

Liturgical-Pastoral Suggestions and Guidelines in the Event of an Outbreak of Flu

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Office for Worship and the Archdiocesan Liturgical Commission
September 2009*

- A) All ministers of communion, ordinary and extraordinary, are to be reminded of the importance of proper hand-washing before and after distributing communion, and of proper technique to be used in distributing communion. This may be done in formation sessions or by written memo.
1. The person responsible for preparing the gifts before Mass is to be reminded to wash his or her hands carefully prior to touching the hosts and pouring the wine. If that person is ill, a substitute must be found.
 2. Parishes may have bottles of alcohol-based hand sanitizer available for communion ministers. For example, these may be placed in the front pews (or other discreet but convenient place) for Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion to use on their way to the sanctuary and after ministering communion.
 3. Ordinary Ministers are reminded to wash their hands properly before the beginning of Mass. In addition, a bottle of hand sanitizer may be placed at the credence table (or other discreet but convenient place) for the Ordinary Ministers to wash their hands after the Sign of Peace.
 4. Ministers are to use proper technique in distributing communion. For example:
 - i. Care must be taken not to touch the mouth, tongue, or teeth of a communicant choosing to receive communion on the tongue. If there is any significant accidental contact, ministers should change the hand with which they are distributing communion. If there is gross contamination, the minister is to wash his/her hands.
 - ii. It is the decision of the pastor whether or not Communion will be distributed under one or both species. The choice to receive from the Cup or to refrain from the Cup is a personal choice. The Church teaches that Christ is present, whole and entire, in either species. (CCC #1377)
 - iii. When ministering the Cup, ministers must take care to wipe both the inside and outside lip of the chalice, to turn the chalice before the next person receives, and to move the purificator for each wipe so the same location on the purificator is not used over and over.
 - iv. Ministers are reminded that self-intinction is not allowed.
 5. The person responsible for the care of the vessels after Mass is to ensure that they are properly cleaned. After being purified according to the rubrics, Mass vessels should be washed with hot, soapy water.
 6. Purificators are also to be laundered according to liturgical norms. After soaking in water (which is then poured into the *sacrarium*), the purificators are laundered normally. Hot water and laundry detergent may be used.
- B) While there has never been a documented case of an infectious disease being transmitted through the sharing of the Cup, the parishioners ought to be regularly reminded (in the bulletin, by announcement, or in formation sessions—such as RCIA, preparation for First Communion, or adult formation groups) that if one is ill he/she should stay home, or at least refrain from the Cup. They are also to be reminded that self-intinction is never allowed.
- C) For information about what the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops produced on this topic, please go to: <http://www.usccb.org/liturgy/swineflu.shtml> . There you will find “Ten Questions on Influenza/Swine Flu and the Liturgy.”

Ten Questions on Influenza/Swine Flu and the Liturgy

Throughout the years, the Committee on Divine Worship's Newsletter has addressed the liturgical implications of the transmission of pathogens on numerous occasions. With the swine flu virus appearing in the United States, the Secretariat of Divine Worship, having consulted with experts, offers the following brief reflections on "influenza/swine flu and the Liturgy."

1. What is swine flu influenza?
According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), "swine influenza (swine flu) is a disease of pigs caused by type A influenza viruses that causes regular outbreaks in pigs. People do not normally get swine flu, but human infections can and do happen. Swine flu viruses have been reported to spread from person-to-person, but in the past, this transmission was limited and not sustained beyond three people."
2. Why is there particular concern for the spread of swine flu at this moment?
Numerous cases of swine flu were recently confirmed in the United States. The CDC is presently monitoring this health issue and will give further guidance as the situation warrants.
3. What is the best way to prevent the transmission of the swine flu virus?
The CDC suggests that, "as with other infectious illnesses, one of the most important and appropriate preventive practices is careful and frequent hand hygiene. Cleaning your hands often using either soap and water or waterless alcohol-based hand sanitizers removes potentially infectious materials from your skin and helps prevent disease transmission."
4. How is the influenza virus transmitted?
According to the CDC, "influenza viruses are spread when a person who has the flu coughs, sneezes, or speaks and spreads virus into the air, and other people inhale the virus. When these viruses enter the nose, throat, or lungs of a person, they begin to multiply, causing symptoms of the flu."
5. Does transmission of the flu require direct contact between persons?
"The viruses can also be spread when a person touches a surface with flu viruses on it (for example, a door handle) and then touches his or her nose or mouth. A person who is sick with the flu can spread viruses – that means they are contagious. Adults may be contagious from one day before developing symptoms to up to seven days after getting sick. Children can be contagious for longer than seven days."
6. How can the spread of the influenza virus be prevented?
While the single best way to prevent the flu is to get vaccinated, the CDC does not know if the seasonal flu vaccine will protect against the swine flu virus. The CDC recommends these other ways to prevent the flu: "Avoid close contact with people who are sick. When you are sick, keep your distance from others to protect them from getting sick too; stay home when you are sick. If possible, stay home from work, school, and errands when you are sick. You will help prevent others from catching your illness; cover your mouth and nose. Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when coughing or sneezing. It may prevent those around you from getting sick; clean your hands. Washing your hands often will help protect you from germs. Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth. Germs are often spread when a person touches something that is contaminated with germs and then touches his or her eyes, nose, or mouth."
7. In previous years, what has the Church done in localities where the outbreak of Influenza is most significant?
In those localities where the outbreak of the disease has been the most significant, bishops have introduced several liturgical adaptations in regard to such practices as the distribution of Holy Communion and the exchange of the Sign of Peace in order to limit the spread of contagion.
8. What measures should be taken in Roman Catholic liturgies in the United States of America now?
Priests, deacons, and extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion should be especially reminded of the need to practice good hygiene. Ministers of Holy Communion should be encouraged to wash their hands before Mass begins, or even to use an alcohol based anti-bacterial solution before and after distributing Holy Communion. They should instruct people who feel ill not to receive from the cup.
9. What about further adaptations or the restriction of options at Mass?
The Diocesan Bishop should always be consulted regarding any changes or restriction of options in the celebration of Roman Catholic Liturgy. However, the need for the introduction of widespread liturgical adaptations for the prevention of the transmission of influenza in the dioceses of the United States of America is not evident at this time.
10. What is the Secretariat of Divine Worship doing to address this question?
The Secretariat will continue to closely monitor the situation and provide the best advice possible to Diocesan Bishops and their Offices for Worship. The Secretariat likewise appreciates whatever information Diocesan Offices for Worship are able to provide concerning local conditions and the pastoral responses developed by Diocesan Bishops. Continuously updated information is available from the CDC at www.CDC.gov/swineflu.