



COVID-19, Seasonal Tips, Flu

The Differences Between COVID-19, Flu, Allergies and Colds

When a sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, or cough appear, you might ask yourself, "Do I have COVID-19, the flu, allergies or a cold?" And since each share some similar symptoms, it's hard to know the difference.

Bayhealth Vice President of Quality and Medical Affairs John Fink, MD, said to know for certain, you need to set up an appointment with your doctor and get tested, either at home, at a testing center, or at your doctor's office.

While you wait for your diagnosis or test results, Dr. Fink said there are a few key differences between coronavirus, seasonal allergies and the flu that you can keep in mind.

- Flu and COVID-19 symptoms can both come on fast. Flu symptoms usually develop within four days of an exposure, while COVID-19 symptoms can develop anywhere from one to 10 days after exposure.
- With seasonal allergies you generally don't have a fever or body aches, but you might feel run down and could have a sore throat. Symptoms are also pretty continuous and don't escalate.
- Allergies don't usually cause troubled or heavy breathing unless you have asthma. So, if you have troubled or heavy breathing, it could be coronavirus or the flu.
- If you have itchy eyes, nose or throat, those symptoms are often associated with allergies.

If you have COVID-19 or flu symptoms, Dr. Fink said it's important to remember to stay home from work or school and to isolate yourself from other family members to help prevent the spread of the virus. "Don't share drinking glasses or utensils with others, practice really good handwashing, and make sure you're disinfecting surfaces. If you must leave the house, be sure to wear a mask. Lastly, don't just walk into your doctor's office. Be sure to call ahead," said Dr. Fink.

Dr. Fink also shared some additional advice for those who have been vaccinated for COVID-19. "While vaccines are extremely effective in preventing hospitalization and death, they do not completely eliminate the chance of getting COVID-19," he said. "People who are vaccinated, especially those who haven't yet had their booster, need to be on the lookout for symptoms and to isolate and get tested if they become ill. Many of these cases will have mild symptoms that are very similar to seasonal colds: nasal congestion, sneezing, and low-grade fevers. During this particular wave, I'd encourage anyone with upper respiratory symptoms to stay home from work or school and to get tested for COVID-19."

Breaking the Chain of Infection

Bayhealth Senior Manager of Infection Control Kelly Gardner, RN, CIC, echoed Dr. Fink's recommendations for helping to prevent the spread of COVID-19 and the flu, while also speaking to the coronavirus variants that have recently surfaced. "No matter what variant is out there, we need to do the same things we've been doing during the COVID-19 pandemic," she said. "It's all about breaking the chain of infection, just like it is for other viruses such as the flu, which also has different strains and can mutate.

Here are some of the steps Gardner said everyone can take to help break the chain of infection.

- Get vaccinated if you haven't already
- Get your booster shot if you're due for one
- Practice good hand hygiene
- Wear face coverings when out in public
- Practice social distancing
- Clean and disinfect high-touch surfaces regularly
- Get tested if you have symptoms
- Don't go to work or school if you're sick

To learn about coronavirus testing or vaccinations, please contact your primary care physician or visit the Delaware Division of Public Health's (DPH) coronavirus resource center at Coronavirus.Delaware.gov. You can also reach DPH by calling 1-866-408-1899 or emailing DPHCall@Delaware.gov. Visit Bayhealth.org/COVID-19 for coronavirus information specific to Bayhealth including visitation policies, testing, FAQs, and more.

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