

Flu Versus COVID-19



Flu and COVID-19 are both contagious respiratory illnesses, but they are caused by different viruses. While they share many characteristics, there are key differences between the two.

	Similarities	Differences
Common symptoms	Fever, chills, cough, shortness of breath, sore throat, headache and a runny or stuffy nose.	COVID-19 may include a loss of taste or smell.
Symptom onset after exposure and infection	1-4 days from infection to experiencing symptoms.	COVID-19 can take longer to develop, anywhere from 2-14 days.
Contagious spread	At least 1 day before symptoms show.	COVID-19: people may be contagious longer and may have no symptoms.
How it spreads	Mainly spread person-to-person through droplets when people with the illness talk, sneeze or cough.	COVID-19: more contagious among certain populations and age groups, having been observed to have more “superspreading” events than flu viruses.
High-risk populations	Older adults, people with underlying medical conditions, pregnant women. Serious outcomes are rare in healthy school-age children for both diseases.	COVID-19: can rarely be followed 3-4 weeks later by a serious complication known as Multisymptom Inflammatory Syndrome in Children (MIS-C), whereas as children with flu are typically more ill with the initial illness than they are with COVID-19.
Complications	Pneumonia, respiratory failure, fluid in lungs, sepsis, worsening of chronic medical condition, multiple-organ failure, inflammation of the heart, brain or muscle tissue.	COVID-19: blood clots in the veins and arteries of the lungs, heart, legs or brain. Multisymptom Inflammatory Syndrome in Children (MIS-C).
Treatments	People at high risk of complications should seek medical care.	Flu: antiviral drugs are available by prescription. COVID-19: no drugs are approved yet.
Vaccine	No similarities.	Flu: multiple flu vaccines are available. COVID-19: no vaccine has been developed yet.