COVID-19 vs Flu vs Common Cold vs RSV: What You Need to Know

VIRUS	LEVEL OF INFECTIVITY	TIME FROM EXPOSURE TO INFECTION	SYMPTOMS	PREVALENCE IN CHILDREN	IMMUNIZATION AVAILABILITY
 **Common Cold** *Rhinovirus*	Less contagious Symptomatic individuals shed the virus during the first 2-3 days of infection.	2-3 days	Cough Low-grade fever Sneezing Sore throat Stuffy nose	Common Most children experience 2-4 colds per year; frequently associated with asthma exacerbations.	None
 **Seasonal Influenza** *Influenza virus (A and B)*	Contagious Viral shedding occurs 24 hours before symptoms appear, peaking around day 3 of illness.	1-4 days	Body aches/chills Cough Fatigue Fever Headache Sore throat Stuffy nose	Common Children younger than 2 are at highest risk for more severe disease.	Everyone 6 months and over are eligible for an annual flu vaccine.
 **COVID-19** *Severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2)*	More contagious Viral shedding occurs 2-3 days before symptoms appear, peaking around day 3 of illness. However, there can be viral shedding without ever developing symptoms.	2-14 days	Body aches/chills Cough Diarrhea Fatigue Fever Headache Loss of taste/smell Nausea/vomiting Shortness of break Stuffy/runny nose	Becoming more common and asymptomatic children are possible. Typically, children have mild symptoms, and rarely do they develop multisystem inflammatory syndrome in children (MIS-C) weeks after a SARS-CoV-2 infection.	Two and three-dose vaccines approved for ages 6 months – 4 years Two-dose vaccine booster approved for ages 5 and older Multiple vaccines and boosters approved for adults.
 **RSV** *Respiratory syncytial virus*	Very contagious Symptoms can last 7-10 days, but some kids can develop a cough that takes up to 6 weeks to clear	4-6 days	Cough Runny nose Sneezing Fever Wheezing	Common Infants are at high risk for severe disease, including pneumonia or bronchiolitis, an inflammation of the small airways in the lungs.	Single-dose monoclonal antibody approved for infants up to 8 months of age, and certain infants up to 19 months of age with risk factors for severe RSV.