

Prevention and treatment are similar to flu - except there's no vaccine against colds and most people don't need to stay in bed. As with the flu, it's a good idea to keep away from other people so that you don't spread the virus.



English
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Is it the flu - or just a bad cold?

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Is it the flu - or just a bad cold?

How can you tell if you have influenza or only a cold? Here's how to tell the difference - and how you can help protect yourself from both problems.

Influenza.

Both flu and colds are spread in a similar way. Infected people cough and sneeze infected droplets into the air - which are then inhaled by other people. But the flu is more severe than a cold. In some people, especially those over the age of 65, it can cause serious problems such as pneumonia. In people with heart disease it can also cause death.

Symptoms

Fever and shivering, muscle aches, a dry feeling in the mouth and throat, a headache, a cough, feeling so tired and lethargic that it may be hard to get out of bed. Some people may vomit. Usually lasts seven to 10 days.

How Can You Prevent It?

Although the flu doesn't cause serious problems for most of us, these people are at risk from the disease and need immunising against it every year. They include: anyone over the age of 65, anyone with chronic lung disease (including asthma), anyone with heart or kidney disease; anyone with diabetes, anyone taking drugs which suppress their immune system. If you belong to any of these groups - even if you always feel very healthy - , ask your doctor for the vaccine as soon as possible. This gives you time to build up immunity before the flu season starts. You can also ask your doctor

about a vaccine to help prevent pneumonia. If you live in a nursing home ask the staff if immunisation against flu and pneumonia has been arranged. If not, see your doctor. The flu vaccine is also recommended for health workers working with aged people or people who have suppressed immunity - this is to help protect the patients, rather than the workers themselves. The flu vaccine isn't suitable for pregnant women, or anyone who is allergic to eggs.

Other ways to reduce the risk of catching flu include avoiding contact with people with the flu and avoiding crowded places where people are coughing and sneezing into the air. Frequent hand washing may help - sometimes you can pick up flu germs on your hands. Keep as healthy as possible - avoid smoking (smokers get more colds and flu), get enough rest and eat plenty of vegetables and fruit.

If You Catch the Flu.

Stay in bed - preferably until your temperature has been normal for 48 hours. This helps your body fight off the virus. Drink plenty of fluids. You can ease the pain and fever with aspirin or paracetamol if you're an adult, but only use paracetamol for children as aspirin is unsuitable. See a doctor if symptoms get worse - if you have breathing problems for instance, cough up yellow or green coloured phlegm, have severe headaches or dehydration - or if you're in one of the high risk group.

Colds

Children can catch as many as ten colds each year and adults two or three. The worst symptoms usually last only one to two days and can include a mild fever, headache, runny nose and sneezing.