



Collingwood General & Marine Hospital
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How to tell if I have the flu?

Compare Symptoms

During the fall and winter months colds and the flu (influenza) – both seasonal and pandemic H1N1 flu, can affect many people. Colds are not as severe as the flu. Complications from the flu can be life threatening for children and young people, pregnant women, the elderly and people of all ages with certain chronic illnesses (e.g. diabetes).

So how do you know if you have a cold or the flu? Check the chart below for some of the major differences between the two illnesses:

Influenza, a cold, and stomach upset are different illnesses

The chart below shows the differences between influenza, a cold and a stomach upset. It also notes the differences of pandemic H1N1 influenza.

| Description / Symptoms | Respiratory Infection | | Gastrointestinal Infection |
|--------------------------------|---|--------------|---|
| | Influenza | Common Cold | Stomach Upset* |
| Fever | Usually high, beginning suddenly and lasting 3–4 days | Sometimes | Rarely |
| Headache | Usually, can be severe | Rarely | Sometimes |
| Chills, aches, pain | Usually, and often severe | Rarely | Common |
| Loss of appetite | Sometimes. Pandemic H1N1 influenza symptoms may also include nausea, vomiting and diarrhea. | Sometimes | Frequently – usually nausea, vomiting and diarrhea occur as well. |
| Cough | Usually | Sometimes | Rarely |
| Sore throat | Sometimes | Sometimes | Rarely |
| Sniffles or sneezes | Sometimes | Usually | Rarely |
| Extreme tiredness | Usually – tiredness may last 2–3 weeks or more. | Rarely | Sometimes |
| Involves whole body | Usually | Never | Stomach and bowel only. |
| Symptoms appear quickly | Yes | More gradual | Yes |



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| Possible Complications (Health problems) | Pneumonia, kidney failure, swelling of the brain and death. | Not usually and often not severe. Sinus infection or ear infection. | More common and can be severe. Dehydration (losing more fluid than you take in). |
| Vaccine | Yearly vaccine provides protection against two influenza A strains and one influenza B strain. These vaccines are usually available late fall. (Vaccine for pandemic H1N1 influenza is not yet available.) | No vaccine available. | No vaccine available. |

Remember, Stomach “Flu” is not really the flu. It is really called Gastroenteritis (“Gastro” or stomach bug) and here are the differences between a cold, types of flu and “Gastro”:

- Gastroenteritis symptoms include stomach cramps, vomiting and diarrhea. H1N1 flu rarely produces vomiting and diarrhea as symptoms.
- Gastroenteritis usually lasts 24 – 72 hours whereas flu usually lasts about a week.
- Yearly flu vaccine (and the H1N1 vaccine, when it is ready late 2009) doesn’t provide protection from Gastroenteritis because this illness is not actually caused by an influenza virus.

What can you do to avoid catching the flu (both seasonal and H1N1)?

Wash your hands with soap and water

Cover up when you cough or sneeze

Clean and disinfect shared surfaces

Stay at home if you are sick

Get your annual flu shot