Upper Respiratory Infections: The Flu, RSV and COVID

What is the Flu? What is RSV? What is COVID? All three are contagious viral infections in your respiratory system (nose, throat and possibly the lungs) that can be difficult to distinguish from other viral infections or each other.

Signs and Symptoms of the Flu, RSV and COVID: People who have one of these infections often feel some or all of these signs and symptoms that commonly start suddenly, not gradually:

- Fever or feeling feverish/chills
- Cough
- Sore throat
- Runny or stuffy nose
- Muscle or body aches
- Headaches
- Fatigue (very tired)
- Some people may have vomiting and diarrhea, though this is more common in young children than in adults.
- **Specific for COVID: Loss or change of taste and smell

You can be sick without experiencing any of the symptoms or fever. You can also have these infections even if you were vaccinated. Because of the identical symptoms, it is **impossible to tell the difference without a test.**

How do upper respiratory infections spread? They spread by tiny droplets sent out in the air when sick people cough, sneeze or talk. The droplets can land in the mouth or nose of people nearby. Less common, infection can also be passed on if people touch surfaces with virus on, and then touch their eyes, nose or mouth. A person can be contagious some days before becoming sick with symptoms and up till several days after falling sick. In some cases a person can also continue to be contagious even after feeling well.

- **Masking:** People who have known or suspected exposure to COVID-19 should also wear a well-fitting mask around others for 10 days from their last exposure, regardless of vaccination status or history of prior infection.

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How can you prevent upper respiratory infections?

• Get vaccinated.
• Stay away from sick people.
• Cover your cough or sneeze.
• Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth.
• Disinfect contaminated surfaces.
• Wash your hands OFTEN with soap and water, or use a hand sanitizer.

What if your child gets sick? CDC recommends the use of antiviral drugs for those patients who are at higher risk. High risk groups are the very young, elderly and people with chronic diseases. Contact your doctor as soon as possible to discuss this as the treatment should be started 1-2 days after the first symptoms. In most cases the body will fight the infection.

What to do if your child has an upper respiratory infection: Stay at home/keep your sick child at home until there is no fever for 24 hours without use of fever-reducing medication (the 24-hour-rule). Your child may return to school if fever free for 24 hours and the symptoms are better. You should be aware that the period of time for this may be the same, shorter or longer than the 5 days previously recommended for COVID.

Does my child need to quarantine? There is no requirement for a 5 day quarantine even if there has been a positive test for COVID. You should refer to the above recommendations. Keep your child well hydrated. Use of fever reducing medications can make your child feel a little more comfortable by comforting aches and pains and lowering the fever.

Resources:

• CDC's updated guidance for Upper Respiratory Infections
• CDC's hub for the flu - everything you need to know!
• CDC's hub for COVID - everything you need to know about COVID!
• CDC's hub for RSV infection - everything you need to know about RSV!

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