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**Is It a Cold or the Flu? Know your F.A.C.T.S.**

***Sudden symptoms are a clue it’s flu***

You’re not feeling well. You’re exhausted, coughing and have a stuffy nose. How do you know if it’s the flu or merely a cold?

Flu and cold symptoms are similar and may differ only in severity. To tell quickly if you’re probably dealing with the flu versus a cold, infectious disease expert Susan Rehm, MD, says to think of F.A.C.T.S. That stands for fever, aches, chills, tiredness and sudden onset—all symptoms pointing to flu.

***Sudden onset is the key***

Symptoms that turn on like a light switch are telling. “A respiratory illness that comes on suddenly, like you’re being hit by a ton of bricks, may very well be flu,” says Dr. Rehm.

A stuffy nose, sore throat and hoarseness without the other symptoms indicate a cold, she says. For adults, vomiting is a sign of a stomach bug rather than flu. (Flu affects the respiratory tract and not the digestive tract.)

***Getting help early on***

“If you feel like you’re getting flu symptoms, contact your healthcare professional as soon as you can,” says Dr. Rehm. “You might be a candidate for prescription antiviral medication that specifically works against the flu.”

Antiviral medication can lessen the effects and shorten the duration of flu. However, it works best when given within the first 48 hours. If you’re at high risk because you have a chronic medical condition or are pregnant, antiviral medication might mean the difference between a milder flu and a very serious flu.

***Prevention: The best medicine***

But flu vaccine remains your best protection against flu and flu complications such as pneumonia says Dr. Rehm. Vaccination is critical for those at highest risk: children under 5, the elderly, pregnant women and those with chronic medical conditions.

**Remember-**

*Lingering symptoms may signal pneumonia.* Influenza can lead to this lung infection (dangerous if you’re pregnant, have a chronic medical condition, or are very young or very old.) Call the doctor if you start coughing up yellow or green mucus, feel short of breath, breathe rapidly, feel pain when inhaling or have persistent fever.

**Question:** *When is “the flu” not the flu?*

**Answer:** When it’s the “stomach flu” or “24-hour flu.” Severe bouts of vomiting and diarrhea, or gastroenteritis, can make you just as miserable as flu. But the viruses that trigger them are different. And they target your intestines rather than your airways. **(over)**

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| Do you the a cold or the flu? |
|  | **FLU** | **COLD** |
| THE CULPRIT: | 2 types of influenza virus, which have different strains. | More than 200 types of rhinovirus. |
| TARGET: | Nose, throat & lungs. | Nose and throat. |
| TRANSMISSION: | Inhalation or contact with contaminated surfaces. | Inhalation or contact with contaminated surfaces. |
| SYMPTOMS: | Think F.A.C.T.S (fever, aches, chills, tiredness, sudden onset). Can also cause headache, sore throat and hacking cough. Young children may have GI symptoms like vomiting and diarrhea. | Runny nose, sneezing, nasal congestion. Often a sore throat, mild cough, mild aches and/or fatigue. Young children may get a fever. |
| END RESULT: | 2-4 days in bed. Can lead to bronchitis, sinus or ear infections, pneumonia, hospitalization and even death. Pregnancy, chronic medical conditions & older age increase the risk of complications. | 1-3 weeks of discomfort. |
| PREVENTION: | Yearly flu vaccine for everyone over 6 months of age, especially the elderly, pregnant women and those with lung conditions like asthma or chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD). Nasal flu mist vaccine is an option for many people 2-49 years of age. | Frequent hand-washing to prevent their spread. Zinc lozenges and vitamin C may shorten a cold’s duration. |
| TREATMENT:  | Bed rest, liquids and over-the- counter flu medicines. Prescription antiviral medicine may shorten duration if given early. | Over-the-counter cold medicines/ analgesics. |

Source: Health Hub from Cleveland Clinic (<http://health.clevelandclinic.org/2014/10/is-it-a-cold-or-the-flu-know-your-f-a-c-t-s-infographic/>)

**More information:**

CDC flu information: <http://cdc.gov/flu/>

About influenza: <http://www.nfid.org/idinfo/influenza>

CDC parents guide to flu: <http://www.cdc.gov/flu/pdf/freeresources/updated/a_flu_guide_for_parents.pdf>