

INFLUENZA VS COMMON COLD



Influenza and the common cold may have similar symptoms although the common cold symptoms are typically milder than those seen in influenza. The World Health Organization estimates that millions of people contract influenza, and 290,000 to 650,000 people die of flu-related causes every year worldwide. Individuals most at risk of dying from influenza-related causes include very young or old individuals or those who have a compromised immune system. The common cold, on the other hand, is contracted by billions of people worldwide with significantly less mortality.

Influenza

Caused by:

- Influenza A, B, C, D
- Only Influenza A and B are responsible for epidemics. Influenza A is the only influenza virus responsible for global influenza pandemics.

Risk factors:

- Anyone! Particularly during the “flu season”

Symptoms of influenza:

- Fever
- Aching muscles
- Chills
- Sweats
- Headache
- Dry cough
- Shortness of breath
- Tiredness
- Weakness
- Sore throat
- Nasal congestion

Influenza prevention includes getting the seasonal flu vaccine.



Common Cold

Caused by:

- Rhinoviruses (most common)
- Parainfluenza viruses
- Coronaviruses (not to be confused with SARS-CoV-2/COVID-19)

Risk factors:

- Age: Infants, young children, and elderly are more likely to “catch a cold.”
- Weakened immune system
- Smoking or vaping
- Exposure to large crowds like schools, airplanes

Symptoms of common cold:

- Coughing
- Sneezing
- Runny nose
- Sore throat
- Sinus pressure
- Lack of appetite
- Headache (rare)

There is no vaccine for the common cold. Standard general prevention methods may reduce the risk.



CLINICAL TIP:

Influenza symptoms are more severe and occur more abruptly compared to the common cold. Laboratory testing by nasal swabs can confirm influenza infection and type. Anti-viral medication may be prescribed to shorten the duration of illness but must be started early in the course of disease.

CLINICAL TIP:

There are no laboratory tests available to diagnose a common cold. Treatment is directed to specific symptoms (fever, nasal discharge, sore throat, cough). There are no specific antiviral medications and antibiotics are to be avoided unless there is confirmation of a secondary bacterial infection.

General Prevention of Viral Illnesses:

- Wash your hands for at least 20 seconds with soap and water.
- Cover your cough, sneeze into a tissue.
- Clean/disinfect high-touch surfaces like bathroom countertops, doorknobs, light switches, electronics, children’s toys.
- Avoid sick contacts when appropriate.

NOTES

