Version 2

This guidance is a summary of Guidance for the Church specifically for Parish Worship and events

The Liturgy, Parish Events and Coronavirus: Steps to take

At the time of writing there are few cases in the UK and no evidence of a person to person transmitted outbreak within England and Wales. This may change. The guidance below is intended to be stepped up in case you may need it as the situation changes.

At the time of writing we are not in a pandemic. Efforts in England and Wales are focused on containment of the virus and this advice is written for those circumstances. If this situation changes, detailed guidance will be produced. The guidance is kept under continuous review.

More detailed guidance can be found on the Bishops' Conference website at this link
https://www.cbcew.org.uk/home/our-work/health-social-care/coronavirus-guidelines/

What is Coronavirus?

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 COVID-19. 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 Catholics can do would be to restate the facts accurately, reassure, counter prejudice against Chinese and other communities.

There has been a great deal of anxiety raised and it is important to quell this. While for some people the disease is mild, for a small number of people especially those who are older or vulnerable because of pre-existing diseases like cancer, diabetes or

heart disease or lung disease, it can become serious. A key issue is to reassure people.

Where do I get the latest information?

This is a rapidly evolving situation and latest updates can be found on the Gov.uk website here

- For the public https://publichealthmatters.blog.gov.uk/2020/01/23/wuhan-novel-coronavirus-what-you-need-to-know/
- For professionals https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/wuhan-novel-coronavirus-background-information

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

What should I do?

The key thing to do is take a stepped approach, and to reassure people the disease is mostly mild. If cases appear and grow, you should move up a step as suggested below, as the situation changes.

Stage 1: Current status (very few cases in UK, no cases in local parishes)

The key things for parishes to do are:

1. Ensure everyone maintains good hygiene (we should be doing this already) especially at Mass and parish gatherings
    a. The best way of protecting us from spread is for everyone to use universal good hygiene, which will effectively disrupt spread of the virus. So display the public information poster (https://www.england.nhs.uk/south/wp-content/uploads/sites/6/2017/09/catch-bin-kill.pdf), which states:
        - Catch it - sneeze into a tissue
        - Bin it - bin the tissue
        - Kill it - wash your hands with soap and water or alcohol hand gel
        - Do not touch your face unless you've washed your hands
2. Ask anyone with cold or flu symptoms to refrain from the physical sign of peace, taking communion from the Chalice and advise they should receive the host on the hand only. (*We should be doing this anyway, every 'flu season.)*

Ensure good regular cleaning of surfaces lots of people touch regularly, including such things as door handles,

3. Ask everyone attending Mass to sanitise their hands as they come into church using sanitized gel dispensers (make these available in porches or entrances).

4. Ensure ministers of the Eucharist sanitise their hands before and after distributing communion (*we should be doing this anyway as a matter of course*.) This can be done by washing hands thoroughly (for 20 seconds at least with soap and water) discreetly before proceeding to the sanctuary or using good quality hand gel discreetly.

    a. Remember to use good hand washing and gel use technique. You can find more here https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/healthy-body/best-way-to-wash-your-hands/ and a poster here https://www.who.int/gpsc/5may/resources/posters/en/
    b. People who do catering are especially important for hand hygiene, and it is very important to ensure cups and utensils are properly washed and cleaned and surfaces cleaned

5. There is no need as things stand for the Chalice to be withdrawn or the sign of peace suspended, such as was advised during the 2009 'flu pandemic. This advice would only come if we had a very serious epidemic in the UK and at the time of writing this is unlikely. People with cold and flu like symptoms should refrain from the sign of peace if they are present.

6. When visiting parishioners at home, wash hands before giving the sacraments. No pastoral visits to people who are self-isolating until isolation ends. However, do offer phone support.

7. Visits to people in care homes or Hospitals should follow advice from the staff on infection control.

Stage 2: A number of cases in local communities or a case specifically linked to a parish community

The key things for parishes in these circumstances are:

1. It is likely you will need to suspend distribution under both kinds (the host to be given on the hand only).

   a. When giving communion in the hand seek to ensure you place the host in the hand of the recipient in such a way that you do not touch their hands.

2. Suspend the physical sign of peace.

3. Remove holy water stoups.

4. Public veneration of relics and the Cross on Good Friday should NOT be by kissing or physically touching them.

5. Advise those most vulnerable (elderly, people with weakened immune systems and long-term conditions like cancer, diabetes and heart disease) to refrain from large parish gatherings and stay at home.

6. Cease use of shared hymn books and missals which could help transmit the virus.

7. Ask everyone attending Mass to sanitise their hands as they come into church using sanitized gel dispensers (make these available in porches or entrances).

8. Ensure everyone maintains good hygiene especially at Mass and parish gatherings

   a. The best way of protecting us from spread is still for everyone to use universal good hygiene, which will effectively disrupt spread of the virus. So, display the public information poster, which states:
      i. Catch it - sneeze into a tissue
      ii. Bin it - bin the tissue
      iii. Kill it - wash your hands with soap and water
      iv. Do not touch your face unless you've washed your hands

9. Ask anyone with cold or flu symptoms to refrain from attending Liturgy, public events, nor attend the sacrament of reconciliation if symptomatic (They may have an ordinary cold but equally it is important to ensure a precautionary approach).

10. Ensure **very** regular cleaning of surfaces lots of people touch regularly (e.g. ideally clean door handles before and after every Mass).

11. Do not pass the collection plate around.

12. Ensure ministers of the Eucharist sanitise their hands before and after distributing communion (*we should be doing this anyway as a*

matter of course.) This can be done by washing hands discreetly before proceeding to the sanctuary or using good quality hand gel discreetly.

a. Remember to use good hand washing and gel use technique. You can find more here https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/healthy-body/best-way-to-wash-your-hands/ and a poster here https://www.who.int/gpsc/5may/resources/posters/en/

13. When visiting parishioners at home, wash hands before giving the sacraments. No pastoral visits to people who are self-isolating until isolation ends. However, do offer phone support.

14. Visits to people in care homes or Hospitals should follow advice from the staff on infection control.

15. Suspend catering (teas, coffees etc.) at large parish gatherings where multiple people touch mugs, utensils, biscuits etc.

Stage 3: Many Cases in local parishes

It is currently unlikely, but not impossible, that we will get to this stage. This could be at either deanery, diocesan or national level.

- We will know we are at this stage because public authorities will give general advice on suspending large public gatherings. These are the current circumstances in Singapore, for example.

- Mass and Liturgy in public should be suspended and parish gatherings suspended. Specific and detailed guidance will be produced should we come to this stage. But at the time of writing this is **not** needed. Templates have been drafted for Ordinaries to use should this be needed.