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Communication to our Faith Community regarding the H1N1 Flu Virus

For the last several months, the Archdiocese of Toronto has been in regular communication with health officials to determine whether or not it is necessary to alter our liturgical practices, in light of current concerns regarding the spread of H1N1 influenza. To date, we have been informed that this is not required. It is important, however, that we remain diligent with preventative measures. We need to take note of the following reminders from our health officials:

- Good hand hygiene is the best way to prevent the spread of all flu viruses. Wash your hands with soap and water thoroughly and often.
- Keep an alcohol-based hand sanitizer (gel or wipes) handy at work, home and in your car. It needs to be at least 60% alcohol to be effective.
- Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when you cough or sneeze and dispose of tissue. Cough into your upper sleeve if you don't have a tissue.
- Stay home when you are feeling sick or have a fever out of respect for those around you.
- Keep common surfaces and items clean and disinfected.

In addition to these general recommendations from the health officials, I would ask everyone to be attentive to some particular points relating to our celebration of the liturgy:

- Parishes may wish to provide hand cleaning stations near the entrances to the church.
- Priests, deacons and extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion are especially reminded of the need to practice good hand hygiene.
- Ministers of Holy Communion should always wash their hands before Mass begins. In some parishes, as a further precaution, hands are cleaned before and after distributing Holy Communion.
- The faithful should be instructed that if they feel ill, have a fever, or have been sick in recent days, they certainly should not receive communion on the tongue or from the cup. Of course, as noted above, if they are ill they really should stay home.
- The Sign of Peace is an important part of our liturgical celebration. The usual custom is to express the Sign of Peace by shaking hands. It may, however, be preferable, especially in our present circumstances, to use another gesture, for example, by bowing and perhaps saying "Peace be with you."

We will continue to monitor the situation and, if necessary, adopt additional measures. Updates and additional resources regarding the situation can be accessed online at: www.archtoronto.org/flu.

Sincerely in Christ,

+ Thomas Collins

Thomas Collins
Archbishop of Toronto