

- Influenza / Cold (Disease) / Virus

Flu, Cold and COVID-19 all circulating in community

The Standard Journal · 12 Jan 2022 · A3 · Tifani Kinard is Administrator in Charge and Chief Nursing Officer at Polk Medical Center, a part of Atrium Health Floyd.

Flu season is in full swing, add to that COVID-19 and the common cold and you have a perfect storm of runny noses, coughs and fevers.

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention is reporting that cases of the flu are much higher than last year. Add to that cases of COVID-19 and the common cold and you have a perfect storm of sick people who probably wonder at the outset just what is making them feel bad.

In the early stages of all three viruses, it can be difficult to tell what exactly is making you sick. The onset symptoms can be similar, and only a test can determine what virus you have contracted.

IS IT COVID-19, THE FLU OR JUST A COLD?

Flu symptoms usually show up fairly quickly and often include the following:

- ◆ Fever
- ◆ Cough
- ◆ Sore throat
- ◆ Stuffy nose
- ◆ Body aches
- ◆ Fatigue
- ◆ Headaches

The most common cold symptoms are:

- ◆ Sneezing
- ◆ Stuffy nose
- ◆ Sore throat
- ◆ Fever and chills are rare Cold symptoms may also develop slowly, so sneezing may occur days before you get a sore throat.

COVID-19 symptoms can differ widely from person to person. The time between exposure and the onset of symptoms can be anywhere from a few days to two weeks. Severity of symptoms can differ from person to person. You can also be asymptomatic, meaning you have contracted the virus but are not exhibiting any symptoms. They can include:

- ◆ Fever or chills
- ◆ Cough
- ◆ Shortness of breath or difficulty breathing
- ◆ Fatigue
- ◆ Muscle or body aches
- ◆ Headache
- ◆ New loss of taste or smell
- ◆ Sore throat
- ◆ Congestion or runny nose

The only way to know if you have COVID-19 or the flu is to get tested.

USE COMMON SENSE TO PROTECT OTHERS

Whether you have the flu, a cold, or COVID-19 there are steps you should take to keep from preventing others. For the flu and cold, the steps are the same:

- ◆ Limit contact with other people.
- ◆ Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze, or sneeze into your elbow. If you use a tissue, throw it away after you use it.
- ◆ Wash your hands frequently. If soap and water are not available, use an alcohol-based hand rub.
- ◆ Don't touch your eyes, nose or mouth if you are sick.
- ◆ Clean and disinfect surfaces that you touch often.
- ◆ If you have COVID-19, wear a mask and maintain a 6-foot distance.

GET VACCINATED

Vaccines are effective weapons against COVID-19 and the flu. Contact your primary care physician if you have not been vaccinated. Even if vaccines aren't 100% effective against either virus, there is evidence that vaccines can lessen the impact of the virus and allow you to feel better faster.