

30 April 2009: U.N.'s World Health Organization (WHO) Raises Pandemic Alert Level to Phase 5

According to the WHO, "Phase 5 is characterized by human-to-human spread of the virus into at least two countries in one WHO region. While most countries will not be affected at this stage, the declaration of Phase 5 is a strong signal that a pandemic is imminent and that the time to finalize the organization, communication, and implementation of the planned mitigation measures is short."

In addition, with the report of one confirmed and one suspected case of H1N1 influenza in central Minnesota, it is possible that the Diocese will be asking parishes to implement some precautionary actions. We will keep you informed. Pastors and other administrators are advised to act on their best prudential judgements without giving the appearance of panic.

In the meantime, the following commonsense practices with regard to the Liturgy should be kept in mind:

a) While there has never been a documented case of an infectious disease being transmitted through the sharing of the Cup, the congregation ought to be regularly reminded (in the bulletin, by announcement, or in formation sessions—such as RCIA, preparation for First Communion, or adult formation groups) that if one is ill with a fever he or she should stay home, or at least refrain from the Cup, out of concern for fellow worshippers.

b) All ministers of communion, ordinary and extraordinary, are to be reminded of the importance of proper hand-washing before and after distributing communion, and of proper technique to be used in distributing communion.

1. The person responsible for preparing the gifts of bread and wine before Mass is to be reminded to carefully wash his or her hands prior to touching the hosts and pouring the wine. If ill, a substitute should be found.
2. Ordinary ministers are reminded to wash their hands properly before the beginning of Mass.
3. Ministers are to use proper technique in distributing communion. For example:
 - i. Care must be taken not to touch the mouth, tongue, or teeth of a communicant wishing to receive communion on the tongue. If there is any significant accidental contact, ministers should change the hand with which they are distributing communion.
 - ii. When ministering the Cup, ministers must take care to wipe both the inside and outside lip of the chalice, and to turn the chalice before the next person receives, and to move the purificator for each wipe so the same location on the purificator is not used over and over.
 - iii. Ministers are reminded that self-intinction by the communicant is not allowed.
 - iv. The person responsible for the care of the vessels after Mass is to ensure that they are properly cleaned. After being purified, Mass vessels should be washed with hot, soapy water.
 - v. Purificators are also to be laundered according to liturgical norms. After soaking in water (which is then poured into the *sacrarium*), the purificators are laundered normally. Hot water and laundry detergent should be used.

Sunday Obligation:

The obligation to attend Mass on Sunday other Holy Days of Obligation, (canon 1247) is the ordinary expectation of Catholics. Obviously, extraordinary circumstances such as sickness, travel, or severe weather can excuse the faithful from this obligation. If you are not feeling well, especially during this time of concern, please stay at home and do not risk spreading infection to others. If you have a vulnerable or compromised immune system, you are to use your own best judgement about whether to attend Mass.

Reception of Holy Communion:

While it is the teaching of the Church that the fullness of the Body and Blood of Christ are contained in the Holy Eucharist under the form of the consecrated Host and under the form of the Blood of Christ, we believe that one receives the whole Christ under one form only. It is strongly suggested that if you are feeling sick, (and still come to Mass) please receive communion in the hand, and refrain from receiving communion under the form of the Blood of Christ.