

## Cold or Flu? What to Do? - *By Mindy Tatera, MD*

The common cold is a milder respiratory illness than the flu and is caused by one of over 200 different viruses. It usually starts with a sore throat followed by nasal congestion, runny nose and sneezing. Nasal discharge may be watery at first, then become thick and yellow. A cough may start around the fourth or fifth day. Symptoms typically last three to seven days but may last up to two weeks. Colds are most contagious the first two to four days and are often spread with handshaking.

Influenza (the flu) is highly contagious and spreads from person-to-person by coughing, sneezing or touching surfaces. Symptoms occur more suddenly than a cold and may include higher fever, headaches, muscle aches, dry cough and sore throat. Flu symptoms usually improve over two to five days, although the illness may last for a week or more.

Weakness and fatigue may persist for several weeks. Pneumonia is the most common complication of influenza. Adults are contagious 24 hours before symptoms and up to seven days after getting sick.

Hand-washing and alcohol-based hand rubs help prevent spread of colds and flu. Influenza is preventable with an annual vaccine. Antibiotics are not useful for treating viral illnesses such as influenza or the common cold. Fluids and rest are the mainstays of treatment. Antiviral medicines can be used to treat or prevent influenza. Treatment does not eliminate symptoms but can reduce severity and duration. The decision to treat is based upon risk of developing complications of influenza.

### Maintaining a Healthy Heart

February became American Heart Month way back in 1963 to help raise public awareness of heart disease. Conveniently arriving around Valentine's Day when heart images are everywhere, February is the perfect time to take some time to consider your own heart.

During a routine physical, your heart will receive a lot of attention with signs of its well being partially determined by things like your blood pressure, pulse and cholesterol level and discussions on smoking, diabetes, weight and even dental health.

If you haven't had a physical within the past two year, do your heart a favor and schedule with your provider!

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