



# What is the difference between the Flu & COVID-19?

**Influenza (Flu) and COVID-19 are both contagious respiratory illnesses, but they are caused by different viruses. Flu and COVID-19 share many characteristics, but there are some key differences between the two.**

## Signs & Symptoms

**Similarities:** Both COVID-19 and flu can have varying degrees of signs and symptoms, ranging from no symptoms (asymptomatic) to severe symptoms. Common symptoms that COVID-19 and flu share include:

- Fever or feeling feverish/chills
- Cough
- Shortness of breath or difficulty breathing
- Fatigue (tiredness)
- Sore throat
- Runny or stuffy nose
- Muscle pain or body aches
- Headache
- Some people may have vomiting and diarrhea

**Differences:** Flu viruses can cause mild to severe illness, including common signs and symptoms listed above. COVID-19, different from flu, may include change in or loss of taste or smell.

## How long symptoms appear after exposure and infection

**Similarities:** For both COVID-19 and flu, 1 or more days can pass between a person becoming infected and when he or she starts to experience illness symptoms.

**Differences:** If a person has COVID-19, it could take them longer to develop symptoms than if they had flu. Typically, a person develops flu symptoms anywhere from 1 to 4 days after infection. For COVID-19 typically a person develops symptoms 5

days after being infected, but symptoms can appear as early as 2 days after infection or as late as 14 days after infection, and the time range can vary.

## How long can someone spread each virus

**Similarities:** For both COVID-19 and flu, it's possible to spread the virus for at least 1 day before experiencing any symptoms.

**Differences:** If a person has COVID-19, they may be contagious for a longer period of time than if they had flu. Most people with flu are contagious for about 1 day before they show symptoms. How long someone can spread the virus that causes COVID-19 is still under investigation.

It's possible for people to spread the virus for about 2 days before experiencing signs or symptoms and remain contagious for at least 10 days after signs or symptoms first appeared. If someone is asymptomatic or their symptoms go away, it's possible to remain contagious for at least 10 days after testing positive for COVID-19.

## How they spread

**Similarities:** Both COVID-19 and flu can spread from person-to-person, between people who are in close contact with one another (within about 2 meters). Both are spread mainly by droplets made when people with the illness (COVID-19 or flu) cough, sneeze, or talk.

**Differences:** While COVID-19 and flu viruses are thought to spread in similar ways, COVID-19 is more contagious among certain populations and age groups than flu. Also, COVID-19 has been observed to have more superspreading events than flu. This means the virus that causes COVID-19 can quickly and easily spread to a lot of people and result in continuous spreading among people as time progresses.

## Complications

**Similarities:** Both COVID-19 and flu can result in complications, including:

- Pneumonia
- Respiratory failure
- Acute respiratory distress syndrome (i.e. fluid in lungs)
- Sepsis
- Cardiac injury (e.g. heart attacks and stroke)
- Multiple-organ failure
- Worsening of chronic medical conditions
- Inflammation of the heart, brain or muscle tissues
- Secondary bacterial infections

**Differences:** Most people who get flu will recover in a few days to less than two weeks, but some people will develop complications. Additional complications associated with COVID-19 can include: Blood clots in the veins and arteries of the lungs, heart, legs or brain.

More information on the flu and COVID-19 is available online at the [Centre for Disease Control \(cdc.gov\)](https://www.cdc.gov) and the [BC Centre for Disease Control \(bccdc.ca\)](https://www.bccdc.ca).

Links are also on our website at [bcschools.cupe.ca](https://bcschools.cupe.ca). Please check the site regularly for updates and more information.

In solidarity and safety,

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