

Guidance for Churches on Swine Flu July 2009

Introduction

In a pandemic situation of swine flu, churches need to take care to ensure that their services and activities do not contribute to the spread of the virus.

The Government has written specific guidance on these issues for faith communities which can be found at www.communities.gov.uk/publications/communities/influenzapandemic

Information on this site will be updated as the situation changes, so needs to be checked for changes to this guidance. Please note that this advice only applies to a pandemic situation. At the moment churches need to have plans in place, but no other action is needed at present.

Planning needs to centre on

1. Preventing the spread of the virus
2. Protecting those who contract the virus
3. Preserving core services during a pandemic

Government Guidance	Considerations for Churches
Prevention	
The virus is spread by droplets through sneezing and coughing It is transferred person to person by personal contact, or by contact with surfaces	Educate church congregation with 'Catch It, Bin It, Kill It' advice (see NHS website)
	Have boxes of tissues available around the church
	Have bins placed in obvious places. Possibly increase number of visible bins on premises
	Advise anyone with symptoms (see box below) to stay at home and minimize contact with others until symptoms have resolved
	Ensure good handwashing facilities available, with good supply of soap and disposable towels
	Consider having hand gel around the building for use by the congregation
	Advise parents to keep symptomatic children away from crèche, Sunday School, Children's Clubs, etc
Protection	
Protection of people who contract the virus or are more vulnerable to the virus	Encourage pastoral care teams to set up 'Flu Friends' system for people in the church and community. Especially consider care for people living on their own and have plans in place before needed
	When pastoral visiting, ensure good hand washing and / or carry hand gel

	Tell pastoral visitors to avoid taking objects, such as bags, phones, pens, etc, from home to home
Preserving Core Services	
The government is unlikely to ban church services due to the wide spread virus in the community	Have plans in place within church to run services incase leader(s) are unwell
	Churches may want to consider hand shaking or sharing the peace. (Government advice says this is inadvisable.)
	Review practices around communion.
	Bread: bread should only be touched by the server. Consider introduction of hand washing or hand gel for servers before serving. If one loaf used, server to break of bread and place in receivers hand, taking care not to touch receivers hands
	Wine: The shared cup ought not to be used in a pandemic. Consider individual cups (possibly disposable cups). Consider 'administration of sacrament in one kind only'. Sealed pre-prepared communion cups with wafer included are available on internet.
Funeral and bereavement services need to be considered by church leadership teams	Leadership team discussions need to consider this in local context
Core / essential Services in society may need support to keep running	Encourage church volunteers to participate in wider community services Use community links the church has, or consider building new ones in advance of this being needed

The Faith Communities and Pandemic Flu: Guidance for faith communities and local influenza pandemic committees booklet, (download from www.communities.gov.uk/publications/communities/influenzapandemic) contains full details and also a checklist for faith communities which enables churches to plan for the impact of a pandemic on the organisation and mission. This includes consideration of potential impact of a pandemic on outside resources that the church depends on to deliver its services, such as bank, suppliers, etc.

The typical swine flu symptoms are:

- Sudden fever (a high body temperature of over 38°C or 100.4F)
- Sudden cough
- Shortness of breath

Other symptoms may include:

- Headache
- Tiredness
- Chills
- Aching muscles
- Limb or joint pain
- Diarrhoea or stomach upset
- Sore throat
- Runny nose
- Sneezing
- Loss of appetite

Possible article for church newsletter

Swine Flu and You!

What is Swine Flu?

Swine flu is a respiratory disease. Flu viruses are made up of tiny particles that can be spread through the droplets that come out of your nose and mouth when you cough or sneeze.

How is it spread?

When you cough or sneeze without covering your nose and mouth with a tissue, those droplets can spread and others will be at risk of breathing them in.

If you cough or sneeze into your hand, those droplets and the germs in them are then easily spread from your hand to any hard surfaces that you touch, and they can live on those surfaces for some time.

Everyday items such as door handles, computer keyboards, mobile and ordinary phones and the TV remote control are all common surfaces where flu viruses can be found. If other people touch these surfaces and then touch their faces, the germs can enter their systems and they can become infected. That's how all cold and flu viruses, including swine flu, are passed on from person to person.

What can you do to reduce the spread of swine flu?

Always carry tissues. Don't use handkerchiefs. Use clean tissues to cover your mouth and nose when you cough and sneeze. **'Catch It'** Bin the tissues after one use. **'Bin It'** If you put the used tissue back in your pocket or bag, it will contaminate your pocket / bag, which will recontaminate your hands. Wash your hands with soap and hot water or a sanitiser gel often. **'Kill It'**

How do you know if you have got Swine Flu?

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- Sore throat
- Runny nose
- Sneezing
- Loss of appetite

What do you do if you have Swine Flu?

If you have these symptoms stay at home. Rest and take paracetamol or other cold and flu medicines. Always follow the guidance on the medicine package to ensure it is the right medicine for you and that you are taking it correctly. You should feel better in a few days. If you have another health problem or are pregnant, phone your GP for advice.

What else can you do?

Set up a network of 'flu friends', or people who can help you if you get ill. They could collect medicines, food and other supplies for you, so that you don't have to leave home if you are ill. Let someone in the church know you are unwell, and what help you need.

Do not go into your GP surgery or local accident and emergency department unless you are advised to do so or you are seriously ill, because you might spread the illness to others. Ask a flu friend to go out for you.

For more information call the Swine Flu Information Line on [0800 1513 100](tel:08001513100) to hear the latest advice.

In the church we are reviewing and changing some of our practices. You will notice tissues, bins and hand gels around. We will also change communion during the pandemic and you will be given bread and use an individual cup.

And Finally..... People are understandably worried about swine flu. Remember 'Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus'. Philippians 4:6-7