

# IS IT ASTHMA, ALLERGIES, A COLD, COVID-19, THE FLU, OR RSV?

Symptoms	Asthma Gradual or abrupt onset of symptoms	Seasonal Allergies Abrupt onset of symptoms	Cold Gradual onset of symptoms	Coronavirus† (COVID-19) Symptoms range from mild to severe	Flu Abrupt onset of symptoms	Respiratory Syncytial Virus (RSV) Gradual onset of symptoms
<b>Length of symptoms</b>	Can start quickly or last for hours or longer*	Several weeks	Less than 14 days	7-25 days	7-14 days	7-10 days
<b>Cough</b>	Common (can be dry or wet/productive)	Rare (usually dry unless it triggers asthma)	Common (mild)	Common (usually dry)	Common (usually dry)	Common
<b>Wheezing</b>	Common	No**	No**	No**	No**	Common
<b>Shortness of breath or trouble breathing</b>	Common	No**	No**	Sometimes	No**	No*** (sometimes in infants)
<b>Chest tightness/pain</b>	Common	No**	No**	Sometimes	No**	No**
<b>Rapid breathing</b>	Common	No**	No**	Rare	No**	No*** (sometimes in infants)
<b>Sneezing</b>	No**	Common	Common	Rare	No	Common
<b>Runny or stuffy nose</b>	No**	Common	Common	Common	Sometimes	Common
<b>Sore throat</b>	No**	Sometimes (usually mild)	Common	Common	Sometimes	Rare
<b>Fever</b>	No	No	Short fever period	Common	Common	Common
<b>Feeling tired and weak</b>	Sometimes	Sometimes	Sometimes	Common	Common	Rare
<b>Headaches</b>	Rare	Sometimes (related to sinus pain)	Rare	Common	Common	No
<b>Body aches and pains</b>	No	No	Common	Common	Common	Rare
<b>Diarrhea, nausea and vomiting</b>	No	No	Rare	Common	Sometimes	No
<b>Chills</b>	No	No	No	Common	Sometimes	Sometimes
<b>Loss of taste or smell</b>	No	Sometimes	Rare	Common	Rare	No

Your symptoms may vary. If you have any cold, COVID-19, or flu-like symptoms, talk with your doctor, get tested, and stay home. \*If you are having trouble breathing and your quick-relief medicine is not helping your asthma symptoms, call your health care provider or seek medical attention immediately. \*\*Allergies, colds, flu, and some newer strains of COVID-19 can all trigger asthma which can lead to shortness of breath, chest tightness/pain, and rapid breathing. People with both allergies and asthma may have runny nose, sore throat, and sneezing. \*\*\*This is not common but may be seen in babies 6 months or younger. †Information about COVID-19 is still evolving. Many people may not have symptoms.

Sources: Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America, World Health Organization, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.  
 Edited with medical review: 1/18/24 • aafa.org/rti