

Flu vs. Colds vs. Bacterial Infections

Symptom	Influenza (flu)	Colds and other viral infections (examples: common cold, RSV)	Bacterial infections (examples: strep throat, ear infection, pneumonia)
Fever	Usually present & high (102-104°F; lasting 3-4 days)	Uncommon in persons over 3 years of age	Common
Chills	Common	Uncommon	Common
Headache	Very common	Uncommon	Common with sinus infections and meningitis
Aches and pains, muscle aches, chest discomfort	Very common; often severe	Slight to moderate	Common
Fatigue and weakness	Moderate-severe; can last up to 14-21 days	Mild	Common
Extreme exhaustion	Very common in early illness	Rare	Sometimes
Stuffy or runny nose	Common	Very common	Common; especially with sinus infection
Sneezing	Sometimes	Common	Common
Sore throat	Common	Common	Common; primary symptom with strep throat infections
Nausea, vomiting or diarrhea	Up to 25% of children with flu may have these symptoms, but will ALWAYS have respiratory symptoms	Rare	Rare
Cough	Character	Non-productive ("dry") cough	Hacking cough, often productive and responds to cough medicines
	Severity	Moderate	Mild to moderate
	Length	Typically 3-7 days; sometimes up to 14 days	Varies
Contagious period*	1 day before symptom onset and 3-5 days after; up to 7 days in children. <i>Children with flu should remain home while symptoms are present.</i>	Varies; typically one day before symptoms up to 5 days after <i>Children and adolescents should remain home when he/she does not feel well.</i>	Some infections may resolve without antibiotic treatment. The decision to treat bacterial infections with antibiotics should be made by a health care provider. <i>Children and adolescents should remain home as directed by a health care provider.</i>
Incubation period*	4-7 days	12 hours to 5 days; usually 48 hours	1-3 days
Treatment	Prescription flu medication is effective in reducing the severity, contagiousness and duration of illness if taken within 48 hours after symptoms appear.	Over-the-counter cough/cold medication for the most bothersome symptoms. Antibiotics are not effective in treating viral infections.	Health care providers can help determine the most appropriate way to treat the illness.

* The period during which someone can easily spread his/her illness to another person

♦ Length of time before getting sick after being exposed to an ill person

Child Care Provider's Guide to Respiratory Illness

Respiratory infections cause sickness in the lungs. Most respiratory illnesses cause a cough; some also cause symptoms of illness in the throat, nose and ears. Respiratory illness is more common in the fall and winter months.

You can take several steps to reduce the spread of respiratory illness in your child care location:

- **Stay home when sick.** Any staff or child with a respiratory illness that spreads easily should not attend child care.
- **Wash hands often.** Wash hands frequently using soap and warm water for 15-20 seconds (about the time it takes to sing the ABC's). Dry hands with paper towels or automatic hand dryers, if possible. If cloth towels are used, replace them with clean towels several times a day. Each child should have his or her own cloth towel. Young children should be instructed and assisted to ensure proper hand washing. Bathrooms should be checked regularly to ensure that soap and towels are available.
- **Wash after wiping noses.** Proper hand washing is particularly important after wiping your own or someone else's nose, or after contact with drool, saliva or nose drainage.
- **Cover coughs and sneezes.** Make sure tissues are available in the child care business and transport vehicles for runny noses and sneezing. Staff and children should cover their mouths with their upper arm or a tissue when coughing, and use tissues when sneezing or blowing their noses. Tissues should be thrown away immediately, and hands should be washed.
- **Keep your business open, if possible.** Closing a child care business during an outbreak is usually not recommended. If a center closes, parents are likely to take sick and well children to other centers, spreading the illness.
- **Avoid close contact.** Children and staff should avoid sharing saliva by not sharing glasses, forks, spoons, toothbrushes, and toys.
- **Clean frequently and correctly.** Clean commonly used surfaces such as door handles, handrails, eating surfaces, and toys. To clean, use a bleach solution (mix ¼ cup of bleach with 1 gallon of water OR 1 tablespoon of bleach with 1 quart of water).

Take immediate action if a child in your care has difficulty breathing or is breathing hard and fast. Children ill with influenza or some respiratory infections may develop serious complications in their lungs, which can result in difficult breathing that needs to be assessed by a health care provider.

Additional tips:

- **Encourage influenza vaccination every year.** Kids are at highest risk for respiratory illness between the ages of 6 months and 3 years. Therefore, children within this age range are strongly encouraged to get influenza vaccine.
- **Encourage vaccinations for pneumonia and meningitis.** There is a vaccine that helps prevent pneumonia and meningitis infections.
- **Avoid giving aspirin to children.** Never give children or adolescents who are sick with influenza or have a fever aspirin or other medications containing salicylates that are part of some medications used for nausea, vomiting and diarrhea.

For more information on influenza, visit our website: www.idph.state.ia.us/adper/flu.asp

