

Responsibilities and Planning for Congregations

H1N1-Swine Flu

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The influenza outbreak continues to grow in the United States and internationally. Federal and agencies have initiated emergency operations and are providing regular updates and recommendations. Should this outbreak escalate to a pandemic level people, directives may be issued to avoid or stop mass gathering to lessen the spread of the virus. Schools, business, recreational facilities, and places of worship are some of the places that would feel the impact.

The federal government cannot prepare for or respond to a severe pandemic alone. During such a health crisis, there may not be a sufficient number of doctors, nurses, hospital beds, or other countermeasures to go around. Communities will be affected and as many as 40 % of workers may be unable to work because of illness or their need to care for ill family members.

Faith Communities have a vital role in educating and protecting the public's health and safety by helping to ensure that people in need are provided for, and that care is provided. Especially in times of trouble, health is recognized to encompass spiritual and social well-being, as well as physical and mental health.

Consider the Following:

Potential difficulties may include:

- Essential services may be disrupted
- Food and water supplies may be interrupted and limited
- Schools and daycare centers may be closed (weeks or longer)
- Medical care for people with chronic illness could be disrupted
- Chronic illness care will need to be provided differently, reducing exposure risk and unnecessary use of services.

Planning is vital for a congregation. Considerations include:

- How the staff, leadership and congregation will function during the entire event, including how and when they will return to a "new normal" afterwards
- How the creativity and resourcefulness of the congregation will be engaged
- How the Faith Community stays connected with local health department and emergency responders to stay informed [Maybe: How the Faith Community connects and sustains its connections with the local health department, emergency response systems, and trusted sources of information.]
- The role of the Faith Community as a caring spiritual and organizational presence in the wider community. While it is important for spiritual people to give witness to their beliefs during a time of trouble, extreme caution should be used to not impose judgment or alternative value systems on others in the midst of the event. The American Red Cross and ICRC have issued 10 Principles for compassionate response.

Areas of preparedness planning for a Faith Community include:

Communication

Leadership

Facilities-current and potential use

Vulnerable populations

Caring for the sick those with needs

Providing spiritual and emotional care and support
Strengthening community partnerships

Immediate Actions

Meet with staff and key leaders

Form a Disaster planning team

Suggested Immediate Actions

- ✓ Educate congregation on church's response to flu outbreak
 - bulletin, newsletter, minute for mission
- ✓ Begin aggressive respiratory and hand hygiene program at the church
 - All bathrooms will have sufficient soap and paper towels
 - Educational posters will be placed in all bathrooms (see links)
 - Implement alcohol based hand sanitizer program
 - Hand sanitizing station in Narthex with all congregants encouraged to use sanitizer
 - Hand sanitizer placed throughout building with instructions
 - Outside user groups should be encouraged to follow hand-washing/sanitizing guidelines

Rituals

- ✓ Communion recommendations
 - Preparers should be healthy when handling serving pieces and food
 - Preparers should use recommended hand washing protocols and disposable gloves when preparing communion
 - Refrain from using a common cup
 - Disposable cups for juice/wine may be used
 - Small pre-cut cubes of bread or crackers may be used rather than breaking pieces from a common loaf
 - All communion serving ware should be sanitized after use
 - All liquids and juices and bread should be disposed of after each Communion Sunday
- ✓ Passing the Peace recommendations
 - Encourage creativity such as an elbow bump, head nod wave, Namaste.
 - Refrain from activities that involve holding hands or hugging.

Important web sites that you should visit

www.cdc.gov/swineflu

http://www.cdc.gov/swineflu/general_info.htm

<http://www.pandemicflu.gov/>

<http://www.dhmf.state.md.us/>

<http://www.pandemicflu.gov/plan/pdf/faithbasedcommunitychecklist.pdf> Planning check list

Posters that can be printed

http://www.mass.gov/Eeohhs2/docs/dph/cdc/handwashing/did_you_wash_your_hands.pdf

http://www.cdc.gov/flu/protect/pdf/covercough_school8-5x11.pdf

General Information

There is no vaccine available right now to protect against swine flu, although they are being developed and tested. There are everyday actions known as respiratory etiquette and hand hygiene that can help prevent the spread of germs that cause respiratory illnesses like influenza.

Take these everyday steps to protect your health:

- Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze. Throw the tissue in the trash after you use it.
- Wash your hands often with soap and water, especially after you cough or sneeze. Alcohol-based hand cleaners are also effective.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth. Germs spread this way.
- Try to avoid close contact with sick people.
- If you get sick with influenza, CDC recommends that you stay home from work or school.