

Is it COVID, the Flu, RSV?

The United States is facing a triple threat, with a confluence of viral infections due to respiratory syncytial virus, influenza, and Covid-19. Many children's hospitals are overwhelmed after surges of RSV, while the level of influenza is the highest it has been at this point in the year for more than a decade. And after a lull in cases, new coronavirus infections are on the rise across the country as well.

All of this is happening as the holiday season begins, with more people traveling and gathering indoors, likely with fewer precautions than in the previous two years.

Individuals who should be most cautious are those who are at the highest risk for severe illness. That includes older people, newborns, and people with multiple chronic medical conditions. These are people most susceptible to viruses, and what is a mild infection to someone who is a healthy young adult could result in hospitalization for them.

Another group that should consider being cautious are those in direct contact with people at high risk. A spouse of someone who is immunocompromised, family members who live with elderly individuals, parents, or caregivers to a newborn — these are all individuals who should reduce the risk of infection to themselves to prevent transmission to someone vulnerable in their immediate household.

Let's look at the viruses that cause four common childhood illnesses—COVID, flu, the common cold and respiratory syncytial virus (RSV). All of them share some similar symptoms. This can make it hard to tell them apart. Here are some clues that help your pediatrician figure out what kind of respiratory illness is making your child sick.

- **COVID** symptoms include fever, cough, fatigue, congestion, shortness of breath, sore throat, headache, sneezing, vomiting/diarrhea, or loss of taste/smell. COVID symptoms can appear 2 to 14 days after infection.
- **Flu** symptoms include fever, cough, fatigue, stuffy nose, shortness of breath, sore throat, headache. Symptoms show up about 1 to 4 days after being exposed to a sick person. The infection can cause pneumonia.
- **RSV** can cause a fever, cough, fatigue, stuffy nose, shortness of breath, sneezing, fast/short breaths, flaring nostrils, wheezing, and grunting, poor feeding/no appetite, and head bobbing or chest caving in between and under ribs with each breath. Symptoms of RSV usually are worst on days 3 through 5 and last about 5 to 7 days. The infection causes a cold, which may be followed by bronchiolitis or pneumonia. RSV is common in late fall through early spring. In 2021, however, the pandemic caused a strange thing to happen. The number of RSV infections and hospital rates went up in summer 2021 instead. Nearly all children get RSV by their second birthday.

Vaccines exist for Covid-19 and for the flu to prevent severe disease and death. People should follow guidance from the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention about staying up to date with their coronavirus and flu vaccine.





COVID-19, Flu, RSV or a Cold?



Check your child's symptoms

How To Tell Them Apart

Common symptoms of all four illnesses include fever, cough, fatigue, stuffy, runny nose and congestion. Some symptoms that may be different include:

Illness	Sudden loss of taste or smell	Headache	Loss of appetite	Sore throat	Sneezing
 COVID-19	✓	✓	✓	✓	
 Flu		✓	✓	✓	✓
 Cold				✓	✓
 Respiratory syncytial virus (RSV)					✓

Call your pediatrician if your child has any of the following symptoms:

- Rapid breathing, flaring nostrils, wheezing and grunting
- Shortness of breath/difficulty breathing
- Chest caving in with each breath
- Very ill or drowsy
- Poor feeding
- Dehydration
- Vomiting for more than 24 hours
- Bloody diarrhea
- Fever:
 - above 104°F in any child
 - above 100.4°F if child is under 2 months old
 - above 103°F for more than 24 hours

Common cold symptoms may include fever, cough, fatigue, stuffy nose, sore throat, sneezing. Colds are upper respiratory infections that can be caused by many viruses. A few common cold viruses are rhinovirus, adenovirus, human coronavirus, human parainfluenza virus, human metapneumovirus and RSV. Healthy children get about 6 colds a year.