



COVID-19 RESPONSE

WINTER IS COMING: PREPARING FOR FLU SEASON DURING COVID-19

Learn about the difference between colds, flu and COVID-19.

Fall is here, with winter not far behind. That means colder weather, sweaters, hot chocolate and, unfortunately, that time of year known as “sick season” – a time where there are greater incidences of allergies, colds and the flu. In previous years, this time of year may have seemed more a nuisance since no one has time, nor likes to be sick. However, this sick season will be further complicated by the COVID-19 pandemic. With the multitude of information available, it may be hard to understand what you need to do to prepare for the upcoming sick season.

How do you tell the difference between the flu and COVID-19? In short, it is difficult to tell the difference between the two without a diagnostic test. Both the flu and COVID-19 are respiratory illnesses with similar symptoms. These can range from fever, cough, shortness of breath or sore throat to runny nose, fatigue or vomiting and diarrhea. It is important to note that symptoms will vary from person to person.

What should you do if you are feeling sick? Whether or not you think you have the flu or COVID-19, it is important to follow the steps outlined below:

1. **Call your doctor** – If you have any symptoms, call your doctor. It is important to call the doctor BEFORE going to their office. They will provide some recommendations. There is a chance they may recommend you be tested for the flu and COVID-19.
2. **Be sure to quarantine** – Flu and COVID-19 are spread through infected droplets and particles in the air. If you feel ill, make sure to isolate yourself to slow the spread to other individuals. It can take several days until test results are received, so it is important to self-isolate until you have a diagnosis. The Centers for Disease Control

and Prevention recommends isolating until you have met the following: 10 days since your symptoms first appeared; 24 hours with no fever without the use of fever-reducing medications; and other symptoms of COVID-19 are improving.

WHAT CAN YOU DO TO PREPARE?

1. **Get a flu shot** – It is possible to have COVID-19 and the flu at the same time. A flu shot can help reduce your risk of contracting the flu. Each year’s vaccine contains three to four inactive influenza strains. These help spur your body to create antibodies that can help fight off a real virus. Experts recommend getting a flu shot in September or October – though it is never too late to get a flu shot.
2. **Care for yourself** – Make sure to get proper nutrition, plenty of rest, regular exercise and manage stress. All of these steps can help improve immune health to help

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fight off any virus. Stress has repeatedly been shown to suppress the immune system. If you are struggling with managing stress, consider taking up some kind of activity like yoga, tai chi or meditation.

3. **Nip seasonal allergy symptoms in the bud** – Vaccines can help some respiratory infections, but they do not prevent airborne allergens like ragweed or pollen from triggering allergy symptoms (ex. runny nose, sneezing). If you struggle with these symptoms, start your usual medicines before symptoms show up or at the first sign to prevent or stop the inflammation before the symptoms escalate.
4. **Check your temperature** – Fever is a key symptom that helps clinicians make diagnoses and decide the level of care needed. A true fever is defined as a temperature at or above 100.4 F or 38 C. If you have a slight fever, your physician may tell you to rest, drink plenty of fluids and “watch and wait” to see how the symptoms develop. Remember that COVID-19, colds and flu are all caused by viruses, so antibiotics will not treat them.
5. **Familiarize yourself with any online tools** – Many medical offices are now offering telehealth appointments, even for routine care. These services can help avoid exposing yourself or others to illness. Also, the CDC has created a coronavirus self-checker to help you make decisions on when to seek testing and medical care. Follow the link for the self-checker: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/symptoms-testing/coronavirus-self-checker.html>
6. **Continue following coronavirus precautions** – During this season, it is more important than ever to wash your hands frequently, clean and sanitize high traffic areas, wear a mask and maintain physical distance (at least 6 feet) from others.

It is important to follow these guidelines and recommendations even if you have been previously diagnosed with COVID-19. The data is unclear whether or not you can contract COVID-19 again or carry it to others. Following social distance and coronavirus precautions can help protect you, your family and your community.

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