

Do You HAVE THE FLU?

Lately all the talk of H1N1 flu (formerly known as swine flu) may have you wondering what symptoms to look for when you're sick. Is it H1N1 flu, seasonal flu, or could it just be the common cold? All three are upper respiratory infections caused by viruses, so many of the symptoms appear to be similar. So let's say your symptoms include chest congestion, a sore throat and a feeling of tiredness....is this just the common cold? The answer is, maybe. While each of those are symptoms of a cold, if they are accompanied by extreme weakness, muscle and joint aches and a high fever, then you also have telltale symptoms of the flu. The difficulty is self-diagnosing just what kind of flu you're dealing with; only lab tests can determine just what type of flu you may have.

Generally, flu symptoms come on more quickly and are much more severe than cold symptoms. Below is a chart that can help you determine if you have a cold or the flu:

Symptoms	Cold	Seasonal Influenza (flu)
Fever	Rare	Usual; high (100°F to 102°F; occasionally higher, especially in young children); lasts 3 to 4 days
Headache	Rare	Common
General Aches, Pains	Slight	Usual; often severe
Fatigue, Weakness	Sometimes	Usual; can last up to 2 to 3 weeks
Extreme Exhaustion	Never	Usual; at the beginning of the illness
Stuffy Nose	Common	Sometimes
Sneezing	Usual	Sometimes
Sore Throat	Common	Sometimes
Chest Discomfort, Cough	Mild to moderate; hacking cough	Common; can become severe

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So far, the symptoms of H1N1 flu have been very similar to seasonal flu: fever, cough, sore throat, body aches, headache, chills and fatigue. According to the CDC, some people have reported diarrhea and vomiting associated with H1N1. While this is not common in adults with seasonal flu, these symptoms are often found in children with seasonal flu. If you think you have the flu it's important to seek medical care quickly. The flu can cause serious complications for some people such as bacterial pneumonia, or it can worsen chronic medical conditions like asthma or diabetes. Complications are more likely in the elderly, those with chronic conditions, young children, and pregnant women.

Centra Care has a quick influenza test which can tell within minutes if you've got the influenza. The earlier you are diagnosed can make a difference in how long the flu lasts or how severe it may become. Newer prescription medications (like Tamiflu) are very effective, and all Centra Care locations carry this - - BUT you need to start the medication within 48 hours of symptom onset or they won't work - so don't wait too long before being seen for Flu symptoms.