

healthdirect

Cold or flu?

Know the difference



Colds are very common. They are caused by about 200 different viruses. There is no vaccine for a cold.



The flu is a viral infection affecting your nose, throat and sometimes your lungs. A vaccine is available for the flu.



Good hygiene reduces the spread of colds and flu, especially after coughing and sneezing.

Understand the symptoms



Body aches/pain

COLDS Slight
FLU Usual, often severe



Fever

COLDS Rare
FLU Usual, lasts 3 to 4 days



Sore throat

COLDS Common
FLU Sometimes



Chest discomfort/cough

COLDS Mild to moderate, hacking cough
FLU Common, can become severe



Headache

COLDS Rare
FLU Common



Fatigue/weakness

COLDS Sometimes
FLU Usual, can last up to 2 to 3 weeks



Sneezing

COLDS Usual
FLU Sometimes



Extreme exhaustion

COLDS Never
FLU Usual, at the beginning of the illness

Still not sure if it's a cold or flu? healthdirect's Symptom Checker can help you decide what to do next
www.healthdirect.gov.au/symptom-checker

Colds and flu treatments



Get lots of rest



Drink plenty of water



Keep warm



Avoid cigarette smoke



Try steam inhalation



Try ice or honey and lemon for a sore throat



Paracetamol or ibuprofen for fever, aches and pains



Saline nasal sprays or decongestants for a blocked or runny nose



Take throat lozenges for a sore throat



Do not use cough medicines for children younger than six years old.

Myths vs reality

Top colds and flu myths debunked

Myth: The flu is not a serious illness.

Fact: The flu is a highly contagious and potentially life-threatening disease.

Myth: Colds and the flu can be treated with antibiotics

Fact: Antibiotics won't cure a cold or flu. Antibiotics only work against bacteria not viral infections.

Myth: Vitamin C supplements can prevent the flu or colds.

Fact: There is no evidence to support vitamin C supplements as a way of preventing colds or flu.

Myth: Healthy people don't need to be vaccinated.

Fact: Everyone can benefit from the flu vaccine. If you are at higher risk group, the vaccine is free.

Myth: You can catch a cold or the flu from cold weather or getting caught in the rain.

Fact: The flu or colds are caused by viruses and not by cold climates or being exposed to cold air.

Myth: I'm pregnant, so I shouldn't have the flu jab because it will affect my baby.

Fact: The flu shot is safe for pregnant women at all stages of their pregnancy.

At high risk of becoming seriously ill from flu?
Talk to your doctor or pharmacist



Elderly



Pregnant women



Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people



Existing serious medical conditions



Why

Annual vaccination is the best way of preventing the flu and any associated illness.



Cost

The flu vaccine is available FREE under the National Immunisation Program for people at high risk.



Where

Vaccine is available from doctors, pharmacies and other vaccination providers.