


Can Cold Weather Make You Sick?

By [Kristina Duda, RN](#) 

Updated August 29, 2019

 Medically reviewed by [a board-certified physician](#)

This question has probably been asked since the first time the flu made someone sick. After all, cold and flu season occurs when the weather is cold, so there must be a connection, right? Not exactly. No matter how many times your mother and grandmother told you not to go out in the cold because you would catch a cold or the flu, it just doesn't work that way.

What Really Makes You Sick?

The truth is the flu and the common cold are caused by viruses. There are over 200 viruses that cause the symptoms that we refer to as the common cold. Rhinoviruses cause a majority of colds, but they can be caused by coronaviruses, enteroviruses, and others as well. Because there are so many viruses that cause these symptoms, there may never be a cure for the common cold. The flu, on the other hand, is caused by the influenza virus.

Why We Get Sick When It's Cold Outside

People get sick more often in the winter because they are exposed to each other more than in the summer. When it is cold outside, people tend to stay inside and are more likely to spread germs to one another. Also, because school is in session, kids are around each other all day and are not afraid to share their germs. With so many people in such close contact, the likelihood of passing germs is much higher when it is cold outside than when it is warm and people are outdoors.

There is also evidence now that viruses spread more easily through the dry air. When it is cold outside, the air is drier both outdoors and inside (where people have their heaters on), which may make it easier for germs to pass from one person to another. But it is not the cold weather that causes the cold; it just might make it easier to spread the virus.

Can Rainy Weather Contribute to Getting Sick?

In tropical areas where it does not get cold, the common cold and flu season generally occurs during the rainy season. But again, these illnesses are not caused by the rain. They are just more prevalent because people come in closer contact with each other than they do during the dry season.

Protection From Cold and Flu

The most important thing to remember during cold and flu season is to protect yourself against these germs when you are around other people. Viruses are passed by contact between people, so be sure to wash your hands often, get your yearly [flu vaccine](#), take care of your body, and avoid people that you know are sick. Try to avoid touching your face as much as possible, since that is how most respiratory germs enter your body.

Article Sources

1. Roussel M, Pontier D, Cohen JM, Lina B, Fouchet D. [Quantifying the role of weather on seasonal influenza](#). BMC Public Health. 2016;16:441. doi:10.1186/s12889-016-3114-x

Additional Reading

- "Guidelines for the Prevention and Treatment of Influenza and the Common Cold." Cold and Flu Guidelines: Myths and Facts 2008. American Lung Association. 09 Dec 08.
- "Winter Safety Tips." American Academy of Pediatrics Nov 08. 09 Dec 08.