



*Office of the Bishop
Diocese of St. Cloud*

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Reverend and dear Fathers, Deacons, Religious Superiors, Chaplains, and Parish Nurses:

Last May, I sent you a letter regarding the H1N1 Novel Virus and recommended that common sense health precautions be followed, as recommended by the Centers for Disease Control. Now, as we see a rise in infection rates, I want to be proactive in reminding you to take efforts to minimize the possibility of infection and spread of H1N1 in our parishes and institutions. Vaccines for the H1N1 Novel Virus are expected to start arriving in Minnesota in later October or early November for high-risk populations; vaccination for the general public would be available soon afterwards. This means prevention is our highest priority right now.

The H1N1 Novel Virus is transmitted through the coughing or sneezing of infected people. This can happen either directly or through contact with contaminated surfaces for up to several hours. Young people (infants through age 25) and pregnant women are especially susceptible to this virus. Please avoid touching eyes, nose, or mouth after coming in contact with sick persons or possibly contaminated surfaces and observe the following precautions:

1. **Cover your coughs and sneezes.** Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when coughing or sneezing. This helps to prevent those around you from getting sick.
2. **Clean your hands.** Washing your hands thoroughly (20 seconds) with soap and water often will help protect you from germs.
3. **Stay home when you are sick.** Stay home from work, school, and errands when you are sick, and keep sick children at home as well. You will help prevent others from catching your illness.
4. **Avoid close contact.** Avoid close contact with people who are sick. When you are sick, keep your distance from others to protect them from getting sick too.
5. **Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth.** Germs are often spread when a person touches something that is contaminated with germs and then touches his or her eyes, nose, or mouth.
6. **Practice other good health habits.** Get plenty of sleep, be physically active, manage your stress, drink plenty of fluids, and eat nutritious food.

For faith communities I make the following recommendations, effective immediately:

1. In accordance with the advice from the Minnesota Department of Health, I am asking parishes, schools, and institutions of the Diocese not to offer the common Cup for Communion at this time. Provisions should be made for those with celiac disease who cannot receive the Host, perhaps consecrating a small chalice for their Communion. Priest celebrants and concelebrants and assisting deacons will continue to receive under both forms, per liturgical norms. Deacons, extraordinary ministers of the Eucharist, and the lay faithful will not be offered the Cup. Not only is there risk of infection from contact with saliva, but also from handing the Cup from person to person.
2. Communion in the hand is better hygiene in this situation; however, Communion is not to be denied to those who choose to receive on the tongue. If the situation worsens, these suggestions will be revised. Other liturgies such as First Communions and Confirmations should follow these suggestions as well.
3. Because viruses are transmitted by contact, a verbal exchange at the Sign of Peace is appropriate under these circumstances. The priest or deacon may either omit the invitation: "Let us offer one another the Sign of Peace" or specify a manner of exchange in the invitation, such as: "Let us offer a verbal sign of peace."
4. Holding hands during the Lord's Prayer is to be excluded.
5. Priests, Deacons, Extraordinary Ministers, Sacristans, Greeters and Ushers are to exercise good hand hygiene, i.e., washing hands with soap and water before and after the liturgy. In particular those distributing Communion should use hand sanitizer before and after Communion. Boxes of tissue and additional hand sanitizer are to be provided in the gathering spaces, restrooms, kitchens or church entrances for those who wish to use them.
6. An announcement should be made at the beginning of Mass regarding these precautions and reminders given prior to the Sign of Peace and distribution of Communion. If you have a website, please post this information as soon as possible.
7. To reduce the transmission of the virus, clean bathrooms more frequently. Disinfect door handles and ask ushers or parish nurses to freshen those areas between Masses. Toys in play areas should be sanitized after each use.

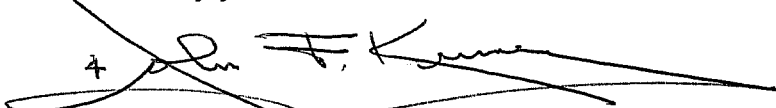
The suggested text of the announcement is as follows and can be read by the pastor or other liturgical minister:

In light of the concerns regarding the H1N1 Novel flu virus, Bishop Kinney has issued the following precautions for our diocese, effective immediately:

- ❖ **At the Sign of Peace, a verbal exchange of peace is to be offered rather than a handshake or other contact.**
- ❖ **(If it is your parish's custom) Holding hands during the Lord's Prayer is to be excluded.**
- ❖ **In accordance with the recommendations from the Minnesota Department of Health, Communion will be offered to the faithful only under the form of the Host; the common Cup will not be offered until further notice.**
- ❖ **Good hygiene is recommended for all. Hand sanitizer and tissues are available near the church entrances. Please cover your coughs and sneezes.**
- ❖ **Those who are exhibiting flu-like symptoms (fever over 100 with either cough and/or sore throat) are dispensed from attending the Sunday liturgy and asked to stay home. You may participate in liturgy remotely by viewing a televised Mass. Thank you for your cooperation.**

With kind personal regards, I remain,

Sincerely yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "John F. Kinney", written over a horizontal line.

+John F. Kinney
Bishop of Saint Cloud

For additional information:

www.cdc.gov/swineflu/

<http://pandemicflu.gov/plan/faithcomcklist.html> (particularly Appendix #8)

<http://www.state.mn.us>