

Useful websites & contact numbers:

*The NHS website: www.nhs.uk NHS Direct: 0845 4647

The Department of Health: <http://www.dh.gov.uk>

The UK Resilience website: <http://www.ukresilience.info>

Swine Flu Information Line: 0800 1 513 513

An information & guidelines 'package' in **swine flu for faith communities** has been produced. See:

<http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/communities/influenzapandemic>

**Guidelines produced for Churchwardens and PCCs in the
Diocese of Newcastle July 2009**



The Diocese of Newcastle

Pandemic Flu - Advice to Churchwardens, PCCs and Parish Clergy (I).

It is now considered to be highly likely that we will be affected significantly by a 'flu pandemic this autumn/winter. There is no cause for immediate alarm, but we do need to prepare ourselves so as to lessen the likelihood of being infected, and so that our churches can continue to offer mission and ministry even during the pandemic. This document is designed for Churchwardens, PCCs and parish clergy to help you formulate plans for your own church and for its continuing life during and after a pandemic.

Being Hygienic

Influenza viruses are spread mainly through falling on surfaces (after coughs or sneezes). When another person subsequently touches these surfaces and then touches their eyes, nose or mouth they could become infected by the virus. This means that:

- a) people should exercise good hygiene when coughing and sneezing (use a tissue to cover mouth and nose, and immediately dispose of it), and
- b) hard surfaces and hands should be cleaned on a regular basis.

As long as Church Halls and Churches are open to people, we need to think about:

- Surfaces that are touched by people frequently – they should be cleaned after each time the building is used. (For example door handles, counter-tops, altar-rails, pew-backs – ordinary cleaning products are sufficient).
- Encouraging people always to carry tissues with them, and to “catch it, bin it, kill it”.

Are you displaying relevant posters (e.g. as found on the Dept of Health website:

http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publichealth/Flu/Swineflu/DH_098802

or

http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publicationsandstatistics/Publications/PublicationsPolicyAndGuidance/DH_080839)?

Is there relevant and up-to-date information on pew sheets?

- Are there bins available in which people can dispose of tissues? (The bins should then be emptied without touching the tissues).
- How often are towels in your toilets washed? Might it be easier to make papers towels or hand-gels available? How often are tea-towels washed?

Proper hygiene is more effective in protecting you from being infected than is a face-mask (unless you are in close face-to-face contact with someone who has 'flu).

Being Ready

- **At any time key members of your church could fall ill, be bereaved or need to care for dependant relatives – have you trained substitute(s) who could stand in at any moment for essential work normally done by your verger, treasurer, administrator, Churchwarden, vicar.....?**

Being Church – meetings

- What about the regular round of meetings related to church life? The Local Ministry Group, house groups, the PCC, the Finance committee.....?
- How will you decide whether meetings should take place or not?
- How much could be done over the phone or by email rather than face-to-face?
- Could house groups set up an email group or a telephone network?
- Schools may be closed for a period to prevent the spread of infection.

Being sensible – maintaining your own health

CWs and PCCs should be aware if their clergy (or staff) are in situations which put them at particular risk from the flu (for example those with diabetes or asthma, those taking medication which affects their immune system). How will you ensure people are not put at inappropriate risk?

Strategies for reducing the risk of catching or spreading the influenza virus:

- Cover your nose and mouth when coughing or sneezing, using a tissue when possible
- Dispose of dirty tissues promptly and carefully.
- Avoid nonessential travel and large crowds whenever possible
- Maintain good basic hygiene; washing your hands frequently with soap and water to reduce the spread of the virus from your hands to your face, or to other people

Being sensible - if you do catch flu

- symptoms can be checked through the NHS website or NHS direct*, or call your GP (do not attend a surgery)
- You must stay at home and rest
- Take medicines such as ibuprofen or paracetamol to relieve the symptoms
- Drink plenty of fluids
- If asked by the authorities, contact your GP or health authority to inform them of infection.

Encourage people in your church to follow this guidance, and be prepared to follow it yourself you are not indispensable!

Being Good Neighbours

- How might the church set up a system for checking on and helping those who are living alone?
- It is likely that 'flu friends' will be required to pick up medication for those who are ill. Can church members be active in this way?
- If there are farms or small-holdings in your parish, people may need help in feeding and caring for livestock in situations where the work-force is significantly reduced.
- If there are families in which both parents are ill, could anyone offer child-care?

Being Church – communication

- How can you communicate effectively and quickly to all your church members?
Do you have a telephone network? Or do you have an up-to-date email group? It would be useful to establish these lines of communication before they are needed (in case of cancelled services or news about those who are ill).
- If you have a church website, how might it be used to maintain a sense of belonging if services are not possible? How might it be used to encourage personal prayer, bible study and worship? Do enough people know how to publish things on the website in case the webmaster falls ill?
- If your vicar has a regular weblog, might it also be used for these purposes? Will your vicar have time to maintain it?
- Remember to refer regularly to the Diocesan website (www.newcastle.anglican.org) and the Church of England website (www.cofe.anglican.org) for information and prayer/worship ideas.

Will you decide to close toddler groups, pram services, childrens' clubs during this time?
Will you close down other activities like lunch clubs, tea dances, or sewing groups?
How will you communicate such closures to people?

Being Church – regular worship

It is not automatic that church services will be suspended.

As long as we are able to meet for worship, it will be very important to attend to hygiene, and to be aware of possible contamination points in our churches.

- A high standard of cleaning will be necessary before and after use of the church building, including any silver used. Good personal hygiene is also essential on the part of those leading worship.
- Chalice can spread infection, even though there may be some antiseptic effect of alcohol and silver. The practice of dipping one's host in the wine should be prevented (fingers also carry germs).
There may be a time when the Bishop or Archbishop requires the use of the chalice to be stopped completely. Receiving communion 'in one kind' is a perfectly valid and appropriate action.
Until such a requirement is given, people should be free to choose to receive communion in one kind if they want, and to be assured that they are receiving the sacrament of Holy Communion.
For small congregations wafers may be intincted before the service begins, but this would not be practical for large numbers.
- When distributing the bread, one should not place it on a person's tongue but their hand, and be careful not to touch hands.

- Avoid close contact such as shaking hands when people arrive.
- If services are not suspended, then having coffee after the service should be able to continue too. Good personal hygiene will still be very necessary.
- Do you have a plan for action if your clergy (and Readers) fall ill?

Are there people who have been trained to lead a simple service of the Word? See for example

http://www.newcastle.anglican.org/people-and-places/churchwardens-page.aspx#Leading_Worship

If you had to cancel a service at short notice because of illness, how would you tell everyone?

If meeting for usual services is suspended, how will you encourage people to continue a life of prayer and worship?

- It may be appropriate to keep the church open during the day for individual prayer.

If so; how and when will the church be cleaned?

What leaflets might you offer to help people pray (these should be disposed of once used, or laminated and cleaned regularly).

- How will the daily offices of morning and evening prayer be continued?

Are you aware of websites which can be used for prayer?

(For example:

<http://www.cofe.anglican.org/worship/dailyprayer/> or http://www.rejesus.co.uk/site/module/daily_prayer/)

- Could prayer leaflets be delivered to church members or even throughout the parish? One possibility would be to offer a midday prayer leaflet, and to ensure that the church bell is rung at midday. (Or even refer people to this site:

<http://cofe.anglican.org/worship/liturgy/commonworship/texts/daily/day/dayfront.html>)

- Local Radio (or even TV) may be offering a greater range and depth to its religious broadcasting, including acts of worship, prayers and thoughts for the day. Direct people to these when you hear about them.
- How might the financial life of the church continue? Have you ensured as many people as possible arrange their giving through direct debit? For those still using planned giving envelopes or cash, could they be encouraged to have a 'church collection box' at home, and to ensure they still contribute to it each Sunday?

Being Church - pastoral work

- General visiting should be suspended, people may not want you visiting them anyway for fear of infection.

- Bear in mind that those infected will be expected to be cared for at home.

Do not visit if you know someone is ill with flu. Make contact with the family by phone. Could the church offer to help with shopping or other 'messages' (leaving the shopping outside the house)?

- It is possible that there will be an increased number of funerals in your parish(es).

How might you be able to support your clergy (& Readers) during this increased work-load?

What other work might be taken from them?

Do you already have bereavement visitors who can 'visit' (and even pray) using the telephone?

Could you train people to do this?

- How could you assure bereaved families that they are being prayed for? Could someone (or a team) commit to praying for the sick and bereaved in church (or at home) at a regular time? Could the form of these prayers be distributed to those being prayed for?