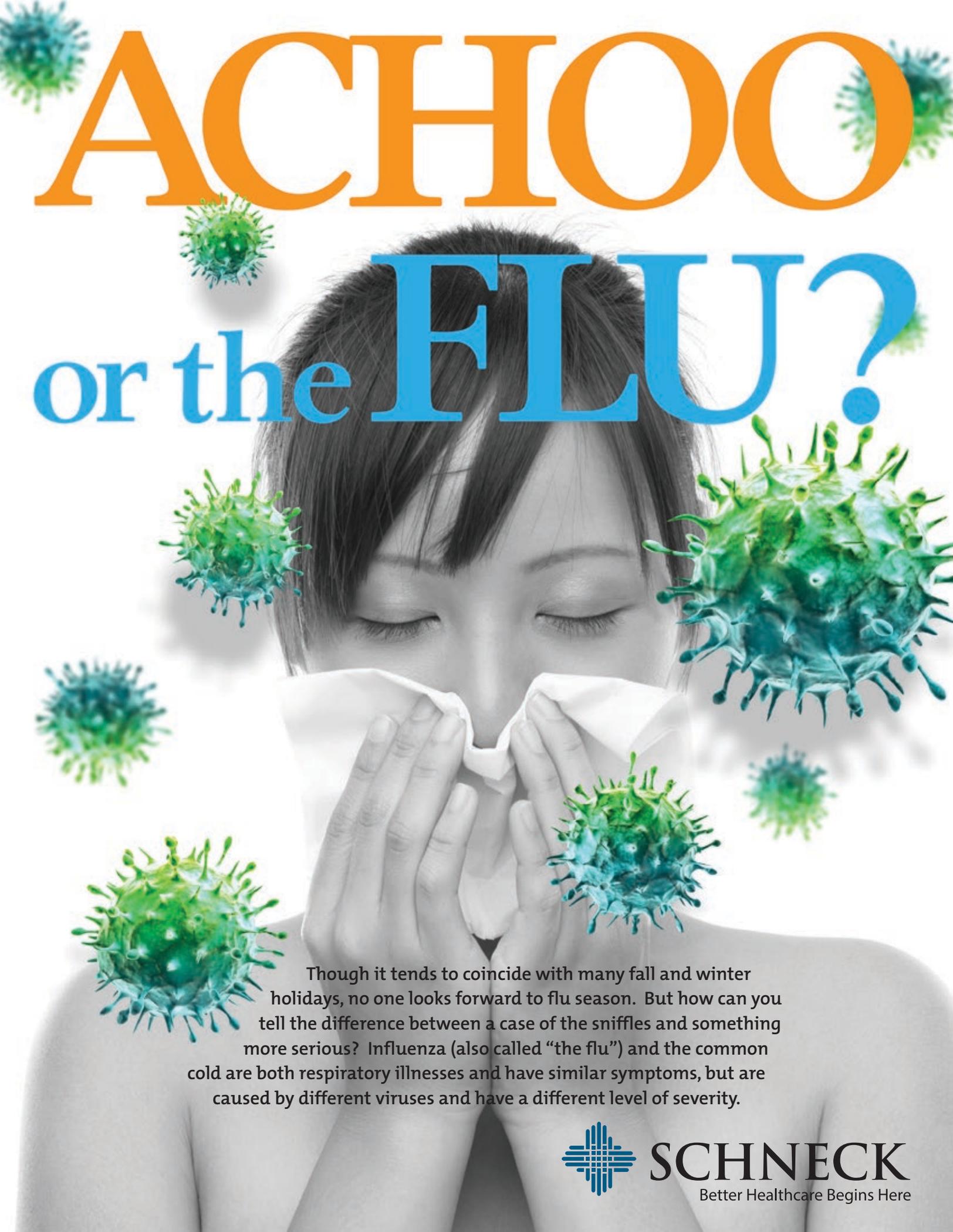


ACHOO

or the FLU?



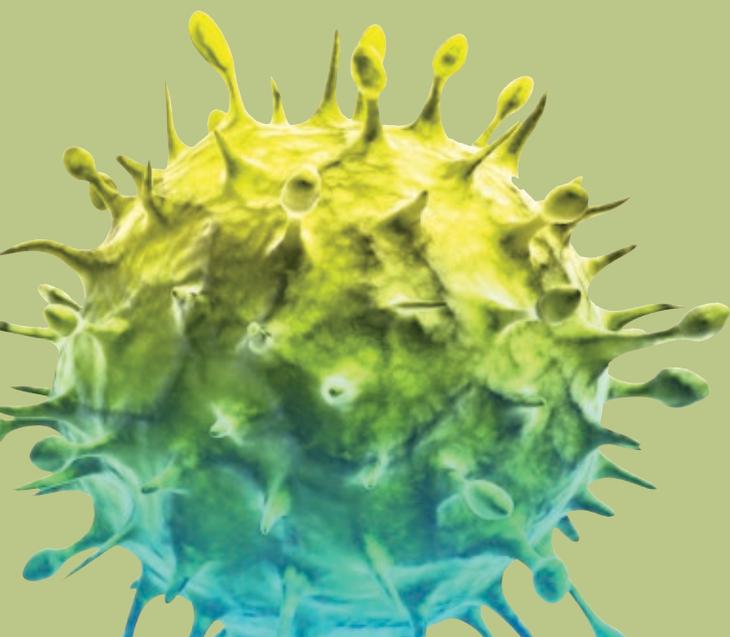
Though it tends to coincide with many fall and winter holidays, no one looks forward to flu season. But how can you tell the difference between a case of the sniffles and something more serious? Influenza (also called “the flu”) and the common cold are both respiratory illnesses and have similar symptoms, but are caused by different viruses and have a different level of severity.



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Though the common cold and the flu can often look alike, in general having a stuffy nose, sneezing, and a sore throat are more indicative of a cold, while symptoms like fever, headache, body aches, weakness, fatigue, and extreme exhaustion are rarely signs of a cold but are common indicators of the flu. Both illnesses can cause chest discomfort and a cough, which is usually mild to moderate with a cold but can become quite severe with the flu. Also, with the flu, symptoms tend to be worse, come on suddenly, and can last as long as two weeks.

Complications that result from the flu, like pneumonia, can be very serious and even life-threatening. Though anyone can get the flu, more serious complications usually affect young children, pregnant women, people with certain chronic medical conditions, and anyone aged 65 and older. If you are experiencing flu-like symptoms, your doctor can do a test early on to find out whether you have the flu or something less serious. Influenza may not inspire good cheer, but there are three easy ways to help you and your family stave off the flu this year and every year.



- 1 The Flu Vaccine:** The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends the flu vaccine as soon as possible after turning six months of age as the most important preventive measure against the flu, especially for high-risk individuals. It is also particularly important for those who care for or work closely with high-risk individuals to be vaccinated to avoid spreading the illness, particularly those who work with children under six months of age, who are too young to be vaccinated but are at high-risk. Though there are several flu viruses, flu vaccines can protect you against several different strains that research shows may be the most common that season. Getting vaccinated can help cut down on missed work and school, doctor's visits, hospitalizations, and even flu-related deaths.
- 2 Daily Preventive Measures:** Always try to avoid close contact with anyone who is sick. You can also help prevent the flu by keeping yourself and your surroundings as germ-free as possible. To do this, wash your hands often with soap and water (or use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer if soap and water are not readily accessible), avoid touching your mouth, nose, and eyes, and disinfect any surfaces that could become contaminated. If you do get the flu, make sure to limit close contact with others until your fever has been gone without the aid of a fever-reducing medicine for at least a full day to avoid infecting your family, friends, and co-workers.
- 3 Flu Antivirals:** If you do get the flu, ask your doctor whether he or she recommends that you take an antiviral drug to make the illness shorter and more moderate. An antiviral drug can also help to avoid serious complications. Antivirals come in different forms and are only available by prescription. Though antivirals tend to work best when taken within two days of the onset of symptoms, they can still be helpful later on.

Work with your doctor to help your family stay healthy and happy this flu season. Since the flu can lead to serious and even life-threatening complications, seek help immediately if you or someone you love is experiencing severe symptoms.

Sources: www.cdc.gov , niaid.nih.gov