

# Is it flu, a cold or Covid?

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As the days get shorter and the weather gets colder, the signs are all there that we're heading into winter, while also facing a spiralling pandemic.

As the numbers of positive cases of Covid-19 continue to rise, we are also facing the resurgence of the normal seasonal respiratory tract viruses, influenza (flu) and coryza (the common cold) which is likely to cause confusion and fears about signs and symptoms.

How, after all, can you be sure that a cold is a cold and not the onset of flu, or even coronavirus?

All three can cause similar symptoms, making a differential diagnosis troublesome, potentially bringing society to a halt if we can't exclude Covid-19 without resorting to testing. As access to testing is becoming more variable in the north-east, this will become more and more important.

Here are some things to consider when you start feeling a bit "under the weather" this winter:

## DID IT COME ON SUDDENLY?

The incubation period for both the flu and common cold are similar with periods of 1-4 days and 1-3 days respectively.

However, the flu tends to have much quicker onset of symptoms with individuals normally going from very mild symptoms to very severe symptoms rapidly.

Covid-19, which has an incubation period of 2-14



SIGNS:  
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days, is more similar in progression to that of the cold, with a gradual onset of symptoms, rather than deteriorating over several days.

However, most people who feel ill with coronavirus will have at least one of the key symptoms:

- a high temperature
- a new, persistent cough
- a loss or change to their sense of smell or taste

## IS YOUR TEMPERATURE RUNNING HIGH?

A high temperature is 37.8C or above. A fever like this can happen when the body is fighting off any infection – not just coronavirus.

Although fever is a key coronavirus symptom, it could be flu or a different infection, but is unlikely to be caused by a cold. The key

difference in Covid-19 is that a raised temperature can be remarkably asymptomatic.

## HOW OFTEN ARE YOU COUGHING?

Although it can be common in all three, there are some clues to look out for when suffering from a cough.

Flu sufferers will usually experience muscle aches, chills, headaches, tiredness, a sore throat and a runny or stuffed nose, alongside a cough.

Coughs as a result of a cold tend to be accompanied by sneezing, a runny nose and sore throat.

A coronavirus cough is often associated with coughing a lot for more than an hour, or three or more coughing fits or "episodes" in a 24-hour period. If you usually have

a cough because of a long-standing medical condition like chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), it may be worse than usual.

## CAN YOU STILL EXPERIENCE SMELL AND TASTE?

Anosmia may be the only symptom people have to indicate they have Covid-19, and some studies have alleged that it may predict less severe conditions, that are less likely to need hospital admission.

The loss of smell that can accompany coronavirus is unique and different from that experienced by someone with a bad cold or flu. When Covid-19 patients have smell loss it tends to be sudden and severe, and has nothing to do with a blocked, stuffy or runny nose.

## AND IF YOU'RE STILL UNSURE?

Protecting yourself and others is still key this winter, whether that's from spreading nasty colds and the flu or the much more serious, coronavirus disease.

In addition to regular and thorough hand washing and wearing face masks when out in public, individuals should also consider the need for the flu vaccine this year. Reasons to get the seasonal vaccine, which is recommended every year, remain valid, and there are now additional reasons due to Covid-19. In addition to helping reduce prevalence of the flu in your community, you also protect others including vulnerable groups from potentially getting the disease.

Although the flu vaccine will not protect you from getting Covid-19, it does leave you protected from influenza, which will in turn, reduce the need for doctors' visits, the risk of developing fever and respiratory symptoms, and the risk of potentially being quarantined.

But in all cases take advice by either calling NHS24 on 111, or if you are offshore immediately isolate in your cabin and call the offshore medic.

■ For anyone interested in finding out more about International SOS' healthcare solutions please contact Claire Westbrook-Keir, International SOS client relationships director at [claire.westbrook@internationalsos.com](mailto:claire.westbrook@internationalsos.com)

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