Is It the Flu or COVID-19?

It can be hard to tell the difference between the flu and COVID-19. Getting vaccinated against both can help prevent you and your family from getting sick.

What are the symptoms of the flu and COVID-19?
The flu and COVID-19 have similar symptoms, including fever or chills, cough, shortness of breath or trouble breathing, fatigue, muscle or body aches, headache, sore throat, congestion or runny nose, nausea or vomiting, diarrhea, and loss of taste and smell. Loss of taste and smell is more common with COVID-19 than with the flu. Both infections can lead to pneumonia, other severe complications, hospitalization and death.

It usually takes longer for people to develop COVID-19 symptoms than flu symptoms. COVID-19 symptoms can appear two to 14 days after exposure, while flu symptoms can appear one to four days after exposure.

How do the flu and COVID-19 spread?
The flu and COVID-19 spread through particles that are sprayed when a person coughs, sneezes, sings, talks or breathes. Spread mainly happens when someone is within 6 feet of a person who is infected. People who are infected and have no symptoms can still spread the flu and COVID-19.

Who is at risk of severe illness from the flu and COVID-19?
Older adults, people who are pregnant and people with certain underlying health conditions are at increased risk of severe illness from the flu and COVID-19. It is especially important for these groups to get vaccinated against both infections.

Children under age 5 are also at risk of severe illness from the flu, so it is important that children age 6 months and older get the flu vaccine every year.

How can I protect myself and others against the flu and COVID-19?
Get vaccinated. Vaccines are the most important way to help prevent severe illness, hospitalization and death from the flu and COVID-19. Flu vaccines only protect against the flu and the COVID-19 vaccines only protect against COVID-19, so it is important to get both if you are eligible.

Practice hand hygiene by:
- Washing your hands often with soap and water or using an alcohol-based hand sanitizer if soap and water are not available
- Avoiding touching your face with unwashed hands
- Covering your cough or sneeze with your arm, not your hands

Use multiple prevention measures. Physical distancing, avoiding crowds and wearing a face mask when outside your home are important ways to prevent getting and spreading the flu and COVID-19.
Where can I get vaccinated against the flu and COVID-19?

Flu and COVID-19 vaccines are available at many doctors’ offices, clinics, pharmacies, and vaccination sites and events around the city. It is safe to get both vaccines at the same time. The flu vaccine is covered by most health insurance plans, including Medicaid. To find a location to get your flu vaccine, visit nyc.gov/vaccinefinder or call 311.

Everyone age 12 and older is eligible for a COVID-19 vaccine. To find a COVID-19 vaccination site, visit nyc.gov/vaccinefinder or call 877-VAX-4NYC (877-829-4692). Visit nyc.gov/homevaccine or call 877-VAX-4NYC to schedule a free in-home vaccination.

What should I do if I have flu or COVID-19 symptoms?

Stay home. Do not leave home, except to get tested, other essential medical care and basic needs (such as groceries) if someone cannot get them for you. Do not go to work or school.

Get tested. If you have flu or COVID-19 symptoms, it is important to get tested for both to figure out what kind of care or treatment you should get.

- If your provider does not offer COVID-19 testing, visit nyc.gov/covidtest or call 311 to find a testing site near you. Many sites offer free testing. You can also make an appointment to get a combined COVID-19 and flu test at a COVID Express site by visiting nyc.gov/health/covidexpress.

Talk to your provider about treatment options. If you have the flu, you may be able to get antiviral medication to reduce your illness. If you have COVID-19, you may be able to get monoclonal antibody treatment, which reduces your risk of severe illness and hospitalization. To learn more about monoclonal antibody treatment, visit on.nyc.gov/antibody-treatment.

- If you do not have a provider, call 311 or 844-NYC-4NYC (844-692-4692). NYC Health + Hospitals provides care regardless of immigration status or ability to pay. Call 911 right away if you have trouble breathing or are experiencing a medical emergency.

The NYC Health Department may change recommendations as the situation evolves. 10.5.21