**Colds versus Flu: How to Tell the Difference**

Are you coming down with a cold? Do you have the flu?

Look below to see some differences and similarities between colds and flu.

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| **Differences Between Colds and the Flu** |
| **WITH A COLD:** | **WITH THE FLU:** |
| Symptoms are usually **less severe** than flu symptoms | Symptoms are usually **more severe** than cold symptoms |
| Symptoms develop **gradually** over a few days. | Symptoms come on **quickly** and severely. |
| You rarely have a fever. | You almost always have a **fever**. |
| You feel sick mostly in your head and nose. | Your **entire body** feels sick. |
| Body aches, headaches and pain are usually mild if you have them.aches, headaches and pain are usually mild if you have them. | **Body aches, headaches and pain are common** and can be severe. |
| You may or may not feel tired and weak. | **Tiredness and weakness are common.** |
| There is no vaccine to protect you. | You can get vaccine to protect yourself. |
| Colds generally do not result in serious health problems, such as pneumonia, bacterial infections, or hospitalizations. | The flu can result in serious health problems, such as pneumonia, bacterial infections, or hospitalizations. |
| **Similarities Between Colds and the Flu** |
| **WITH A COLD:** | **WITH THE FLU:** |
| Caused by a virus. | Caused by a virus. |
| Affects the body’s breathing system (nose, throat, windpipe and lungs). | Affects the body’s breathing system (nose, throat, windpipe and lungs). |
| Usually goes away on its own. | Usually goes away on its own. |
| You should contact your doctor if symptoms change or get worse. | You should contact your doctor if symptoms change or get worse. There are antiviral medicines, by prescription, to treat the flu. |

Massachusetts Department of Public Health

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