

## INFLUENZA AND THE LITURGY



*Throughout the years, the USCCB Secretariat of Divine Worship has addressed the liturgical implications of the transmission of pathogens on numerous occasions. With the flu season now taking place in the United States, we offer the following brief reflections on influenza and the liturgy. Continuously updated information on influenza is available from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) at [www.CDC.gov](http://www.CDC.gov).*

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### INFORMATION ON INFLUENZA

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*This information is excerpted from the CDC's influenza website:*

#### **What is influenza (also called flu)?**

The flu is a contagious respiratory illness caused by influenza viruses that infect the nose, throat, and lungs. It can cause mild to severe illness, and at times can lead to death. The best way to prevent the flu is by getting a flu vaccine each year.

#### **How flu spreads**

Most experts believe that flu viruses spread mainly by droplets made when people with flu cough, sneeze or talk. These droplets can land in the mouths or noses of people who are nearby. Less often, a person might also get flu by touching a surface or object that has flu virus on it and then touching their own mouth, eyes or possibly their nose.

#### **Period of contagiousness**

You may be able to pass on the flu to someone else before you know you are sick, as well as while you are sick. Most healthy adults may be able to infect others beginning 1 day before symptoms develop and up to 5 to 7 days after becoming sick. Some people, especially young children and people with weakened immune systems, might be able to infect others for an even longer time.

#### **Preventing seasonal flu: Get vaccinated**

The single best way to prevent the flu is to get a flu vaccine each season. About two weeks after vaccination, antibodies develop that protect against influenza virus infection. Flu vaccines will not protect against flu-like illnesses caused by non-influenza viruses. The seasonal flu vaccine protects against the three influenza viruses that research suggests will be most common.

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### THE CHURCH'S LITURGICAL RESPONSE TO INFLUENZA

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#### **In previous years, what has the Church done in localities where the outbreak of Influenza is most significant?**

In those localities where the outbreak of the disease has been the most significant, bishops have introduced several liturgical adaptations in regard to such practices as the distribution of Holy Communion and the exchange of the Sign of Peace in order to limit the spread of contagion.

#### **What measures should be taken in Roman Catholic liturgies in the United States of America during flu season?**

Priests, deacons, and extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion should be especially reminded of the need to practice good hygiene. Ministers of Holy Communion should always wash their hands before Mass begins; a further precaution suggests using an alcohol-based anti-bacterial solution before and after distributing Holy Communion. The faithful should be instructed not to receive from the chalice if they feel ill.

#### **What about further adaptations or the restriction of options at Mass?**

The Diocesan Bishop should always be consulted regarding any changes or restriction of options in the celebration of Roman Catholic Liturgy. However, the need for the introduction of widespread liturgical adaptations for the prevention of the transmission of influenza in the dioceses of the United States of America is not evident at this time.

#### **What is the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops doing to address this question?**

While the USCCB Secretariat of Divine Worship will continue to monitor the situation and provide the best advice possible to Diocesan Bishops and their Offices for Worship, it is ultimately the responsibility of the Diocesan Bishop to recommend or mandate liturgical changes in response to influenza in particular local areas. The Secretariat likewise appreciates whatever information Diocesan Offices for Worship are able to provide concerning local conditions and the pastoral responses developed by Diocesan Bishops.