

**Guidance and Instructions for Clergy
and Parish Leadership
Relating to the H1N1 Virus**

**Diocese of Central Newfoundland
Anglican Church of Canada**

Some material in this item is from the Newfoundland and Labrador Provincial Department of Health, some from the Federal Department of Health and some taken, with permission, from the Diocese of Leicester of the Church of England.

Introduction

This communication is intended first to raise awareness, and then to offer some suggestions as to how we may deal, immediately, in our local parishes with issues around the H1N1 virus and finally to outline what we might need to do as a Diocese in the future.

In the past number of weeks I have been asked about how our Church may deal with the H1N1 Virus and last week there was an item on the Local News concerning some measures another denomination has taken. We do not wish to over react, and raise unwarranted concerns. Nevertheless, we need to be aware:

- of our people's concerns,
- of the possible role that some of our pastoral and liturgical practices may have in spreading the virus,
- of what we might do to answer concerns and prevent possible infections.

From the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador

Information on H1N1 Influenza Virus (Human Swine Influenza)

Updated Monday, August 3, 2009

The Department of Health and Community Services would like to notify the public of the latest information pertaining to H1N1 Influenza. There have been two hospitalized cases in Newfoundland and Labrador. This case is included in the current total of 76 confirmed cases in the province.

The number of confirmed cases will now be updated every Monday by 3 p.m. NL time. As in other Canadian jurisdictions, additional cases are anticipated over the summer months and into the fall flu season. Public advisories will be issued as necessary.

The department is working with the PHAC and other provinces and territories to closely monitor the situation. Heightened surveillance protocols are in place across the province.

Prevention is the best approach to protect against influenza. Individuals are advised to take precautions around general hygiene and public health.

Clean, Cover and Contain is the recommended approach.

Clean: wash hands regularly with soap and water or hand sanitizer.

Cover: use a tissue or arm to cover coughs and sneezes as opposed to the hands which frequently touch other surfaces and people.

Contain: stay at home so that the illness is not spread to others.

Individuals with influenza-like symptoms should stay home to minimize contact with others and to treat the symptoms of the illness. If symptoms worsen or if there are other health concerns, call a health care professional. A doctor will determine what, if any, testing or treatment may be required.

For current travel notifications and information on precautionary measures visit the Public Health Agency of Canada website

A toll-free public information line is also available Monday – Friday from 8:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m. ET. The number is: 1-800-454-8302.

Residents of Newfoundland and Labrador can also contact the Newfoundland and Labrador Healthline at 1-888-709-2929.

Background

On June 11th 2009 the World Health Organization declared a worldwide epidemic, or **pandemic**, of H1N1 influenza (commonly called Swine Flu), after sustained human to human transmission. H1N1 Flu Virus has been reported around the world, and the World Health Organization (WHO) has declared it a pandemic influenza virus. Governments around the world and the World Health Organization are engaged to investigate and address this situation. The Public Health Agency of Canada continues to work with federal, provincial and international governments to address this situation, and will share more information with Canadians as it becomes available.

Pastoral/ Liturgical Precautions

During this pandemic, the pastoral ministry of the Church plays an integral role in the community and we need to be sensitive to the community

Parishes will want to monitor the level of infection in their locality. In a congregation or parish where there appears to be increased levels of infection and/or grave concern, a clergy, in consultation with Wardens and Parish leadership, with the Regional Dean and members of the Deanery Chapter, as well as with Synod Office may want to make temporary changes to liturgical practice to including some of those listed below. Clergy should be aware of the implications of such changes and attempt to ensure they are made for the minimal time period needed. This is to say, clergy should not act alone, but carefully, in consultation with your parish leadership and your colleagues in nearby parishes.

Where changes are made, the Bishop must be informed.

In the meantime, clergy should take sensible precautions by:

1. When visiting institutions clergy and lay visitors are required to carefully follow the procedures for hand washing and other practices which are in effect for staff in Hospitals and Care facilities, to deal with the H1N1 Virus.
2. Hand washing frequently, while performing parish visits, or by proper use of a suitable alcohol based hand sanitiser between visits.
3. At the Eucharist, proper use of a suitable, alcohol based hand sanitiser, before the Prayer of Consecration, by those distributing communion.
3. Staying home when you have flu like symptoms.
4. Becoming aware of and following the guidelines outlined for the public by both the Provincial and Federal Health officials

IF INFECTIONS INCREASE

The Bishop may, **at a future stage**, issue instructions that will affect liturgical and pastoral practice in all churches and parishes in the diocese for a temporary period.

These Instructions may include some, or, all of the following:

1. Sharing of the peace – request that the peace should be spoken only and not involve shaking of hands or physical contact.
2. Distribution of Holy Communion - from one kind (bread) only, or, if preferred, from intincted wafers (prepared from a cup that no-one has used). In this event the sharing of common vessels at the Eucharist would cease, while this instruction was in effect. As well, wafers should be placed in the hand, not on the tongue, taking care not to touch the communicant's hand.

There is an understanding, not uncommon, in our Church, that it is not possible to transmit germs through alcohol in a common cup. Nevertheless, medical advice is very clear, and normal concern very real. In the event of increasing infections we would err on the side of caution.

It would be noted that during this period of time the person presiding would consecrate in both kinds but only the person presiding would consume the wine.

Conclusion

In concluding, at this moment there does not seem to be a serious outbreak of H1N1 Virus in the various areas of this Diocese. Nevertheless, we need to be aware of what is happening. If there is widespread concern in your parish or among persons at risk, you may decide to take action. This action may be education and awareness raising around the Provincial “ **Clean, Cover, Contain**” Campaign by downloading posters, making announcements, and increasing the awareness of hand washing, particularly among Eucharistic Assistants. Where there are increased infections or grave concern, your action may extend to not shaking hands at the Peace, to encouraging the elderly, those with compromised immune systems, pregnant women etc., to receive “in one kind”. In moving to this level of concern I would ask that action be taken in consultation with the Bishop, with your lay leadership and with colleagues in nearby parishes

If the situation does indeed worsen, and infections spread, the Bishop may well have to issue instructions as outline above. Such instructions would be implemented in consultation with the parishes, as well as with the other two Dioceses in Newfoundland and Labrador. However, in the meantime, take reasonable care and keep informed by checking the NL Government website.

Finally, if you have concerns please call Synod Office to speak with Perry or me.

+David
Bishop of Central Newfoundland