

Nurses' Nook.....

Is it a cold or is it the flu??

The flu is a *respiratory* illness caused by the influenza virus. Symptoms of the flu are fever and chills (in most people), cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, body aches, headaches, and fatigue. Most people are moderately to severely ill but for those very young, very old, or with underlying medical conditions *the flu can be severe with serious complications*.

A cold, also a respiratory illness, may have similar but milder symptoms and rarely involves fever or body aches. In addition the common cold often involves sneezing. Persons with the common cold may feel fairly miserable but are generally functional. Persons with the flu are usually much sicker and want to be home in bed (as they should).

The *single best way* to prevent the flu is to get a yearly flu shot. The Center for Disease Control recommends yearly flu vaccination for anyone over 6 months of age. There is even a special vaccine for those 65 and older that can provide a stronger immune response in older adults. It is especially important for you to get vaccinated if you have frequent contact with a more vulnerable person, such as a young baby, an elderly person, or someone with an underlying medical condition.

Other ways to help prevent colds and flu are by washing your hands frequently, and keeping your hands away from your mouth, nose, and eyes (where viruses can enter). Additionally, cleaning common surfaces such as sinks, countertops, etc may reduce the risk of exposure. If you are ill you should stay home from work; if your child is ill you should keep him or her home. After you or your child has been without fever for 24 hours (without anti-fever medication) then you can return to work/school.

If you have any questions about cold or flu please feel free to call the nurse in your child's school.