

- Cold—physiological effect / Communicable diseases

Common illnesses during cold weather

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January and February are the coldest months in the Philippines aside from December. This is because in January and February, the northeast monsoon or 'hanging amihan' is causing temperatures to drop as it affects the country. The Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical, and Astronomical Services Administration (PAGASA) defines the northeast monsoon as "cold winds from the northeast."

As temperatures drop over, our risk of contracting illness only goes up.

Here are a few common coldweather ailments (turns out, there's more than just flu on the horizon) and how to best avoid them.

Seasonal allergies

Allergies tend to kick the whole thing off, these viral diseases tend to hit after the change of weather.

Those suffering from seasonal allergies are more likely to contract a virus because their immune systems are already under attack. Often, patients that experience prolonged viral symptoms may also be battling allergies, "even if they don't realize" it.

Just because summer's over doesn't mean there aren't still allergens floating around. Mold, ragweed, and dust mites, all prevalent in the early fall months, are some of the most common seasonal-allergy triggers.

Bronchitis and pneumonia

While colder weather does indeed constrict blood flow, leading to higher blood pressure, the majority of what we see tends to be respiratory.

More often bronchitis and pneumonia could be those types of things that are exacerbations of (chronic conditions like) asthma and COPD, which can become acutely worse.

Gastroenteritis

As temperatures cool down, an occasional flare-up of gastroenteritis, aka stomach flu can also be seen.

"Sometimes people think they've got the flu," but "most of the time it's a different virus" that causes diarrhea, nausea, vomiting, abdominal cramps, and fever (not all at once, necessarily) associated with gastroenteritis.

Seasonal flu

A list of cold-weather illnesses wouldn't be complete, of course, without influenza. Flu season generally kicks off around October and peaks between December and March, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

While young children, seniors (anyone over 65 is considered at risk) and those with chronic conditions such as asthma and COPD are probably the most vulnerable, flu can infect pretty much anyone, and with serious consequences.

It is important to get shots. It is available in your doctor's office, pharmacy around town, and you're local Rural Health Unit. The vaccination is for everyone 6 months and older.

What else you can do?

Guard your body against viruses, with vitamin C, zinc, and echinacea. Make sure you're drinking plenty of fluids (eight 8-ounce glasses of water a day being the old stand-by recommendation) and getting enough sleep (most health authorities suggest seven to nine hours for the average adult).

As life gets busy during this time of year, that's hard to do, but it would probably make more of a difference than anything else.

Other common-sense strategies: Wash your hands, and make sure to wipe down publicly shared surfaces such as grocery carts, phones, and doorknobs often.

Already feeling symptoms? Sleeping in colder, drier air (with your mouth open) in the cold season can lead to a sore throat when you wake up. To that end, investing in a humidifier in the bedroom is a good choice. Also, in the morning, try a cup of hot tea to soothe a scratchy throat fast. If you can do that and feel better, you can probably avoid going to the doctor.

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