

H1N1 and Seasonal Flu Viruses and Liturgical Celebrations – Version 2

Along with the recommendations of the Center for Disease Control, the Virginia Health Department, and the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (see below), the Diocese of Richmond strongly recommends that the following precautionary measures be taken at liturgical celebrations.

The H1N1 virus (swine flu) as well as seasonal flu viruses are transmitted by airborne droplets and by contact. Those who are sick should not attend Mass or other large gatherings. If they do, they should follow the guidelines below, and also refrain from sharing in the cup. To miss Mass when one is ill is never a sin.

- Hospitality Ministers (Greeters and Ushers) should be encouraged to carefully wash their hands and/or use hand sanitizer before and after their ministries of greeting others, taking up the collection, and passing out programs and bulletins.
- Sacristans should take similar precautions in their preparations for liturgy as well as in the care of vessels and linen after Mass.
- Altar servers should wash their hands before Mass.
- All ministers of the altar should take the same precautions.
- In lieu of a handshake at the Sign of Peace at Mass, people may smile or make a small bow of the head to others as a sign of reverence.
- In lieu of holding hands at the Lord's Prayer, people may pray with hands folded, or extended or raised in the traditional posture known as the *orans* gesture.
- No handshakes should be exchanged when the gifts are received.
- Holy water fonts should be regularly cleaned and the water replaced.
- An announcement about the requested changes should be made before Mass begins.
- Because not everyone is present at the beginning of Mass, it will be important to include a comment about these temporary changes during the homily and/or after the Great Amen and before reciting the Our Father.

Holy Communion:

- Ordinary (priests and deacons) and extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion should "wash" their hands before and after distributing. Parishes may choose to do any of the following:
 - provide individual antibacterial hand wipes to each minister, and/or
 - provide a small pump of antibacterial gel or foam at the credence table, where all ministers will go to clean their hands before gathering around the altar
- When offering the Cup, ministers must unfold the purificator, take care to wipe both the inside and outside lip of the chalice, to turn it before the next person receives, and to move the purificator for each wipe so the same location is not used over and over.
- If non-communicants come forward for a blessing, this should be given without touching them.
- Accommodations should be made for those with special needs, e.g. those with Celiac-Sprue Disease may need to receive from a separate Cup
- While not yet mandated, it may eventually be necessary to temporarily eliminate reception of Holy Communion on the tongue and from the cup.

Parishes are urged to ensure that diocesan-trained and recognized lay leaders of prayer are available. In case of emergency, they may be called upon to lead Sunday Celebrations in the Absence of a Priest or other liturgical rites.

The U.S. Bishops' Committee on Divine Worship has posted on the Web a series of 10 questions and answers related to participation at Mass during the time of the swine influenza (swine flu).

<http://usccb.org/liturgy/swineflu.shtml>

See also the state & federal government sites, in English & Spanish:

www.vdh.state.va.us/flu/flutoolkit

<http://www.pandemicflu.gov/plan/community/faithcomchecklist.html>