

# Live Well, Work Well

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## Understanding the Flu Season and COVID-19



This year's influenza (flu) season is expected to be active amid the COVID-19 pandemic. Flu season usually begins in October and peaks between December and February. As we're amid the second flu season during the pandemic, it's even more important for you to take precautions to prevent both the flu and COVID-19 from spreading.

This article features [frequently asked questions](#) (FAQs) prepared by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) about the seasonal flu and COVID-19.

### FAQs

#### **What is the difference between the flu and COVID-19?**

The flu and COVID-19 are both contagious respiratory illnesses, but different viruses cause them. COVID-19 is caused by infection with a coronavirus (called SARS-CoV-2), and seasonal flu is caused by infection with one of many influenza viruses that spread annually.

Because some symptoms of flu and COVID-19 are similar, people may need to be tested to tell what virus is causing their illness. People can be infected with both a flu virus and the virus that causes COVID-19 at the same time. In general, COVID-19 seems to spread more easily than the flu and causes more serious illnesses in some people. Compared with flu infections, people who have COVID-19 can take longer to show symptoms and be contagious for longer. [This FAQ page](#) compares COVID-19 and the flu.

#### **Will there be the flu along with COVID-19 in the fall and winter?**

While it's not possible to say with certainty what will happen in the fall and winter, the CDC believes it's likely that flu viruses and the virus that causes COVID-19 will both be spreading at that time. Relaxed COVID-19 mitigation measures (such as stay-at-home orders or mask mandates) may result in an increase in flu activity during the upcoming 2021–2022 flu season. Common respiratory viruses, such as respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) and human coronaviruses (not SARS-CoV-2), did not spread as much as usual during the 2020–2021 flu season as in past seasons. However, [data](#) showed an increase in these viruses' activity during the summer, outside of their usual seasonal increases.

#### **Can I have the flu and COVID-19 at the same time?**

Yes. It is possible to have the flu and other respiratory illnesses like COVID-19 at the same time. Health experts are still studying how common this is. Some of the [symptoms](#) of flu and COVID-19 are similar, making it hard to tell the difference between them based on symptoms alone. Diagnostic testing can help determine if you are sick with flu or COVID-19.

#### **If I get sick with the flu, am I at a higher risk of contracting COVID-19?**

Because COVID-19 is still a relatively new illness, we have little information about how the flu illness might affect a person's risk of getting COVID-19. We know that people can be infected with flu viruses and the virus that causes COVID-19 simultaneously. Getting a flu vaccine is the best protection against the flu and its potentially serious complications, and getting a COVID-19 vaccine is the best protection against COVID-19.

### **Because symptoms of the flu and COVID-19 are similar, how will I know if I have the flu or COVID-19?**

Your health care provider may order a test to help confirm whether you have the flu or COVID-19, or some other illness.

### **Is there a test that can detect both the flu and COVID-19?**

Yes. Some tests will check for seasonal influenza A and B viruses and SARS-CoV-2, which causes COVID-19. Testing for these viruses simultaneously gives public health officials important information about how the flu and COVID-19 are spreading and what prevention steps people should take.

### **Will a flu vaccine protect me against COVID-19?**

No. Flu vaccines do not protect against COVID-19. Flu vaccination reduces the risk of flu illness, hospitalization and death in addition to other important benefits. Likewise, getting a COVID-19 vaccine is the best protection against COVID-19, but those vaccines do not protect against the flu.

### **Does a flu vaccination increase my risk of getting COVID-19?**

No. There is no evidence that getting a flu vaccination raises your risk of getting sick from COVID-19 or any other coronavirus.

### **I think I may have the flu. Is it safe for me to visit my health care professional when COVID-19 is spreading in my community?**

Health care professionals may have different practices for diagnosing and treating the flu during the COVID-19 pandemic, such as requiring individuals to wear masks in health care settings or offering telemedicine. If you have flu symptoms and are at higher risk of serious flu complications, you should call your health care provider as soon as possible to tell them about your symptoms.

## **Get Vaccinated**

The CDC recommends that anyone over the age of six months get a flu shot every year. You can get a flu vaccine at the same time you get a COVID-19 vaccine, including a COVID-19 booster shot.

By getting vaccinated about both viruses, you can help prevent the spread of COVID-19 and another deadly flu season.

*Source: CDC*

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