

Common Cold

Sneezing, sore throat, a stuffy nose, coughing—everyone knows the symptoms of the common cold. It is probably the most common illness. In the course of a year, people in the United States suffer 1 billion colds.

You can get a cold by touching your eyes or nose after you touch surfaces with cold germs on them. You can also inhale the germs. Symptoms usually begin 2 or 3 days after infection and last 2 to 14 days. Washing your hands and staying away from people with colds will help you avoid colds.

There is no cure for the common cold. For relief, try:

- Getting plenty of rest
- Drinking fluids
- Gargling with warm salt water
- Using cough drops or throat sprays - but not cough medicine for children under four
- Taking over-the-counter pain or cold medicines—but not aspirin for children

Flu (also called: grippe and influenza)

Flu is a respiratory infection caused by a number of viruses. The viruses pass through the air and enter your body through your nose or mouth. Between 5% and 20% of people in the U.S. get the flu each year. The flu can be serious or even deadly for elderly people, newborn babies and people with certain chronic illnesses.

Symptoms of the flu come on suddenly and are worse than those of the common cold. They may include:

- Body or muscle aches
- Chills
- Cough
- Fever
- Headache
- Sore throat

Is it a cold or the flu? Colds rarely cause a fever or headaches. Flu almost never causes an upset stomach. And "stomach flu" isn't really flu at all, but gastroenteritis.

The main way to keep from getting the flu is to get a yearly flu vaccine. If you get the flu, your health care provider may prescribe medicine to help your body fight the infection and lessen symptoms.

—National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases