

Greetings Friends,

Understandably, there have been many questions circulating regarding appropriate precautionary measures around the coronavirus as news of this health threat continues to unfold. Currently, the risk to the public from coronavirus in the US remains low. Of course, that could change rapidly, and these basic guidelines are shared purely to enable churches and our affiliates to find in one place relevant information that may be useful as we plan.

Under no circumstances should the information relayed here be construed as medical advice. These are simply public precautions gathered from available websites and best practices of various denominations.

Because this is a rapidly changing situation, it will be crucial to ensure as you read these you check the latest guidance from the Center for Disease Control (CDC) at: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html>

This guidance focuses on the hygiene measures needed to disrupt the spread of coronavirus should we get a number of cases. But currently we remain at low risk. This information is not exhaustive and should be paired with further discovery. Should significant changes occur to suggested hygiene protocols, the information will be updated in order to minimize panic and optimize protection.

Peace Be With You,

Rev. Traci D. Blackmon

Coronavirus – understanding the outbreak

On December 31, 2019, the World Health Organization was informed of a cluster of cases of pneumonia of unknown cause detected in Wuhan City, China. The cause is now identified as a coronavirus, one of the family of viruses which caused the SARS (Serious Acute Respiratory Syndrome) outbreak in 2002-2003 across the world, though it is less severe than SARS.

The virus is now called Novel Coronavirus (2019-nCoV). As a family of viruses, these viruses are fairly common, and can range from mild to very severe in effect. Typical symptoms of coronavirus include fever and a cough that may progress to a severe pneumonia causing shortness of breath and breathing difficulties.

Most people who get coronavirus will have mild to moderate illness, a bit like 'flu. Generally, coronavirus can cause more severe symptoms in people with weakened immune systems, older people, and those with long term conditions like diabetes, cancer and chronic lung disease.

The death rate is low, typically at present around 2%, which is a little above the death rate for flu. But it has understandably caused concern because of the lack of information and because of myth.

Some of the most important things we can do to be helpful is to restate the facts accurately, reassure our congregations frequently with up-dates and check-ins, counter unwarranted prejudice against Chinese people.

This is a rapidly evolving situation and latest updates can be found on <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html>

The CDC has processes in place to manage cases where people may have or do have the virus.

People returning from China and self-isolation

This advice may change, and it is important to check the Center for Disease Control (CDC) websites.

If you have visited Wuhan or Hubei Province in the last 14 days you should stay indoors and avoid contact with others just as you would with the flu, and call the CDC to inform them of your recent travels.

Please follow this advice even if you do not have symptoms of the virus.

If you develop a fever, difficulty breathing or a cough, you should continue to follow the advice above. Please do not leave your home until you have been given advice by a physician.

If you have travelled from elsewhere in China (but not Macao or Hong Kong) to the US in the last 14 days and develop symptoms of cough, fever or shortness of breath, you should immediately:

- stay indoors and avoid contact with other people as you would with the flu
- call the CDC to inform them of your recent travel to the country.

What does self-isolation mean for people who don't have symptoms?

Just like when you have the flu, individuals should remain at home and should not go to work, school, church or public areas.

Where possible, individuals should avoid having visitors to their home, but it is ok for friends, family or delivery drivers to drop off food.

Individuals should not use public transportation until 14 days after their return from Wuhan. *This is simply a precaution. If symptoms should develop during that time, please contact the CDC and follow the advice of a physician.*

Advice for Congregations

At this time, individuals in the US remain at low risk from coronavirus, although it is expected that coronavirus will eventually become of greater concern in the US.

The best way of protecting us from spread is for everyone to use universal good hygiene, which will effectively disrupt the spread of the virus. **We should be doing this all the time for flu-like symptoms:**

The CDC has issued guidance for the public and this remains the best source of advice.

Those guidelines are available on the CDC website:
<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html>

The key things for congregations to do are:

Ensure everyone maintains good hygiene especially at congregational gatherings. The best way of protecting us from spread is for everyone to use universal good hygiene, which will effectively disrupt spread of the virus. We should be doing this all the time for the flu:

- Contain it - sneeze into a tissue
- Dispose of it - throw away the tissue
- Kill it - wash your hands with soap and water

- Do not touch your face unless you've washed your hands
- Ensure good regular cleaning of surfaces lots of people touch regularly

At this time there is no need to take special measures during Communion, Passing of the Peace, or Fellowship Hour during worship. If greater precaution is desired, please consider individual disposable cups and wafers for communion, and eliminating handshakes during greetings and fellowship in closed spaces. One suggestion is to clasp one's hands in a posture of prayer and simply nod as a form of greeting without direct contact. The greater the ventilation, the better.

Ask anyone with cold or flu symptoms to refrain from taking communion from the Chalice and receive the host in the hand without intinction (dipping the bread in wine) or use travel pack communion sets. *(We should be doing this anyway, every flu season.)*

Ensuring ministers wash their hands before distributing communion is always a good practice to encourage.

Pastoral care remains important

Chaplains and others working in institutions where people with coronavirus are being cared for should seek and follow hygiene guidance from that institution.

Those who have been asked to self-isolate in the community as a precaution by medical staff will understandably be anxious but equally it is important not to breach this isolation.

"In person care" should be kept to a minimum and advice taken from the CDC on any precautions needed.

Cleaning Advice

Because the virus is not yet circulating widely in the US there is no need for any special cleaning.

This may change as cases grow, and it is possible that as cases grow the advice on cleaning will change to using chlorine-based agents.

In any case, regular cleaning to disrupt the spread of colds and flu will be sufficient for workplaces, homes and most non-care settings. *(Patient care facilities have different a different sanitization protocol).*

The best way to prepare for the possibility of any virus circulating in the US is to:

- Regularly clean, with ordinary detergent, surfaces touched frequently and thus likely to have droplets of cold or flu virus on them like tables, door handles, and light switches.