

Common Cold or Seasonal Flu?

Don't be caught off guard by a debilitating cold or flu this season; learn the facts and give prevention a shot.

The first step in protection is learning the similarities and differences between a cold and the flu. Both are respiratory illnesses caused by different viruses. There are hundreds of cold viruses that may leave you feeling under the weather at any time of the year. On the other hand, there are fewer strains of the flu, which is more likely to strike in the cooler months, usually October through May.

Symptoms

In general, a cold is much milder than the flu. Cold symptoms usually begin with a sore throat and nasal symptoms soon develop. A runny nose, congestion and a cough are common within the first four or five days. A fever is possible but less likely in adults than in children. All-in-all, cold symptoms will usually last for about a week; it is most contagious in the first few days. If the symptoms last much longer than a week, a bacterial infection is possible and you should see a doctor.

The symptoms associated with a cold are also common in the flu, but they are often more severe and not alone. If you have a fever, muscle aches and headache along with a sore throat, congestion and a cough, you may have the flu rather than a cold. These symptoms will come on quickly and cruelly and vary in length. It is not uncommon for the flu to lead to pneumonia in young or elderly patients, or those with weakened immune systems due to other health conditions.

Prevention

During the early flu season in the fall, prevention measures are very important. Both cold and flu viruses enter the body through the mucous membranes of the nose, eyes and mouth. Each time you touch one of these body parts, you may be infecting yourself. Use basic prevention techniques such as:

- Frequent hand washing
- Covering coughs and sneezes with your elbow, not your hands
- Disinfecting common surfaces
- Staying home when sick

Additionally, the Centers for Disease Control & Prevention (CDC) and many healthcare providers recommend an annual, preventive flu shot for all ages, but especially for children older

than six months as well as the elderly. To protect children younger than six months, it is helpful for each person in contact with the infant to be vaccinated.

If you have not gotten a flu vaccine yet this year, give prevention a shot by setting up an appointment with us right away.