



National Council of Churches H1N1 (Swine Flu) and Seasonal Flu Best Practices for Congregations

Beloved, I wish above all things that you may prosper and be in health...3 John 1:2a NRSV

Pastors and congregational leaders can play an important role as we move more fully into flu season. Health officials advise extra precautions with the prospect of both seasonal flu and the H1N1 flu virus (swine flu) upon us.

Pastors and congregational leaders might take the time now to talk with custodial staff, secretarial staff, and governing boards about:

- ordering and stocking extra hygiene supplies, including facial tissues, hand soap, paper towels, alcohol-based hand sanitizers, antibacterial cleaning supplies, and additional waste receptacles with closed lids.
- checking that hand washing facilities, either sinks with soap and water or hand sanitizer dispensers, are adequate and working properly.
- cleaning frequently restrooms, handrails, doorknobs, bathroom sink taps, flush toilet handles, and all surface areas touched by many people.
- removing candy dishes or filling candy dishes with individually wrapped candies.
- contacting local public health officials to obtain local information regarding meeting cancelation, seasonal and H1N1 flu immunization availability, as well as treatment options and locations.
- planning for cancelation of worship, nursery schools, daycare centers, senior centers, or other congregational activities when health officials call for a limitation of public gatherings.
- posting church plan in the event of the need for worship service cancelation and including this information in worship bulletin, church newsletter, church email, and community newspapers.
- setting up phone trees, email alerts, text messages, public television and radio announcements for effective communication about congregational cancellations and/or postponements of events and activities.
- explaining in worship services and congregational events the new plans, precautions, and practices in response to the H1N1 flu virus and seasonal flu in a calm and reassuring manner.
- meeting with child care staff and youth group leaders, including leaders of scouting groups, to review expectations about hygiene and meeting cancelation practices.



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Hygiene Practices

- Prevent the spread of germs and protect the vulnerable members of the congregation, especially pregnant women and those with underlying chronic medical conditions, by encouraging the sick to stay home until they have been without fever for twenty-four hours.
- Practice cough and sneeze etiquette. Cover nose and mouth with a facial tissue; cough and sneeze into sleeve; make available boxes of facial tissues on tables, in classrooms, and at Coffee Hour.
- Throw the facial tissue into a waste receptacle after you use it; ensure that waste receptacles are located throughout the building; empty waste receptacles frequently.
- Wash hands often with soap and water, especially after coughing or sneezing. Use soap and water for 15 to 20 seconds to wash hands or use alcohol-based hand sanitizer.

Worship Practices

- Follow public health advice on cancellations of public gatherings and avoiding crowds to evaluate whether to cancel worship services.
- Pass the Peace with a simple nod of acknowledgement. Make and maintain eye contact while speaking the words, “the peace of Christ,” without the social ritual of a handshake.
- Suspend use of the common cup and the practice of “intinction” when celebrating communion. Use plastic disposable communion cups or wash glass cups in very hot water over 110-115 degrees with detergent.
- Encourage celebrants to use hand sanitizers before serving communion.
- Wash hands before anointing with oil or the laying on of hands and repeat the practice after the rite is completed.

Visitation Practices

- Check on vulnerable individuals within the community, especially the elderly, infirmed, shut-in, physically and mentally disabled, and those who live alone.
- Follow all hospital infection control protocols. Do not visit hospitals or personal care homes if experiencing symptoms of influenza.

For more information visit <http://www.cdc.gov/H1N1FLU/> or The National Council of Churches Health Task Force www.health-ministries.org.

Encourage all people to get immunizations for BOTH the seasonal flu and the H1N1 flu virus (swine flu).