is there a vaccine?

- Currently, there is no vaccine for COVID-19, but many are working on development.
- There are multiple FDA-licensed influenza vaccines that can be administered annually to protect against flu.
 - The flu shot *does not* give you the flu.
- It is important to get your flu shot to avoid infection with influenza while treatments and immunizations for COVID-19 are still in development.
 - Do what you can now to reduce your risks for severe illness and complications.

Resources

- CDC resource: [Similarities and Differences between Flu and COVID-19](#)
- AAFP vaccine resources, including the 2020-21 influenza vaccine recommendations: aafp.org/vaccines
- Patient education resource on familydoctor.org: [“Do I have COVID-19 or the Flu?”](#)