

Preparing for Pandemic Influenza and Other Influenza Outbreaks

Recovery

It will take a while for things to get back to normal. We will make changes slowly and with the advice of public health officials.

H1N1 Flu Tips

The H1N1Flu virus appears to spread from one person to another just like the seasonal flu. This virus is spread by germs from coughing and sneezing or germs on your hands. As with seasonal flu, individuals and families can do several simple things to prevent infection and stop the spread of disease.



Wash your hands often with soap and warm water. Use hand sanitizer when soap and water are not available.



Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when coughing or sneezing. If you have no tissue handy, cough or sneeze into your upper sleeve.



Avoid close contact with people who are sick. Stay home from work, school, and errands when you are sick (for example avoid church, malls, restaurants)



The single best way to prevent the flu is to get a seasonal flu shot. Seasonal flu vaccine will not protect against H1N1 Flu. The H1N1 Flu vaccine will be given as a separate shot when it becomes available.



The Flu, Your Parish, and You...

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Diocese of Pensacola-Tallahassee
11 North B Street
Pensacola, Florida 32502
850-435-3500 – www.ptdiocese.org

The Flu, Your Parish, and You...

This year we are faced with a special challenge. As flu season approaches, not only do we have to be concerned about the regular (or “seasonal”) flu, but we also need to be concerned about H1N1, a new form of the flu. Because this is a new flu virus, almost all of us will be able to catch it. Therefore, it is important that we prepare for this year’s flu season carefully — not only as individuals and families, but as parishes as well.

The Diocese of Pensacola-Tallahassee has put together a policy to help parishes and schools make certain changes in the way they do things, depending on how the flu is spreading and how severe the flu is in people. We talk about Remote Preparation, Immediate Preparation, Response to Threat (in four steps), and Recovery.

Here are some important points for you to know about each part:

Remote Preparation

During this time, parishes need to be encouraging good hygiene (including washing of hands by Communion ministers before and after distributing Communion) and reminding everyone to stay home if they get sick. Please remember: if you are sick, you do not have the obligation to go to Mass.

Immediate Preparation

When it looks as if an outbreak is going to happen, parishes need to make sure that they have made all their plans for a flu outbreak. They also need to make sure that they have the supplies that they need on hand.

Response to Threat

Our response to an outbreak includes four steps:

Step 1

Once an outbreak begins, parishes need to keep reminding people about cough and sneeze etiquette, good hand washing, and to stay at home if sick. You may also notice bulletin inserts describing what is going on and what might happen if the outbreak becomes more serious. You should be ready for the chance that the schools might be closed and/or programs cancelled.

Step 2

If things get worse, we would reinforce that all sick individuals (including clergy, staff and volunteers) need to stay home. Your parish, if it has not already done so, should set up hand washing stations. The biggest things will come at Mass:

- If you are sick, please stay home. Notify the parish and we will bring communion to you, if possible.
- Communion may not be distributed from the cup.
- Communion may not be distributed on the tongue.
- The Sign of Peace will not be shared with a handshake, rather a bow of the head will be used.
- The priest(s) and other ministers will not be shaking hands in greeting before or after mass.
- Hand sanitizer will be made available for your use.
- We will be changing the holy water fonts at least daily as well as after each Mass.

Step 3

If things become more severe, we will make the following changes:

- Collection baskets will not be passed through the congregation instead baskets will be made available near the doors for your use or baskets on poles used by the ushers will be used.
- Hymnals and missalettes will not be used.
- A distance of about 3 to 6 feet should be maintained between priest and penitent for the sacrament of confession. The use of the confessional ‘box’ will be discontinued if warranted by an outbreak.
- Holy water fonts will be emptied.
- There will be no large group baptisms, weddings, or funerals.
- Children’s Liturgy of the Word and after Mass refreshments will be discontinued.

Step 4

Finally, it may be necessary to cancel Mass altogether.

Please note: All throughout an outbreak, we will have updates and instructions in our bulletin. You should also visit the diocesan website at www.ptdiocese.org for more information.