

Ministering with Care

Good Hygiene & Sacramental Ministry

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.

It is important, for example, that in our sacramental ministry to the people of God we do what we can to take those precautions which help us avoid spreading the influenza virus.

Remain Calm, it’s ‘flu

We also need to remember to offer reassurance that the current form of swine flu 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.

As a minister you may be asked questions.

- Get informed, check www.direct.gov.uk/swineflu for more information or ring 0800 1 513 513 for the swine flu information line.
- Download the guide for ministering in the current pandemic from: <http://www.lancasterdiocese.org.uk/admin/Uploads/media/35/Sustaining%20Pastoral%20Presencev.4.5%5B1%5D.pdf>

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.

Simple precautions for ministers

Some simple precautions will help protect you and those you minister to

- Practice, and encourage everyone to practice good hygiene
 - Carry tissues and always sneeze or cough into them,
 - Dispose of them carefully
 - Wash your hands thoroughly with soap and water or gel frequently
 - Ensure frequent touch points in churches etc (door handles etc) are cleaned frequently with a normal cleaning product
 - Ensure before you celebrate a sacrament you wash your hands carefully

You may need to provide pastoral ministry to people who are ill with this form of ‘flu. Some simple precautions will be sufficient.

- **If you are visiting someone in hospital, follow carefully the instructions from staff**
- If you are visiting someone at home who has the ‘flu, you could consider asking the person to wear a facemask or they should sneeze or cough into a tissue
- Sit about 1.5 metres away from the person, ideally in a ventilated room
- If giving them communion, try to use a pyx and hosts only for them (perhaps visit them at the end of your visiting). Do not stay longer than an hour or so. If you are visiting large numbers of people with flu consider wearing gloves and a facemask (fresh pair for each visit.)
- Wash your hands and clean the pyx after administering communion with a normal cleaning product or hot water and soap
- Wash your hands after administering anointing or laying on of hands
- If you are anointing, open the vial, take some oil (on your thumb or a cotton bud) and close it before you touch the person with flu. Dispose of the cotton bud as you would a tissue.

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

Ministering to the sick and elderly

Some people are generally at higher risk than others of a flu being severe. People who are already ill from other conditions and the very old and very young are among them. While this 'flu may seem to be spreading most among younger people, we need to be prudent and protect the vulnerable. Ministers who use good hygiene will avoid being a source of infection of those vulnerable people.

If you are visiting in a residential or nursing home, ask for advice from the staff on infection control. If you have 'flu like symptoms, it is a good idea to get someone else to minister to vulnerable people.

Schools

Currently the virus is spreading easily in schools. This may mean local schools have an outbreak or may sometimes even need to be closed for a period of 7 days to slow spread of the virus. This has already happened in some parts of the UK and is done on the basis of advice from public health professionals. If you have a parish school the Head Teacher should notify any absences to the Health Protection Agency or Wales Health Protection Service using the usual number. You can find information for schools on infection control and other issues here:

- <http://www.teachernet.gov.uk/emergencies/planning/flu/pandemic/>

Care Homes, Nursing Homes and Social Care Provision

If you are a parish or religious community or church organisation which provides any form of residential, institutional or social care you should follow carefully the Department of Health guidance on infection control and on social care. This can be found here

- **Social Care Guidance** : http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publicationsandstatistics/Publications/PublicationsPolicyAndGuidance/DH_093380
- **Infection Control Guidance**: http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/PublicHealth/Flu/PandemicFlu/DH_085433

What About Parish/Church Staff?

You can find a useful guide for employers here: www.businesslink.gov.uk

The Mass

There is no need yet to suspend masses, stop the sign of peace, prevent communion under both kinds or take any kind of special measures. If and when the time comes for this, further guidance will be issued. If you do have a large outbreak in your parish (e.g. many persons ill, your parish school closed and many children and parents ill)

then you should:

- Ask people who have symptoms to stay at home until they have recovered and have finished their treatment
- Ensure touchpoints (door handles, collection plates) are cleaned frequently with a normal cleaning product
- Take any advice from health professionals

The current UK advice is that people who are close contacts (living in same house) of those with 'flu but do not themselves have symptoms should go about their normal business.

The Sunday obligation

Do advise people who are ill that they should stay at home and should not try to come to Mass. The obligation to take part in the celebration of Mass does not apply to those who are ill. It may be helpful to encourage them, if they are able, to join with the Church by praying at home at the time they would normally attend Mass. They can do this by reading and praying with the scripture readings and prayers set for Mass (perhaps you could post people in advance the missalettes.) Alternatively, a quiet time of prayer and reflection may be observed using any resources that seem suitable (e.g. *A time of prayer*, published by CTS.)

Pilgrimages

If you are considering an overseas pilgrimage then consult the Foreign Office website for information on travel and swine flu.

- <http://www.fco.gov.uk/en/travelling-and-living-overseas/swine-flu>



Any guidance issued by the local public health authorities must be followed.

**Liturgy
Office**
ENGLAND
& WALES

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