

OKLAHOMA CITY UNIVERSITY STUDENT HEALTH & DISABILITY SERVICES

Corner of Kentucky & J.R. Homsey
2501 N. Blackwelder Ave.
Oklahoma City, OK 73106
Phone: 405-208-5090
Fax: 405-208-6016
Confidential E-mail: studenthealth@okcu.edu
Website: www.okcu.edu/students/shds

Cold or Flu?

The common cold and flu (influenza) have similar symptoms. Both illnesses attack the upper respiratory system (nose, throat, bronchial tubes, lungs), but mistaking one for the other can lead to serious health complications. It is important to know the difference between the two so that proper medical care can be sought when necessary.

What is the Difference Between a Cold and the Flu?

Cold:

- Sneezing
- Runny Nose
- Coughing
- Sore Throat
- Head and Body Aches
- Congestion of ears, nose, and head
- Mild fatigue
- Low fever—less than 101° F

Flu:

- Rapid onset of symptoms
- Severe body aches and/or headache
- Dry cough
- Extreme fatigue and weakness
- Chills and sweats
- Nasal congestion
- Loss of appetite
- High fever—greater than 101° F

Although conditions such as diarrhea, nausea, and vomiting can sometimes be related to the flu, particularly in children, the flu does not typically have an effect on the stomach or intestines.

What Causes a Cold or the Flu?

Both illnesses are caused by viruses that spread via airborne droplets (e.g., sneezing, coughing) and by direct (hand-to-hand) or indirect (using shared objects such as a telephone, drinking cups, etc.) contact with an infected individual.

Although over 200 different cold viruses are known to exist, the rhinovirus is the most common cause of a cold. It is estimated that the average person experiences 2-4 colds per year. The flu is caused by types of viruses called influenza A, B, and C. An annual flu shot is the first defense in reducing one's risk for catching the flu.

What is the Recommended Treatment?

The cold and flu are caused by viruses; therefore antibiotics are usually not prescribed. However, if a secondary bacterial infection occurs, such as pneumonia, an antibiotic may be used. Although viruses need to run their course, some general treatment measures that can help alleviate symptoms and discomfort include:

- Getting plenty of rest
- Drinking plenty of fluids
- Sucking on ice or throat lozenges
- Gargling with warm salt water several times a day (mix 1/2 tsp of salt in an 8 oz glass of warm water)
- Using a humidifier
- Stopping smoking and alcohol use
- Taking over-the-counter medicines to relieve pain or to treat other symptoms (Acetaminophen or Tylenol, Ibuprofen or Advil or Motrin, Decongestant or Sudafed, cough medicine or Robitussin)
- Antiviral medications may be prescribed to treat the flu (must be taken within 48 hours of the onset of symptoms)
- Get a thermometer and learn to use it

How can the Spread of Cold and Flu be Prevented?

Although it may not always be possible to avoid getting the cold or flu, simple tips that can help decrease one's risk include:

- Practicing good hygiene (wash hands frequently)

- Eating a healthy diet
- Exercising regularly
- Getting enough sleep
- Frequently disinfecting kitchen and bathroom counter tops-use 10% bleach solution or anti-bacterial cleaner/wipes
- Not sharing cups, plates, utensils, etc. with an infected person
- Avoiding close, prolonged contact with an infected person
- Avoiding touching the face, eyes, nose, and mouth until hands are washed
- Getting an annual flu shot

Other tips to help protect others:

- Always sneeze and cough into tissues or your shirt sleeve
- Frequently disinfect the telephone and all shared objects
- Stay home when sick

When Should Medical Treatment be Sought?

If flu symptoms are present medical advice and/or treatment should be sought immediately. In addition, a healthcare provider should be seen immediately if any of the following symptoms are experienced:

- Fever of 103° F or above
- Fever that lasts longer than 72 hours
- Difficulty breathing through mouth
- Severe sore throat
- Cough that produces green or yellow mucus
- Abdominal pain and/or vomiting
- Children, adults over the age of 50, and individuals with a compromised immune system have a greater risk for developing complications such as an ear infection, sinusitis, strep throat, bronchitis, and pneumonia. Prompt medical treatment is advised as these conditions can become fatal.

Get an Annual Flu Shot!

CDC recommends Annual Flu Shots for the following people:

People age 50 and older

People who have long-term health problems such as heart or lung disease, asthma, kidney disease, and diabetes.

People with weakened immune systems due to HIV/AIDS, long-term steroid treatment, and cancer treatment

People 6 months to 18 years of age on long term aspirin treatment

Pregnant women who will be past the third month of pregnancy during the flu season

Physicians, nurses, family members, or anyone else coming in close contact with people at risk for serious influenza
Healthy children 6-23 months of age
People who provide essential community services
People who travel
College students living in dormitories

**Flu Shots will be available through the Student Health Clinic.
Check your OCU Email for more details on dates and times!**