

The Church & flu

Keeping Well — Taking Care

Taking Care

The World Health Organisation has declared a pandemic (a worldwide epidemic) of H1N1 influenza, often called “swine ‘flu”. This is a new form of human flu and is circulating widely in some parts of the world, including parts of the UK. As members of the Church it is right that we take every reasonable care of each other’s well being. At the present time, for example, we should all take those precaution which help avoid spreading the influenza (‘flu) virus.

Remain Calm, it’s ‘flu

This is in most people a mild to moderate illness, and very few so far have become seriously ill or required hospital admission from it. The key thing is not to panic. Agencies in the UK have plans in place to deal with the pandemic.

Get informed, check www.direct.gov.uk/swineflu for more information or ring 0800 1 513 513 for the swine flu information line.

How the flu virus is transmitted

The virus is most easily spread when a person who has ‘flu coughs, sneezes, or even speaks. In these ways the virus is spread by them into the air. Once it is airborne the virus can easily be breathed in by other people. This can lead to the virus multiplying in them, and their contracting ‘flu also.

A secondary means of transmission occurs when a person touches a surface with flu viruses on it, (for example a door handle or tissues) and then touching his or her mouth.

Be Prepared

Government is advising everyone to be prepared. To prepare:

- always carry tissues—catching sneezes and coughs in a tissue could help limit the spread of the virus but you must bin it carefully, immediately after you do so, and wash your hands
- know your NHS number (this will be in NHS letters or prescriptions)
- keep up to date with the latest help and advice available through radio, TV and the internet – follow the links below for more advice on Directgov
- confirm your ‘flu friends’—these are friends and neighbours who can help you if you become ill; they could get your medication or food for you so that you don’t have to leave the house—this will help stop the virus from spreading
- have a two-week stock of food and other supplies in case you and your family are ill
- Making sure that you have an adequate amount of cold and cough remedies in your medicine cupboard in case you or your family are affected by swine flu

If you have ‘flu-like symptoms

If you have ‘flu-like symptoms (one or more of a temperature/fever, cough, runny nose, sore throat, headache, pains in your joints and limbs, diarrhoea or vomiting) and are concerned because you think you have been in contact with someone who may have swine flu:

- Stay at home
- Call NHS Direct on 0845 4647 (England and Wales) or NHS 24 on 08454 24 24 24 in Scotland
- For the latest updates on the swine flu outbreak go to www.direct.gov.uk/swineflu or www.nhs.uk

Remember, preventing the spread of germs through good hygiene is the single most effective way to slow the spread of diseases such as swine flu. You should always:

- Ensure everyone washes their hands regularly with soap and water
- Clean surfaces regularly to get rid of germs with a normal cleaning product
- Use tissues to cover your mouth and nose when you cough or sneeze
- Place used tissues in a bin as soon as possible

If you have been told you have this form of flu

- Stay home – this way you will help protect the general public from becoming ill also.
- Follow good hygiene practice at home as above
- Clean hard surfaces like door handles and remote controls frequently with a normal cleaning product. This way you will limit any likelihood of passing your illness on to members of your family, friends, or health professionals.
- Adults who have had ‘flu can still be contagious for as many as seven days after getting sick. Children can be contagious for longer.
- If you would like to be prayed for at Mass or if you would like to receive Holy Communion or other sacraments please ring the parish priest so that arrangements can be made.
- The obligation to take part in the celebration of Mass does not apply to those who are ill. But when they are able, they are encouraged to join with the Church in prayer by reading and pray with the scripture readings and prayers set for Mass. These can be found in a Sunday Missal. Alternatively a time of quiet prayer and reflection may be observed using any resources that seem suitable (eg *A Time of Prayer*, published by CTS)

Guidance for others

- Ensure that those who are ill are strongly encouraged to stay at home during their time of illness. It is for their good and for the good of others.
- Ensure that standard hygiene precautions are observed in the work place and at home. These include regular washing and drying of hands, and cleaning hard surfaces such as door handles that may have been touched by a person with a flu virus, using a normal cleaning product.

Influenza and the Church

It would be rare to need to do anything other than the sort of normal hygiene procedures outlined above. You should ask for, and follow, advice from a doctor or health professional if in any doubt.

If you have been told by your doctor that you are vulnerable to becoming very ill with ‘flu then you should follow their advice. This may mean that they advise you not to come to church during an outbreak of ‘flu, and not to receive Holy Communion on the tongue.

If you are a minister

- Follow the appropriate hygiene procedures outlined above.
- Follow the additional guidance provided in the Liturgy Office leaflet *Ministering with Care*
- Only in case of a grave outbreak of ‘flu, is there need for any change to the normal arrangements for the ministering of Holy Communion. In such a case instructions will be issued by your Bishop.

If you are another member of the community

- Pray for the sick and those who minister to them.
- Be aware of family, friends, and fellow parishioners who may become ill at this time, and do what you can to help them with any particular needs they may have
- Follow the basic hygiene precautions in order to help you yourself remain healthy and to avoid spreading illness or disease to others.
- Any guidance issued by the local public health authorities must be followed.

In illness, man experiences his powerlessness, his limitations, and his finitude. Every illness can make us glimpse death.

Illness can lead to anguish, self-absorption, sometimes even despair and revolt against God. It can also make a person more mature, helping him discern in his life what is not essential so that he can turn toward that which is. Very often illness provokes a search for God and a return to him.

Catechism of the Catholic Church 1500, 1501