

Rapid Reference: Flu versus Cold versus Pertussis

Symptom		Influenza (“Flu”)	Cold (Viral URI)	Pertussis
Fever		Usually present & high (102-104°F or 39-40°C); typically lasts 3-4 days	Uncommon	Uncommon If present, typically low-grade
Headache		Very common	Uncommon	Uncommon
Aches and pains, muscle aches, chest discomfort		Common Often severe	Slight to Moderate	Uncommon
Fatigue and weakness		Moderate - severe; can last up to 14-21 days	Mild	Mild to moderate
Extreme exhaustion		Very common early in illness	Extremely Rare	Rare
Stuffy or runny nose		Sometimes	Common	Common, early in the disease
Sneezing		Sometimes	Common	Common, early in the disease
Sore throat		Sometimes	Common	Uncommon
Cough	Character	Non-productive (“dry”) cough is typical; nocturnal cough rare	Hacking cough, often productive; nocturnal cough rare; usually responds to cough medications	Variable character; fits / paroxysms and nocturnal cough are common; generally not responsive to cough medications
	Severity	Moderate	Mild to Moderate	Variable; can be mild in adults and very severe in infants and young children
	Duration	Typically 3-7 days; occasionally to 14 days	Typically 3-7 days	Persistent cough, almost always >1week, usually 2-6 weeks, sometimes 10+ weeks
	Paroxysms	Uncommon	Rare	Common
Infectious Period		1-2 d before symptom onset to 5-10 days after	Variable; typically 4-7 days after symptom onset; can be longer	From start of catarrhal phase (before cough) to 21 days after cough onset*

*or until taking 5 days of appropriate anti-pertussis antibiotics, or until a nasopharyngeal pertussis PCR is negative, whichever occurs first