Is it a cold, flu or COVID-19?

Whether you’re sneezing, coughing, or feeling achy, sometimes it’s difficult to know what’s causing your symptoms. Is it just a pesky cold? Or could it be something more serious?

Now that the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) is in our communities, sorting through symptoms can be even more confusing—and stressful. If you experience any of the symptoms listed or are not feeling well, contact and consult your primary care provider to be assessed.

Catching a cold
Compared with the flu and COVID-19, the common cold often doesn’t cause a fever and has milder symptoms:
- **Onset**: Symptoms tend to develop slowly.
- **Duration**: About seven to 10 days.
- **Symptoms**: Runny or stuffy nose, sneezing, sore throat, coughing, slight body aches, headaches.
- **Care tips**: Stay hydrated and get plenty of rest. Taking over-the-counter (OTC) medicine can help manage your symptoms, too.

Fighting the flu
With similar symptoms ranging from mild to severe, it’s easy to mistake the flu for COVID-19. And while both are caused by viruses, one of the tell-tale signs of the flu is that it tends to come on suddenly:
- **Onset**: Symptoms develop abruptly.
- **Duration**: Less than two weeks.
- **Symptoms**: Coughing, sore throat, headaches, muscle or body aches, fatigue, fever or chills, vomiting and diarrhea (more common in children).
- **Care tips**: Stay at home, rest, drink a lot of fluids, and avoid interacting with other people. Your doctor may prescribe an antiviral medication to help reduce your symptoms.

Coping with coronavirus
Suspecting you have COVID-19 can be scary. And while there is cause for concern, remember that most cases are mild and don’t require any special treatment:
- **Onset**: Symptoms may appear two to 14 days after exposure to the virus.
- **Duration**: One to two weeks (for most people).
- **Symptoms**: Coughing, fever, shortness of breath or difficulty breathing, chills, repeated shaking with chills, muscle pain, headaches, sore throat, new loss of taste or smell.
- **Care tips**: Contact your doctor right away if you think you have or were exposed to the coronavirus. For those with symptoms, stay home in a room or area away from other people. Rest and drink a lot of fluids. OTC medicines like acetaminophen may help you feel better, too.

**IMPORTANT REMINDER!** The best way to protect you and your family from the flu is by getting an annual flu shot. Not only does the flu vaccine lessen the severity of symptoms if you do get the virus, it can help prevent the flu as well. Talk with your doctor to make sure a flu shot is right for you.