

Influenza vs. Colds vs. Pertussis

Symptom	Influenza (“Flu”)	Colds (Viral Upper Respiratory Infection)	Pertussis
Fever	Usually present & high (102-104°F or 39-40°C); typically	Uncommon If present, typically low-grade	Uncommon If present, typically low-grade
Chills	Common	Uncommon	Rare
Headache	Very common	Uncommon	Uncommon
Aches and pains, muscle aches, chest discomfort	Very common; Often severe	Slight to Moderate	Uncommon
Fatigue and weakness	Moderate-severe; can last up to 14-21 days	Mild	Mild; Patient usually appears well between coughing attacks
Extreme exhaustion	Very common early in illness	Extremely rare	Rare
Stuffy or runny nose	Common	Very common	Common, early in the disease
Sneezing	Sometimes	Common	Common, early in the disease
Sore throat	Common	Common	Uncommon

C O U G H	Character	Non-productive (“dry”) cough is typical	Hacking cough, often productive; usually responds to cough medications	Coughing fits/paroxysms and nocturnal cough are common; often leads to vomiting or gagging; generally not responsive to cough medications; “whooping” may or may not occur
	Severity	Moderate	Mild to moderate	Variable; mild to severe; infants appear quite ill and may present with cough or apnea
	Duration	Typically 3-7 days; occasionally to 14 days	Typically 3-7 days	Persistent cough, almost always >1 week, usually 2-6 weeks, sometimes 10+ weeks
	Paroxysms	Uncommon	Rare	Coughing fits are common; often leads to vomiting or gagging

Infectious Period	1 day before symptom onset and 3-7 days after	Variable; typically 4-7 days after symptom onset; can be longer	From start of catarrhal phase (before cough onset) to 21 days after cough onset*; Most efficient spreading after cough onset
Incubation Period	1-5 days	1-4 days	6-20 days

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