



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: February 27, 2020**  
**RE: Recent Influenza Status in RI**

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Each year at this time concerns are raised regarding the potential spread of influenza throughout various communities. The most recent weekly report from the State Department of Public Health categorizes the statewide estimate of influenza activity as ‘widespread’. In addition, given the global attention of the COVID-19 Virus (Corona Virus) it is always important to be prudent and prepared without cause for alarm. Currently, there are NO KNOWN cases of the Coronavirus 2019 in the State of RI. However, the ordinary Flu Season still has impacted the local community.

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.
- If your parish has the practice of distributing Holy Communion under both species, 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.
- 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. Likewise, parishioners should be reminded that if they have symptoms of serious illness they are dispensed from attending Holy Mass on Sundays and in fact should not attend Holy Mass. 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.
- 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.
  - 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.
- 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.