Do You Have A COLD OR THE FLU?

Both illnesses can make you miserable! But each is caused by different bugs that settle in different places. Below, our experts explain how to tell them apart.

flu

- CULPRIT: 2 types of influenza virus, which have different strains.
- TARGET: Nose, throat and lungs.
- TRANSMISSION: Inhalation or contact with contaminated surfaces.
- SYMPTOMS: Think F.A.C.T.S (fever, aches, chills, fatigue, sudden onset). Can also have headache, sore throat and hacking cough. Young children may have GI symptoms like vomiting and diarrhea.
- END RESULT: 2-4 days in bed. Can lead to bronchitis, sinus or ear infections, pneumonia, hospitalization and even death. Pregnancy, chronic medical conditions and older age increase the risk of complications.
- PREVENTION: Yearly flu vaccine for everyone age 6 months or older, especially the elderly, pregnant women and those with chronic medical conditions. Take Oseltamivir or Zanamivir as anti-viral medicine (Oseltamivir). Flu mist vaccine is an option for many people 2-49 years of age.
- TREATMENT: Bed rest, liquids and over-the-counter flu medicines. Prescription antiviral medicine may shorten duration if given early.

- 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. They target your intestines rather than your airways.

cold

- CULPRIT: More than 200 types of rhinovirus.
- TARGET: Nose and throat.
- TRANSMISSION: Inhalation or contact with contaminated surfaces.
- SYMPTOMS: Runny nose, sneezing and nasal congestion. Often a sore throat, mild cough, mild aches and/or fatigue. Young children may get a fever.
- END RESULT: 1-3 weeks of discomfort.
- PREVENTION: Frequent hand-washing to prevent their spread. Zinc lozenges and vitamin C may shorten a cold’s duration.
- TREATMENT: Over-the-counter cold medicines/analgesics.

RESOURCES
- cdc.gov/flu/about/season/flu-season-2014-2015.htm
- cdc.gov/flu/bulletin/vs/vs2013-2014.htm
- my.clevelandclinic.org/health/diseases_conditions/hic_influenza
- my.clevelandclinic.org/healthhub
- nfid.org/idinfo/influenza
- clevelandclinic.org/HealthHub