



INFECTION PREVENTION & YOU

SYMPTOM CHECK: COVID-19 OR SEASONAL ALLERGIES?

Spring is in the air. Green grass peeks out through a blanket of snow. Buds swell and burst open, revealing tiny new leaves on trees. Colorful flowers begin to bloom on shrubs. Birds start appearing at backyard feeders. You wake up each morning sneezing and with a stuffy nose.

In past years, your first thought would be “It’s probably allergies from the pollens and the dander.” But now, you wonder, “Could it be COVID-19?”

How similar are the symptoms of COVID-19 and my seasonal allergies?

The symptoms are about as comparable as an orange is to a banana. While they are both fruits and have a protective barrier, once you peel their outer layers, the similarities end. A runny or stuffy nose, cough, tiredness, even shortness of breath and a lack of smell/taste can occur in both allergies and COVID-19. But a cough from COVID-19 is typically dry, whereas in allergies, a cough is wet and usually more sneeze-like. A stuffy nose from allergies can cause loss of taste/smell. During allergy season, shortness of breath really only occurs in individuals who suffer from some sort of respiratory condition, such as asthma.

What symptoms indicate COVID-19 vs. allergies?

The symptoms of seasonal allergies, such as sneezing and itchy nose, eyes, mouth, and inner ear, are rarely experienced by someone afflicted with COVID-19. Likewise, there are COVID-19 symptoms that are almost never seen in someone dealing with allergies: fever/chills, muscle aches, nausea/vomiting, and diarrhea. Another easy way to determine whether you’re experiencing allergies is to see how quickly your body responds to treatments like over-the-counter and prescription antihistamines or decongestants. If your condition improves fairly quickly, then it may be safe to assume that your body was having an allergic reaction.

How can I prevent seasonal allergies altogether?

Luckily, a lot of preventive measures that we have been taking during the pandemic can be helpful in avoiding allergies. Avoid inhaling your known triggers by wearing a cloth mask when you are outside, and make sure you are washing your mask after each use since it could carry pollen particles. You can reduce your risk of infection from the viruses that cause COVID-19, colds, and flu by social distancing, performing hand hygiene, and wearing a face mask.

If I suffer from allergies, am I more likely to get COVID-19?

Not enough research has been done to say definitively whether or not pollen exposure can lead to an increased risk of contracting COVID-19. However, there are studies that show allergies can weaken a person's immune system enough that they are at greater risk of contracting a respiratory illness, like COVID-19.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

"COVID-19, cold, allergies and the flu: What are the differences?". Mayo Clinic. Retrieved 19 April 2021. www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/coronavirus/in-depth/covid-19-cold-flu-and-allergies-differences/art-20503981

"Infographic: Venn diagram of the overlap of COVID-19 symptoms with seasonal allergy symptoms". CDC. Retrieved 19 April 2021. www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/need-extra-precautions/infographic-overlap-symptoms.html

"Is It Coronavirus or Allergies?". University of Maryland Medical System. Retrieved 19 April 2021. www.umms.org/coronavirus/what-to-know/diagnosis-symptoms/symptoms/allergies

"People with Seasonal Allergies". CDC. Retrieved 21 April 2021. www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/faq.html

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