

# Cold, Flu or COVID-19?



The cold, flu and COVID-19 are all contagious respiratory illnesses, but they are caused by different viruses. While they share many characteristics, knowing the differences can help keep kids healthy and slow the spread.

	Common Cold	Flu (Influenza)	COVID-19
Common symptoms	Colds are often mild and typically include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sore throat</li> <li>• Runny or stuffy nose</li> <li>• Sneezing</li> <li>• Cough</li> <li>• Sometimes low fever</li> <li>• Normal energy levels</li> </ul>	Flu symptoms may feel worse, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• High fever and chills</li> <li>• Headache</li> <li>• Body aches</li> <li>• Sore throat</li> <li>• Runny or stuffy nose</li> <li>• Cough</li> <li>• Fatigue</li> <li>• Vomiting or diarrhea</li> </ul>	Symptoms may be mild like the common cold or severe like the flu. One unique symptom of COVID-19 is the loss of taste or smell.
Symptom onset after exposure	1 - 3 days	1 - 4 days	2 - 14 days  COVID-19 can take longer to develop and seems to spread more easily than flu, even if no symptoms are present.
Duration of Symptoms	3 - 14 days	10 - 14 days	10 - 14 days
Diagnosis	There is no test to diagnose the common cold.	Testing is available. Ask a provider if testing is needed.	Testing is available. A swab (viral) test is used to determine a current infection. Check local health department websites for testing locations and options.
Treatment	No specific treatment other than getting lots of rest and drinking plenty of fluids. Ask a provider if over-the-counter cold remedies are right for your child.	Antiviral medicines are available by prescription to ease symptoms and shorten the illness.	Only one antiviral drug is FDA-approved to treat COVID-19 in kids aged 12 and older.
Complications	Bronchitis, strep throat, sinus or ear infections, or asthma attack.	Pneumonia, respiratory failure, sepsis, worsening of chronic medical conditions, inflammation of the heart, brain or muscle tissue.	Same complications as the flu, in addition to risk of blood clots in the lungs, heart, legs and brain, or MIS-C (multisystem inflammatory syndrome in children).
Vaccine Availability	None. Since COVID-19 can present as a cold, children with mild cold symptoms should consider COVID-19 testing if there is a risk of exposing others.	Yes. Everyone 6 months of age and older (with rare exceptions) should get a flu vaccine each year.	Yes. COVID-19 vaccines are available to kids aged 5 and older. For more information and resources on COVID-19, visit <a href="https://akronchildrens.org/coronavirus">akronchildrens.org/coronavirus</a> .