How to tell a cold from the flu

The Associated Press

The common cold and flu are caused by different viruses but can have some similar symptoms, making them tough to tell apart. In general, the flu is worse and symptoms are more intense.

COLDS: Usual symptoms include stuffy or runny nose, sore throat and sneezing. Coughs are hacking and productive. It's unusual to have fever, chills, headaches and body aches, and if they do occur, they are mild.

FLU: Fever is usually present, along with chills, headache and moderate-to-severe body aches and tiredness. Symptoms can come on rapidly, within three to six hours. Coughs are dry and unproductive, and sore throats are less common.

PREVENTION: To avoid colds and flu, wash your hands with warm water and soap after you've been out in public or around sick people. Don't share cups or utensils. And get a flu vaccination — officials say it's not too late, even in places where flu is raging.

TREATMENT: People with colds or mild cases of the flu should get plenty of rest and fluids. Those with severe symptoms, such as a high fever or difficulty breathing, should see a doctor and may be prescribed antiviral drugs or other medications. Children should not be given aspirin without a doctor's approval.

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Sources: U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention; Roche, maker of Tamiflu.

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