

Is it a Cold, the Flu, or Pertussis?

Cold and Flu Season will be fast approaching. Ellen Bartlett, RN, CIC, Infection Preventionist of Houlton Regional Hospital, provides the following guidelines for families. This page can be cut out and attached to your refrigerator to use as a reference to describe symptoms to your Provider in the event of a household illness.

The Myth of the "Stomach Flu" – The "Stomach Flu", often called the "flu", may often be used to describe illnesses with nausea, vomiting, and diarrhea. These symptoms can be caused by many different germs. True "flu" really means influenza. While you can have vomiting and diarrhea and feel sick to your stomach with the flu, especially in children, these are rarely the main symptoms of real "flu" or influenza. The flu is a respiratory illness and not a stomach or intestinal disease.

Is it a Cold, Flu, or Pertussis? These respiratory illnesses below are highly contagious and, in the early stages, might seem alike. Clean hands often and always remember to cough and sneeze into your elbow or a tissue to help prevent the spread! Ask your doctor if you are up to date on your Pertussis vaccine and remember to get a Flu shot every year.

Symptoms		Cold	Flu (Influenza)	Pertussis
Fever		Uncommon	Usually 102° F but can go as high as 104° and usually lasts 3-4 days	Uncommon, but if present usually low grade
Headache		Uncommon	Very common	Uncommon
Muscle Aches		Mild	Common and often severe	Uncommon
Tiredness & Weakness		Mild	Moderate to severe and can last 14-21 days	Mild to moderate
Extreme Exhaustion		Rare	Common and can be severe	Uncommon
Runny Nose, Nasal Congestion		Very common	Sometimes	Common, early symptom.
Sneezing		Common	Sometimes	Common, early symptom
Sore Throat		Common	Sometimes	Uncommon
C O U G H	Type of Cough	Hacking cough, raises phlegm, cough medicine may help	Dry cough	Character of cough varies, night coughing common, cough medicine usually not effective
	Severity of Cough	Mild to moderate	Moderate	Early cough may be mild in both children & adults.
	Coughing spasm (fits)	Rare	Uncommon	In infants and young children coughing usually progresses to the violent, paroxysmal cough, or <i>whoop</i> . Vomiting may occur with severe coughing
	Length of cough	3 – 7 days	3 – 7 days, can last up to 2 weeks	Almost always > 1 week, usually 2- 6 weeks but can persist longer
Infectious Period (The time someone with illness can spread germs to others)		Varies, typically 4-7 days after symptoms start	1 day before the onset of symptoms and 3-7 days after	From start of catarrhal phase (early symptoms) until 21 days after cough onset or after 5 days of antibiotic treatment

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Incubation Period (The time between exposure and when you get symptoms)	1- 5 days	1- 4 days	6 - 20 days
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