

COVID-19 vs seasonal flu: What you need to know about both

12 March 2020, by From Mayo Clinic News Network



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SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19, continues to spread into communities worldwide. Many are worried, as officials and medical experts urge people to take precautions to contain the virus. Dr. Gregory Poland, a Mayo Clinic infectious diseases and vaccine specialist, says that the threat of the coronavirus is real, but the seasonal flu still remains a bigger issue for most people.

"Right now, [seasonal flu](#) is causing many more deaths than COVID-19, and the tragedy is that many people die because they consider it 'just the flu,'" says Dr. Poland.

The numbers are constantly changing, but as of now the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimates that more 34 million people have been sickened by the flu, from 350,000 to 620,000 people have been hospitalized, and from 20,000 to 52,000 people have died from it.

"Right now, the number of COVID-19 cases pales in comparison to the number of flu cases," says Dr. Poland. "Unlike COVID-19, seasonal flu is in every

state and every community in the U.S. Your [best defense](#) against the flu is to get the flu vaccine. If you haven't gotten it yet, it is not too late. Go get it."

Dr. Poland compares the flu vaccine to being a safety device similar to the seat belt of your car.

"It won't protect you from every type of crash, but it will protect you from getting hurt in many kinds of accidents. And it will also reduce your chances of getting severely injured in a crash," says Dr. Poland. "Similarly, the [flu vaccine](#) can't protect you from all flu viruses, but it can reduce your chances of contracting one. And if you do get sick, the vaccine will help reduce the severity of symptoms."

Dr. Poland says that while most people remain at higher risk of contracting the flu than COVID-19 at this time, he recommends people take these measures, to protect themselves against both:

- Wash your hands with soap and water or use hand sanitizer.
- Use hand sanitizer.
- Cough into a tissue and immediately discard and wash your hands. If a tissue is not available, cough into your elbow.
- Stay up to date on [travel restrictions](#) and other protective measures set up by national organizations such as the CDC and your local government.
- If you develop symptoms such as cough, fever, body aches, [shortness of breath](#) and fatigue, stay in your home and contact a health care provider who can advise you.
- Stay away from others who are ill with cough and fever.

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APA citation: COVID-19 vs seasonal flu: What you need to know about both (2020, March 12) retrieved 12 June 2022 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2020-03-covid-seasonal-flu.html>

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