



ROMAN CATHOLIC DIOCESE OF PROVIDENCE  
*Office of Divine Worship*  
ONE CATHEDRAL SQUARE  
PROVIDENCE, RHODE ISLAND  
02903

**TO: Pastors/Administrators of the Diocese of Providence**  
**FROM: Office of Divine Worship**  
**DATE: March 12, 2020**  
**RE: UPDATE - Recent Influenza Status in RI & COVID-19**

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While there are a few cases of the COVID-19 Virus (Corona Virus) in Rhode Island at this time, it is always important to be prudent and prepared without cause for alarm. The Diocese of Providence is monitoring closely the guidelines recommended by the Rhode Island Department of Health and the Centers for Disease Control (CDC). It is also important to keep in mind that the most recent weekly report from the RI Department of Health categorizes the statewide estimate of influenza activity as ‘widespread’ which still has a major impact on the local community as well.

As pastors committed to promoting and protecting the well-being of our parishioners, we need to be as cautious and prudent as possible in responding to any possible threat, especially for children and the elderly. Since conditions vary from one locale to another, the most effective approach is at the level of the local parish. Pastors are therefore encouraged to prudentially consider the following guidelines and suggestions as they pertain to your local community:

- During the Eucharistic Liturgy, the Sign of Peace need not be announced or exchanged. *(As you know, the exchange of peace is always optional during Holy Mass, omitting the invitation “let us offer each other the sign of peace” GIRM 154)* If the invitation is announced, parishioners should consider avoiding handshakes, embraces and other physical contact. A simple gesture, or even a silent prayer, could easily suffice.  
\*\*Likewise, if your parish is in the habit of holding hands during the Lord's Prayer, this practice should be eliminated.
  - The use of Holy Water at the entrances of the Church should be available at the discretion of the Pastor. It should be changed daily or discontinued for the time being.
  - Pastors should encourage the faithful who attend Holy Mass to limit their proximity to others whenever possible and avoid overcrowding.

- If your parish has the practice of distributing Holy Communion under both kinds, the distribution of the Precious Blood of Christ from the chalice should be discontinued for the time being. The continuation of this practice, as is always the case, is determined by the pastor when the likelihood of spreading illness is less pervasive.
- Those who are distributing Holy Communion should be especially mindful of the particular need for personal hygiene before the distribution of Holy Communion. It is permissible to use hand sanitizer before Mass or even immediately before distribution of Holy Communion. A consideration should be made for having hand sanitizer easily available at the doors of the church, school or other public buildings. However, the best approach is always to wash one's hands with soap and water.
- If the parish has a school, and for all programs of religious education and youth ministry, please follow very carefully the directives of the Rhode Island Department of Health.
- Parishioners who have symptoms of illness should be very careful to avoid any physical contact that could transmit the virus with others. Bishop Tobin has dispensed all the faithful from the obligation to attend Holy Mass on Sundays until March 29, 2020. While Masses will continue to be offered, individuals should consider on their own whether they should continue to attend Holy Mass as long as they do not exhibit any symptoms. This is an obligation in charity that parishioners should take very seriously.
- **THE RHODE ISLAND DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH RECOMMENDS THE FOLLOWING:**
  - Get your flu shot and encourage the people around you to do the same. - Wash your hands often throughout the day. Use warm water and soap. If soap and water are not available, use alcohol-based hand gel. - Cough or sneeze into your elbow. Flu is spread through coughing or sneezing on other people or into your hands. Cover your coughs and sneezes to prevent others from getting sick. - Avoid touching your eyes, nose, or mouth. Germs spread this way. - Get plenty of sleep, be physically active, manage your stress, drink plenty of fluids, and eat nutritious foods. - Keep surfaces (especially bedside tables, surfaces in the bathroom, and toys for children) clean by wiping them down with a household disinfectant.
  - Whenever possible, avoid close personal contact with people in public. When greeting people avoid handshakes and hugs. Pay attention for potential COVID-19 symptoms including, fever, cough, and shortness of breath. If you feel like you are developing symptoms, call your doctor.
- **THE CENTER FOR DISEASE CONTROL AND PREVENTION (CDC) RECOMMENDS THE FOLLOWING:**
  - Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, especially after going to the bathroom; before eating; and after blowing your nose, coughing, or sneezing. Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands. Stay home when you are sick. Cover your

cough or sneeze with a tissue, then throw the tissue in the trash. Increase ventilation by opening windows or adjusting air conditioning.

- The CDC does not recommend that people who are well wear a facemask to protect themselves from respiratory illnesses, including Coronavirus Disease 2019. You should only wear a mask if a healthcare professional recommends it.
  - If you have a family member at home who is sick, please stay home. Put distance between yourself and other people if COVID-19 is spreading in your community. This is especially important for people who are at higher risk of getting very sick.
- Finally, but certainly not least in importance, we approach this situation as we approach everything in life, from the perspective of our faith and in prayer. Please ask the Lord's protection upon our community and those throughout the world during this time of concern for the potential of widespread illness.