

Managing COVID 19, Cold and Flu Symptoms

Brown Health Services Patient Education Series

What is COVID 19?

COVID is a disease caused by a virus called SARS-CoV-2. Most people with COVID have mild [symptoms](#), but some people can become severely ill. Although most people with COVID get better within weeks of illness, some people experience post-COVID conditions. Post-COVID conditions are a wide range of new, returning, or ongoing health problems people can experience more than four weeks after first being infected with the virus that causes COVID. Older people and those who have [certain underlying medical conditions](#) are more likely to get severely ill from COVID. [Vaccines](#) against COVID are safe and effective.

What is a common cold?

The common cold is an inflammation of the upper respiratory tract caused by many different rhinoviruses. Colds typically last 3-7 days but it is not uncommon for some symptoms to persist up to 2-3 weeks.

What is Influenza (the Flu)?

Influenza (flu) is a contagious respiratory illness caused by influenza viruses that infect the nose, throat, and lungs. Some people, such as older people, young children, and people with [certain health conditions](#), are at higher risk of serious flu complications. There are two main types of influenza (flu) viruses: Types A and B.

What are symptoms?

COVID	Common Cold	Flu
<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Fever* or feeling feverish/chills● Cough● Shortness of breath or difficulty breathing● Fatigue● Muscle or body aches● Headache● New loss of taste or smell● Sore throat● Congestion or runny nose● Nausea or vomiting● Diarrhea	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Runny or stuffy nose● Sore or scratchy throat (often occurs early on, then fades)● Hoarseness/headaches and muscle aches● Blocked/popping feeling in ears● Cough (often occurs 4-5 days into cold)● Postnasal drip	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Fever* or feeling feverish/chills● Cough● Sore throat● Runny or stuffy nose● Muscle or body aches● Headaches● Fatigue (tiredness)● Nausea or vomiting● Diarrhea

What is the treatment?

COVID	Common Cold	Flu
<p>Symptom management as below.</p> <p>Treatment options for people at high risk for severe disease progression if recommended by a medical provider can be found here.</p>	<p>Symptom management as below.</p>	<p>Symptom management as below.</p> <p>Antiviral medication such as oseltamivir (Tamiflu)- if recommended by a medical provider</p>

Antibiotics, which are only effective against bacteria, are not necessary or curative for cold, COVID or flu viruses. In fact, overuse of antibiotics for colds can lead to bacteria developing resistance to antibiotics. Most treatments for viral syndromes are for symptom relief, but cannot shorten or cure the virus. The symptoms of viruses are self-limited - they will go away over time, even with no treatment.

- Fluids – keep well hydrated, a minimum of 8 glasses of water daily is reasonable.
- Rest – try to get at least 8 hours of sleep daily – “baby yourself” with extra rest if possible.
- Stop smoking – smokers catch more colds, recover from them more slowly, and are more prone to complications.
- Lozenges/cough drops/sore throat sprays – there are many brands, some with “pain numbing” features, but even hard candy can provide some coating, soothing action.
- Humidifying the air – steam in the form of hot showers, a wet towel hung in the room, a pan of water on the radiator, or best yet, a vaporizer/ humidifier in your room can help congestion symptoms.

For nasal/sinus congestion and post nasal drip

- Daytime: try pseudoephedrine (eg, Sudogest/ Sudafed) following package directions. This decongestant pill is the most effective oral decongestant, but it must be requested at stores as it is kept “behind the counter” rather than out on the shelf. Don’t take it near bedtime as some people are kept awake by it.
- At bedtime: try decongestant/antihistamine combination (eg, Aprodine/Actifed per directions), which is less likely to interfere with sleep. This is also kept “behind the counter”. Antihistamine products used alone for cold symptoms are less helpful for most people because of drying or sedating side effects.
- Day or night: decongestant nasal sprays (eg, Afrin or generic equivalent, per package directions) can also be very effective for nasal and sinus congestion, but only for 3 days; after that some rebound congestion can occur.
- Saline irrigation: try a Neti Pot or other sinus irrigation system (eg, McNeil Sinus Rinse) per product instructions, to clear your sinuses and posterior throat of mucus, by rinsing them out with saline solution. Especially for individuals prone to developing sinus infections after a cold, this may be a very helpful technique.

For fever, body aches, headache, sore throat

Acetaminophen (Tylenol) regular strength 325 mg tabs – 2 tabs every 4-6 hours as needed. (Do not take more than 3250 mg of regular strength daily.) may take with or without food

OR

Acetaminophen (Tylenol) extra strength 500 mg tabs 2 tabs every 6-8 hours as needed. (Do not take more than 3000 mg extra strength daily.) may take with or without food

OR

Ibuprofen (Advil, Motrin, Nuprin eg) over the counter strength – 200 mg tabs – 2 tabs every 4 hours as needed with food, or 3 tabs every 6-8 hours must take with food

OR as directed by your provider.

(Do not take more than 2400 mg ibuprofen daily.)

Some over-the-counter cold products contain acetaminophen or ibuprofen in combination with other products, so be careful to read labels to avoid excessive doses. Similarly, read labels to make sure you know whether you are taking regular or extra strength acetaminophen, as this medicine is toxic at excessive doses.

For cough

There is debate among experts about the usefulness of cough suppressants and expectorants for cough that comes along with a cold. Generally, a wet productive cough that produces mucus is good as it clears secretions. If your cough disturbs your sleep, try a hot drink, elevating your head a little on pillows, and humidifying your room.

An OTC cough medicine with dextromethorphan (“DM”) (eg, Robitussin DM or generic equivalent, per package directions) may help some people who have bothersome dry, spasmodic cough.

Guaifenesin (eg, Mucinex, per package directions), an expectorant, is available either by itself or as a common ingredient in cough/cold OTC remedies; some people find this product helps to thin and mobilize mucus.

See your provider if your cough is worsening, keeps you up without relief, or is associated with wheezing or shortness of breath. Other prescription medicines may be indicated.

Other

Zinc lozenges, Vitamin C, herbal products such as Echinacea are advertised to treat or prevent colds. While none are likely to cause harm, none have been consistently effective in clinical trials.

How do I prevent getting viral illnesses?

- Hand washing with soap and water or alcohol-based hand cleaners
- Wash hands after touching communal surfaces, and before touching your own eyes, nose, mouth.
- Don't share eating and drinking utensils.
- If you have viral symptoms, sneeze or cough into your crooked elbow to contain the spread of viral particles and/or use tissues which should be promptly disposed of, and hands washed.
- Wear a well fitting mask in accordance with local health guidelines.

If you develop any of these signs, seek emergency medical care immediately by contacting DPS at 401-863-4111. Notify dispatch that you are having symptoms and they will send EMS to your location. If urgent but not an emergency, call Health Services at 401-863-3953.

- Neck pain or stiffness
- Severe pain in chest, face, head, ears, throat
- Bluish lips or face
- Severe and constant pain or pressure in the chest
- Extreme difficulty breathing (such as gasping for air or being unable to talk without catching your breath)
- Severe and constant dizziness or lightheadedness
- New serious disorientation (acting confused)
- Unconscious or very difficult to wake up
- Slurred speech or difficulty speaking (new or worsening)
- Seizures
- Signs of low blood pressure (too weak to stand, light headed, feeling cold, pale, clammy skin)
- Wheezing or shortness of breath
- Painful swelling of neck glands
- Exacerbation of asthma symptoms

If you have non-emergency health related questions or concerns please call Health Services at 401-863-3693 to speak with a nurse 24/7.

Academic Concerns:

Sickness Support at Brown:

- On the Student Support Dean website select [Sickness Support](#). The Sickness Support form is a google form students can complete to request a Dean's Note for academic flexibility due to illness.

Or

- On the Brown Health Services home page select [Report Illness to Support Deans](#)

Adapted from information from [The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#) (CDC)