

Concerns About Contagious Diseases in Churches: Care to Help Ensure Good Health

With the regular flu season upon us, and increasing concerns about the possible spread of the COVID-19 coronavirus, the Diocese wishes to remind everyone about mindful practices for hygiene to minimize the risk of contagious diseases in churches. Here are some simple things you can do to help everyone:

Wash your hands frequently. Provide plenty of soap and paper towels in restrooms and kitchens.

To the extent possible, churches should make hand-sanitizers available. Sanitize hands before and after contact with others. Place containers of hand sanitizer in the pews, near doors, and beside tissue boxes to be used when hand washing is not possible.

If you are not feeling well (even a little bit), stay home. You are not helping any one by arriving at church with a cold or the flu to tough it out. Clergy or lay ministers can bring the sacraments to shut-ins and/or provide pastoral care by phone as appropriate. Substitutes can be found for Sunday ministries.

The Peace — respectful acknowledgment of each other with no physical contact. Parishioners who are coughing or sneezing should refrain from handshaking during the Peace. Bowing to each other, friendly waves, and peace signs are all perfectly acceptable substitutes for handshakes and hugs.

Make sure the Holy Eucharist is offered by individuals who have cleaned their hands (and used hand sanitizer). Ask the altar guild to clean handrails and the altar rail before and after each service.

Avoid intinction — the dipping of the bread into the wine — even by celebrants or communion-administrators. Intinction is not a sanitary substitute for drinking from the chalice. Intinction risks possibly unclean hands being dipped in the wine and is thus an infection transmission route. It also creates risk for those with certain allergies.

The shared communion cup. There is little evidence of risk of disease associated with the shared communion cup, but each parishioner must make up their own minds about its use.

The receiving line following the service should include conversation, but with no physical contact.

Coffee Hour. All effort should be made to minimize the touching of food or beverages. Food should be served by individuals who have washed their hands, put on serving

gloves, and are using tongs. Beverages should be served by individuals who have washed their hands and are wearing gloves. Either paper plates and napkins or a dishwasher with a water temperature setting hot enough to kill germs should be used for cleanup.

It's not too late to get your flu shot. While many are worried about the COVID19 virus spreading, this is already a bad flu season. If people have not gotten a flu vaccine, there's still time before the expected second wave of seasonal flu infections.

Best hygiene practice should continue to be observed in all pastoral contacts.

Additional information and links may be found on the Episcopal Relief & Development web page, **["Faith-Based Response to Epidemics."](#)**