



## COVID-19, influenza, or the common cold? Here are the differences

The common cold, influenza, and COVID-19 are respiratory diseases with different sets of symptoms, says **Dr. Michel Fernando Martínez**, head of the **TecSalud** Epidemiological Monitoring Unit.

He said that **knowing these symptoms** is crucial to reducing the number of infections by COVID-19.

*“It’s very important to pay attention to our symptoms, as the key to preventing the rapid spread of COVID-19 is prompt detection and self-isolation if necessary,”* he says.

This infectious disease specialist shared the **main differences** between these diseases.



## TYPICAL SYMPTOMS

**COVID-19:** fever, coughing, and difficulty breathing.

**Influenza:** fever, coughing, and difficulty breathing, as well as headaches, a sore throat, and muscular pain.

**Common cold:** nasal congestion, watery eyes, and headaches; generally without fever.

*“The new **coronavirus** has a preference for the **lower respiratory tract**, just like **influenza**,” says the doctor.*

He mentions that **the common cold** displays symptoms in **the upper respiratory tract**, and generally **doesn’t cause a fever**.

*“A patient with a cold doesn’t have the cough or shortness of breath **we’re seeing with COVID-19**,” the doctor explains.*

Fiebre.

## MANIFESTATION TIME

Dr. Martínez emphasizes that **the time** in which the disease appears is a **distinguishing characteristic**.

**COVID-19:** gradual (on average, 5 days to manifest) with variable intensity.

**Influenza:** abruptly (one day to the next) and intense.

**Common cold:** progressively.

*“One thing different about influenza, which helps us to tell it from a conventional cold, is the **abruptness** of its symptoms: **the patient feels terrible from one day to the next and has intenser symptoms.**”*

*“In the case of **COVID-19**, it’s more **gradual**: it starts with a fever, then a cough, and finally shortness of breath.”*

The doctor said that in the case of COVID-19 in China, it was observed that it took **5 days** from the patient starting to feel bad and then seeking medical attention.

*“With the **common cold**, the onset of symptoms is more insidious. There’s a similar progression (of symptoms) which aren’t so serious. They don’t knock patients sideways, **and patients don’t display such a high fever or have greater respiratory symptoms.**”*



## SEASONALITY

Another difference between influenza and COVID-19 has to do with the **dates** on which they **manifest**.

*“For instance, we’ve been observing cases of influenza since **November**, and you have to remember that COVID-19 started (for the first time) at the end of **December (in China)**.*

*“So, we estimate that there could be a lag between the cases of **influenza** that are falling while we’re seeing an increase in cases of **COVID-19**.”*

In light of this, Dr. Martínez recalled that we’re in a season in which **the influenza virus continues to circulate in the population**.



The specialist recommended constant hand-washing with soap and water for at least 40 to 60 seconds or using alcohol-based antibacterial gel with 70% alcohol; covering your mouth with the crook of your arm or a handkerchief when coughing; and touching your face as little as possible.

*“We’re all responsible for our health, so I urge you to follow the basic preventive measures to prevent the rapid spread of COVID-19,” he added.*

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