

Understanding Your Symptoms: Cold, RSV, Flu, or Pneumonia?

Use this quick guide to spot the differences between common illnesses and know when it's time to call your care team.

HOW TO PROTECT YOURSELF

- Wash your hands often
- Stay away from people who are sick
- Get your flu shot every year
- Get your Pneumonia shot up to date
- Ask your doctor about RSV vaccine
- Let your dialysis team know if you feel sick
- Wear a mask if you are sick or are around others who are sick.

WHEN TO SEEK MEDICAL HELP

- Difficulty breathing
- High fever that doesn't improve
- Chest pain or pressure
- Symptoms worsening after initial improvement

What You Feel & Experience	Common Cold	RSV (Respiratory Syncytial Virus)	Flu (Influenza)	Pneumonia
How it Starts	Sneaks up slowly	Starts like a cold, can worsen	Hits fast—fine in the morning, sick by night	Can come on suddenly or after another illness
Fever?	Rare or mild	Mild or none	High fever (102–104°F), sudden onset	High and doesn't go away easily
Cough	Mild, dry	Persistent, possibly with mucus or wheezing	Dry, painful cough	Deep, wet cough with mucus
Stuffy Nose/Sneezing	Common symptoms	Yes—includes congestion	Might have it, but more body-wide symptoms	Not typical
Aches & Tiredness	Mild fatigue	Some tiredness, mostly breathing issues	Strong body aches, extreme exhaustion	Major fatigue, weakness
Breathing Trouble	Uncommon	More common for babies and older adults	Sometimes with severe cases	Very common—short breath, chest pain
How Long It Lasts	7–10 days	Usually, 10 days or more if complications	5–7 days, longer if untreated	Often 2–3 weeks or longer
Is It Contagious?	Yes	Yes	Yes	Sometimes—it depends on the cause
Prevention Options	Wash hands, avoid sick people	Hygiene and preventive meds for high-risk	Flu shot every year	Pneumonia vaccine available
How It Feels Overall	Just annoying	Starts mild, but watch for worsening	Feels much worse than a cold—fast decline	Serious—you may need medical care