

Is it the cold or the flu?

Your child is sent home from school with a sore throat, cough, and high fever — could it be the flu that's been going around? Or is it just a common cold?

Typically, the flu (also known as influenza) has symptoms that make a child feel worse than symptoms associated with a common cold, but it's not always that easy to tell the difference between the two.

Symptoms Guide

To help determine whether your child's fighting the flu or combating a cold, review these questions:

Flu vs. Colds: A Guide to Symptoms		
Questions	Flu	Cold
Was your child's onset of illness ...	sudden?	slow?
Does your child have a ...	high fever?	no (or mild) fever?
Is your child's exhaustion level ...	severe?	mild?
Is your child's head ...	achy?	headache-free?
Is your child's appetite ...	decreased?	normal?
Are your child's muscles ...	achy?	fine?
Does your child have ...	chills?	no chills?

If most of your answers fell into the first category, chances are that your child has the flu. If your answers usually belonged in the second category, it's most likely a cold.

But don't be too quick to brush off your child's illness as just another cold. The important thing to remember is that flu symptoms can vary from child to child (and they can change as the illness progresses), so if you suspect the flu, call the doctor. Even doctors often need a test to tell them for sure if your child has the flu or not since the symptoms can be so similar!

Some bacterial diseases, like strep throat or pneumonia, can also look like the flu or a cold. It's important to get medical attention immediately if your child seems to be getting worse, is having any trouble breathing, has a high fever, has a bad headache, has a sore throat, or seems confused.

While even healthy kids can have complications of the flu, kids with certain medical conditions are at more of a risk. If you think your child might have the flu, get in touch with the doctor.

Treatment

Some kids with chronic medical conditions may become sicker with the flu and need to be hospitalized, and flu in an infant also can be dangerous. For a severely ill child or one with other special circumstances, a doctor may prescribe an antiviral medicine that can ease flu symptoms, but only if it's given within 48 hours of the onset of the flu.

Most of the time, you can take care of your child by offering plenty of fluids, rest, and extra comfort.

And if the doctor says it's not the flu? Ask whether your child should get a flu shot.

Adapted from www.kidshealth.org article