



Catholic Healthcare West

Ask the Expert
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Q: How can I tell the difference between having a cold and having allergies?

A: Having a stuffy nose and a cough are symptoms of both a cold and allergies, so it can be difficult to tell the difference between the two. Although many of their symptoms are similar, they are very different.

A cold is a virus that attacks an individual's immune system and is contagious. Allergies are caused when a person's immune system reacts to an allergen such as dust and releases histamine that causes a person to cough and have a runny nose. Allergies are not contagious.

Symptoms of a cold may include:

- Cough
- Aches
- Fever
- Sore throat
- Runny or stuffy nose
- Fatigue

Allergy symptoms may include:

- Cough
- Runny or stuffy nose
- Itchy, watery eyes
- Sore throat
- Fatigue

The main differences between the two are colds can cause aches and pains, a fever and yellow mucus. Allergies do not cause aches, pains or a fever and a person's mucus is clear. In addition, a cold lasts approximately two weeks. If the symptoms last longer it could mean that you are suffering from allergies. You may also take into consideration the time of the year that you are having these symptoms, such as the springtime when there are a lot of allergens in the air.

Getting plenty of rest and taking an over-the-counter decongestant or pain reliever is a good way to treat a cold. If you have allergies, there are over-the-counter antihistamines and decongestants that you can take to help manage some of the symptoms, in addition to doing your best to avoid the allergens. Be sure to talk to your doctor if you have concerns about your allergies as he or she may recommend other medications for treatment.

Albert Tejada, M.D., is a physician at Catholic Healthcare West's (CHW) Urgent Care in Ahwatukee, located at 4545 East Chandler Boulevard. For more information, please call 480.728.4000. CHW's Urgent Care centers are open from 7 a.m. to 10 p.m., every day of the year, including holidays.