

Rapid Reference: Flu versus Cold versus Allergies

Symptom		Influenza ("Flu")	Cold (Viral URI)	Seasonal Allergies
Fever		Usually present & high (102-104°F or 39-40°C): typically lasts 3-4 days	Uncommon	Uncommon If present, typically low-grade
Headache		Very common	Uncommon	Common with Sinusitis
Aches and pains, muscle aches, chest discomfort		Common Often severe	Slight to Moderate	Slight to mild
Fatigue and weakness		Moderate - severe; can last up to 14-21 days	Mild	Slight to mild
Extreme exhaustion		Very common early in illness	Extremely Rare	Rare
Stuffy or runny nose		Sometimes	Common	Common
Sneezing		Sometimes	Common	Common
Sore Throat		Sometimes	Common	Sometimes with Post Nasal Drip
Cough	Character	Non-productive ("dry") cough is typical; nocturnal cough rare	Hacking cough, often productive; nocturnal cough rare; usually responds to cough medications	Variable character; throat clearing in morning
	Severity	Moderate	Mild to Moderate	Usually mild, if present
	Duration	Typically 3-7 days; occasionally to 14 days	Typically 3-7 days	Seasonal
	Paroxysms	Uncommon	Rare	Uncommon
Onset of symptoms		Rapid onset within 3-6 hours	Develops over a few days	Can have a rapid onset
Infectious Period		1-2 days before symptom onset to 5-10 days after	Variable: typically 4-7 days after symptom onset; can be longer	Not infectious
Chest discomfort		Often severe with the flu	Mild to moderate with a cold	Can be a symptom of asthma