

Is It a 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? Before you can figure out how to help your child feel better, you need to know what's causing the symptoms. 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 or 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 cough ...dry? severe or hacking?
- Is your child's throat ...sore? fine?
- 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.

Treatment

If caught within the first 48 hours of the onset of symptoms, your child's flu may respond to an antiviral medicine, which can shorten the course of the infection by 1 or 2 days. In the meantime, take care of your child by offering plenty of fluids and extra comfort.

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

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Date reviewed: October 2004

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