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Preventing the Spread of Infection in Faith Communities

Talking Points

In a normal influenza season, hundreds of people become ill. Many require hospitalization and some die. The current novel influenza (H1N1) that has sparked this pandemic is mild, but these viruses are forever changing. Pandemics have historically come in waves, and there is a risk that the virus that causes the next wave of this pandemic could be very different, possibly even more virulent.

With faith communities being recognized as sources of spiritual, emotional and physical support, public health would like to partner with these communities to help identify health risks and minimize the impact of illness. Your congregation may wish to address some of the following practices which contribute to the spread of illness:

Attendance

- Encourage parishioners who are ill to refrain from attending activities and services*
- Urge members who are recovering from illness to avoid activities during the service where they come into direct contact with other members or common items*

Handshakes

- Make an announcement during the service and/or in the bulletin asking members to forego the handshake of fellowship to help prevent the unintentional spread of disease- "Let's share the Spirit, not the germs"*
- Allow parishioners to substitute a nod of the head, a touch on the shoulder or a hand wave when greeting others or passing the peace*

- Ask parishioners to extend their hands in front of themselves-palms up-for special prayers when hands are usually held*
- Have tissues and hand sanitizer gel available in each pew, each classroom, lounge, office and in the kitchen*

Common Servers and Items

- Have communion servers clean or sanitize their hands immediately prior to distribution of the elements*
- Have servers place the host into the palm of the recipient's hand rather than on the tongue*
- Use small, individual disposable cups for communion wine or grape juice in place of a common cup*

Coffee Hours and Social Events

- Have hand sanitizer gel available in a convenient place*
- Encourage single-use plates and cups*

Sunday School/Nursery Ministries/Meeting Rooms

- Clean toys and all surfaces with antiseptic spray after each use*
- Stock classrooms and meeting rooms with tissue, antiseptic wipes and hand sanitizer*
- Use antiseptic spray on all doorknobs, keyboards, telephones and pews*

Bathrooms

- Place waste receptacles near the door so paper towels can be used on faucet and door handles before being deposited in the waste receptacle*
- Encourage frequent handwashing with soap particularly before handling food and after using the restroom (wash until completing The Lord's Prayer or one verse of Old Macdonald Had a Farm)*

Visitation Ministries

-Encourage hand-sanitizer use to all visitors to nursing home residents, the hospitalized or the homebound

Working together, faith communities and public health can have a significant impact on maintaining healthy congregations.

***For more information regarding infection control procedures please contact your local health department. You can find this number in your local phone book, or online at www.dhs.com, go to Partners & Providers; County / Tribal / Local Partners; Local Public Health department Listing; click on your county.
(<http://dhs.wisconsin.gov/localhealth/index.htm>)***

This information has been provided to you by the Wisconsin Department of Health Services.

More online resources:

www.dhs.com

www.cdc.com

www.who.int

www.pandemicflu.gov

www.henrythehand.com