

# Infection Prevention and You



## Is it allergies or the flu?

Fall is here! Cooler temperatures fill the air. What once were green leaves on the trees are now in different shades of red, orange, and yellow. The change in season also brings illnesses that cause the eyes to water, itch, and become puffy. Soon sniffles, sneezes, and sore throats develop. Are these allergies or is this the flu? Knowing the key differences will help in deciding the best treatment.

### What causes allergies and flu?

Allergies are the body's response to allergens such as dust, pollen, pet dander, cigarette smoke, or food. Allergies are not contagious and are not caused by a virus. The flu is contagious and is caused by a virus.

### What are the symptoms of allergies and flu?

Allergies occur commonly during the spring through the fall seasons. Symptoms last as long as there is an exposure to the allergen. These symptoms include sneezing, sore throat, coughing, runny nose, and congestion. Allergies may cause mucus that is clear and thin. Other symptoms are itchy, watery, and puffy eyes. In some cases, a rash or hives develop. Allergies do not cause a fever.

The flu causes fever with temperatures of 100-102 degrees Fahrenheit. Symptoms of the flu include chills, cough, sore throat, runny and stuffy nose, headaches, severe muscle or body aches and pains, and fatigue. Other symptoms such as vomiting and diarrhea are more common in children. Flu symptoms occur during the flu season, which is from October through May. On average, flu symptoms last 1-4 days.

### What are the treatments for allergies and flu?

To treat allergies, avoid allergens. The doctor may prescribe antihistamines, steroids, or decongestants. To treat the flu, get plenty of rest and stay hydrated by drinking fluids. The doctor may prescribe an antiviral medication.

### What are the ways to prevent allergies and flu?

Allergies can be prevented by avoiding allergens such as dust, pollen, pet dander, cigarette smoke, and food. The most effective way to prevent the flu is to get the flu vaccine every year. A flu vaccine is needed this often because flu viruses are constantly changing. It's not unusual for new flu viruses to appear each year. The flu vaccine is formulated to keep up with the flu viruses as they change. Washing hands often, avoiding close contact with someone who has the flu, and covering the mouth when coughing or sneezing are other ways to prevent the flu.

### Additional Resources

APIC—Why should I get a flu shot? <http://www.apic.org/For-Consumers/Monthly-alerts-for-consumers/Article?id=why-should-i-get-a-flu-shot>

CDC—Keys facts about influenza (flu) <http://www.cdc.gov/flu/keyfacts.htm>

CDC—Flu symptoms and complications <http://www.cdc.gov/flu/about/disease/complications.htm>

AHA—United against the flu <http://www.advancinghealthinamerica.org/flu/>

National Institutes of Health—Cold, flu, or allergy? <https://newsinhealth.nih.gov/issue/oct2014/feature2>

NFID—Influenza <http://www.nfid.org/idinfo/influenza>

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