



INFLUENZA AND THE SACRED LITURGY

Questions and Answers • A Common Sense Approach

DIOCESE OF HARRISBURG

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How is the influenza virus transmitted?

According to the Center for Disease Control, influenza viruses are spread when a person who has the flu coughs, sneezes, or speaks and spreads the virus into the air and other people inhale the virus. When these viruses enter the nose, throat, or lungs of a person, they begin to multiply, causing symptoms of the flu.

What is the best way to prevent the transmission of the influenza virus?

According to the Centers for Disease Control, as with other infectious illnesses, one of the most important and appropriate preventive practices is careful and frequent hand hygiene. Cleaning your hands often using either soap and water or waterless alcohol-based hand sanitizers removes potentially infectious materials from your skin and helps prevent disease transmission.

How can the spread of the influenza virus be prevented?

When you are sick, help prevent others from getting sick too by observing the following.

- Keep your distance from others.
- If possible, stay home from work, school, and errands.
- Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when coughing or sneezing.
- Wash your hands often to help protect you from germs.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth.

If you are very sick or know that you have an easily communicable disease you are not bound by the obligation to participate in Mass on Sunday. Stay at home and return to church when you are well. (For longer illnesses, contact the parish office so that arrangements can be made to have someone visit you with Holy Communion.)

What about the Sign of Peace?

This is a time to express our peace in Jesus Christ before we share the communion of his Body and Blood. Remember that there is no single gesture required for this sign. Some may prefer to shake hands, to offer an embrace, to place a hand on another's shoulder, or to offer a simple bow. (Perhaps the best option during cold/flu season.) While the sign of peace is being given, one may say "The peace of the Lord be with you always" to which the response is "Amen".

What about receiving the Precious Blood?

Common sense tells us that if you are sick, don't go to the cup.

What should Ministers of Holy Communion (Ordinary and Extraordinary) be doing to help?

- Be especially careful to follow the above practices. Be alert to even the appearance of unhygienic practices. It sets a good example for others and shows that you are conscientious about your role on their behalf.
- After arriving at church and before the start of Mass, wash your hands well with soap and warm water. Dry them with a clean towel.
- When folding your hands, don't raise them up to touch your face.
- As you yourself receive Communion be careful not to get saliva on your fingers.
- In distributing the sacred host, carefully avoid direct contact between your fingers and the hand or tongue of the communicant.
- In Communion from the chalice, be sure to wipe both the inside and outside of the chalice's rim after each communicant. (Use thumb and forefinger through the purificator to "press" against both sides.) Then turn the cup a bit for the next communicant. Also, remember to keep shifting the purificator so that you are not wiping with the same part of the cloth over and over again.
- After the chalices have been purified, they should be carefully cleaned with anti-bacterial soap and warm water then dried with clean towels (or fresh purificators).
- Each year, the Office of Worship continues to closely monitor the situation and provide the best advice possible to our parishes, schools, and apostolates.