

How Long are Colds and Flu Contagious?

Volume 3, Issue 10
October 23, 2017

You may wonder exactly how long are others contagious when they have the flu or cold. Well, the bad news is that the flu has an incubation period of about 1-4 days, with some adults being contagious 1 day before onset of symptoms up to 2 weeks. Children may pass the flu viruses for longer than seven days — occasionally for 2 weeks.

For colds, most individuals become contagious about a day before cold symptoms develop and remain contagious for about 5-7 days.

How cold and flu viruses spread:

The flu most often is spread by droplets produced by coughing and sneezing. Cold viruses in droplets are spread hand to hand. Occasionally, these droplets can land on surfaces and transfer to an uninfected individual when they touch the contaminated surface (i.e. door handle, copy machine, filing cabinets, elevator buttons) and subsequently touch his/her mouth, nose, or eyes. Quite frankly, surfaces become contaminated and droplets are spread when one does not cover their mouth and nose when sneezing and coughing. According to Live Science, about 3,000 droplets are expelled in a single cough with some flying out of the mouth at speeds up to 50 miles per hour. Sneezing is even worse, with as many as 40,000 droplets expelling up to speeds greater than 200 miles per hour. Additionally, the vast majority of the droplets are less than 100 microns across – the width of a human hair, so are not easily seen.



When should you seek medical attention for a cold or flu?

Physicians will not treat a cold or flu virus with antibiotics. However, physicians are able to prescribe other medications to help with the symptoms experienced when suffering with a cold or flu. If experiencing a fever, chills, a cough that produces bloody sputum and/or greenish-yellow color, difficulty breathing, chest pain or pressure, repeated nausea and vomiting, confusion, and facial pain, it is important that you are evaluated by a physician.

Additionally, according to the American Academy of Pediatrics, a child should be immediately evaluated by a physician:

- If you have an infant younger than 3 months old with a rectal temperature of 100.4° F or above
- If a child of any age has a fever that rises above 104 °F
- If a child younger than 2 years of age has a fever that persists for more than 24 hours
- If a child 2 years of age or older has a fever that persists for more than 3 days

How do you know if you're too sick to work?

You should consider if you are putting yourself or others at risk if you go to work. If you have a coworker that is pregnant, undergoing chemotherapy, has chronic conditions, or has an upcoming surgical procedure, they are particularly vulnerable to complications if they catch your illness.

You are also putting yourself at risk if the symptoms of your condition, or the side effects of medication, could cause you to have an accident on the job, injure others, or produce devastating mistakes in your work product. Putting yourself or anyone in harms way is a clear reason to stay home.

If you're recovering from an illness and feel it's time to return to work, be sure to be extra vigilant with hygiene. Wash hands frequently, keep hand sanitizer available, and use sanitizing or disinfectant wipes to clean common work areas and shared items such as computer workstations.



https://www.medicinenet.com/how_long_is_a_cold_or_flu_contagious/article.htm

https://www.medicinenet.com/are_you_too_sick_to_work/views.htm

<https://www.livescience.com/3686-gross-science-cough-sneeze.html>