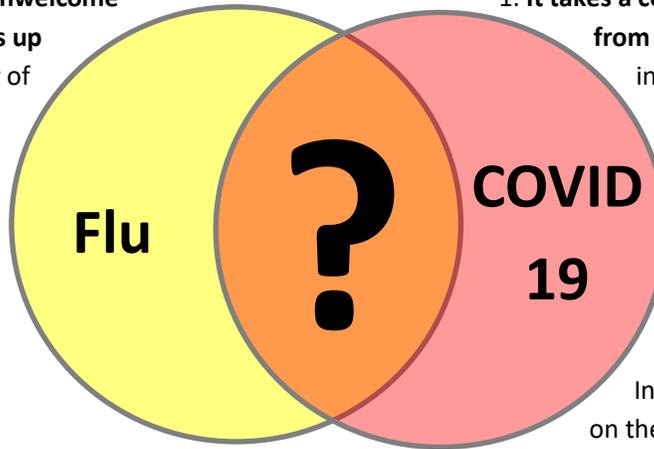


Every year, like clockwork, the unwelcome guest named “Influenza” shows up on our doorstep. While the severity of the flu season varies from year to year, the seriousness of its consequences never changes. From October 1, 2019 — April 4, 2020, the CDC estimates that in the U.S. alone there were 39 - 56 million flu illness, 410 - 740,000 flu hospitalizations, and 24 - 62,000 flu deaths.

This year, there’s an added complication. We’ve already got a visitor named COVID-19 that has long overstayed their welcome. At times COVID is invisible, jumping quickly from host to host but leaving little evidence of its infectious passing. Sometimes it leaves behind small signs: a snuffle, a tickle in the throat. At other times though, COVID-19 signals its arrival by causing a fever, chills, muscle aches, sore throat, cough, and fatigue. Unfortunately, those are also the symptoms of the flu.

Imagine it’s a couple of months in the future and flu season has hit. One day you wake up achy, hot but also chilly, it hurts to swallow, and you’re coughing. Which of the viruses is infecting your body? There’s only one way to know, and that’s to get a COVID-19 test. That seems easy enough, except that... Now you have to get out of bed and drag yourself down to the clinic or hospital. After they collect your sample, you go home and quarantine until the test results come back. In the best-case scenario, you feel better by the time your test results arrive; the results are negative for COVID-19, and you’re quickly back to the business of your life. However, in another scenario, it could take a while to get results, or they could be inconclusive and you have to test again, and wait again, and quarantine again. It could be a while until you can get back to business.

The easiest way to reduce your chances of having this second situation play out (and the easiest way to reduce your chances of catching the flu) is to get a flu shot. However, for a couple of reasons, it is possible to get the shot and still get the flu.



1. It takes a couple of weeks for the protection from the vaccine to “kick in.” If you were infected with the flu just before or just after you got the vaccination, it might not have had time to work. This year the doctors at SMC recommend getting vaccinated in September.

2. The virus is constantly mutating. In this county, we base our flu vaccines on the viruses that are circulating in Australia during their winter and flu season. By the time that the virus has leaped from person to person and made its way from the Southern Hemisphere to the Northern, it’s changed. Sometimes those changes are small, and the vaccine is a good match for the virus. Sometimes those changes are larger, and the vaccine doesn’t fit as well. The good news is that even an imperfect match still protects you from the worst of the symptoms.

Getting the flu shot increases the likelihood that you’ll avoid getting the flu. When more people get vaccinations, fewer people end up with flu/COVID symptoms. This means fewer people will require COVID testing, and, ultimately, fewer people will require medical care. This saves medical resources for the people that need them the most, such as people that are at higher risk from flu complications (children under age 2, people over 65, people that are pregnant, or those that have chronic health conditions such as asthma, diabetes, or cancer).

Not everyone should get the influenza vaccine: babies under 6 months of age and people with severe allergies to any of the ingredients of the vaccine (gelatin, antibiotics...). Some people should check with their doctor before they get the shot (if you’re not feeling well on that day or if you’ve ever had Guillain-Barré Syndrome). *Vaccines are a powerful way for us to protect ourselves from life-threatening illnesses, and by keeping ourselves well, we protect others that are more vulnerable.*

Visit <https://www.cdc.gov/flu/symptoms/flu-vs-covid19.htm> or www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/flu

Allergies, Cold, Flu or COVID-19 Virus?

Here's how to tell the difference between allergy symptoms and the novel 2019 Coronavirus.

Symptoms	ALLERGIES	COLD	INFLUENZA	COVID-19
Symptoms begin	Gradually	Gradually	Abruptly	Within 14 days of exposure
Symptoms last	Allergy season	4 – 10 days	5 – 7 days	Varies by Person
Body aches	–	✓	✓	Sometimes
Chills	–	Less Common	✓	Sometimes
Dry cough	✓	✓	✓	✓
Exposure to germs	–	✓	✓	✓
Fatigue/Weakness	Sometimes	✓	✓	✓
Fever	–	Less Common	✓	✓
Headaches	✓	Less Common	✓	Sometimes
Itchy eyes	✓	–	–	–
Nasal Congestion	✓	✓	✓	Less Common
Nausea/Vomiting/Diarrhea	–	Sometimes	Sometimes	Sometimes
New loss of taste or smell	Sometimes	Sometimes	Sometimes	✓
Repeated shaking with chills	–	Sometimes	Sometimes	Sometimes
Runny nose	✓	✓	✓	Less Common
Sneeze	✓	✓	✓	Sometimes
Sore throat	Sometimes	✓	✓	Sometimes
Shortness of breath	Sometimes	Less Common	✓	✓
Symptoms get worse	–	–	✓	✓

Think You Have COVID-19?

Stay home and away from others • Monitor symptoms • Rest • Cover coughs and sneezes • Wash hands with soap and water often • Treat symptoms

Contact your doctor if you have a fever, cough, difficulty breathing or existing chronic disease.