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WELLNESS WEEKLY



Cold & Flu

Symptoms, Treatment & Prevention

When you wake up sneezing, coughing, and have that achy, feverish, can't move a muscle feeling, how do you know whether you have cold symptoms or the flu? And if it's the flu, could it be swine flu?

A cold is a milder respiratory illness than the flu. While cold symptoms can make you feel bad for a few days, flu symptoms can make you feel quite ill for a few days to weeks. The flu -- whether it's typical seasonal flu or the swine flu virus -- can also result in serious health problems such as pneumonia and hospitalizations

Most colds start with a sore throat and painful swallowing for one to two days. A runny nose and congestion are also common. Sore throats can be a symptom of the flu -- with flu, a sore throat is accompanied by fatigue and other symptoms that often happen all at once. Unless you're also feverish, very achy, and just plain zapped of energy, you've likely got a cold. Flu symptoms usually get better over two to five days. But it's not uncommon to feel rundown and lousy for a week or longer. Both cold and flu can lead to sinus infections. These are marked by a deep and constant pain in the cheekbones, forehead, or bridge of the nose. The pain usually gets worse with sudden head movement or straining.

Because both colds and flu are respiratory illnesses, which affect your airways, both can cause coughing. Pneumonia is a lung infection that can be a complication of the flu. Call your doctor if you have difficulty breathing, shortness of breath, or chest pain as a result of coughing, or are coughing up yellow-green or bloody phlegm.

Swine flu and the regular seasonal flu share many symptoms: cough, sore throat, fever (although not everyone with flu has a fever), and body aches. But many people with swine flu also have stomach problems, such as vomiting, and diarrhea.

While some people may develop a slight fever when they have a cold, most do not. If you have the flu, you will probably run a fever of 100-102 degrees or higher. Children's flu fevers tend to be higher, and children may be more likely to develop a fever with the common cold.

Cold & Flu Prevention

Wash hands well to help prevent the spread of flu from one person to the next. With soap and warm water, vigorously rub your hands together for 20 seconds; don't forget between your fingers and around your nails. Rinse and dry thoroughly. Alcohol-based hand sanitizers also work. Wash often during cold and flu season, especially after coughing, sneezing, or blowing your nose.

Get a flu vaccine. They're made of harmless versions of flu virus to help your body recognize and fight it if exposed to the real thing. They're especially important for children older than 6 months, pregnant women, adults older than 50, and people with chronic illness or suppressed immune systems. Healthy children 2 years old and older and non-pregnant healthy adults under 50 can opt for the nasal mist vaccine.

Cold & Flu Treatment

Over-the-counter medications can also help lessen some flu symptoms like cough and congestion. Read package labels and instructions carefully so you understand what you are taking and how to take it. For a cold, over-the-counter medicine including decongestants, cough suppressants, and antihistamine can help congestion, cough, and nasal symptoms. Acetaminophen, ibuprofen, or naproxen can help with throat pain or headache.