Coronavirus (COVID-19) FAQs – 1

1. **What is coronavirus and should I be concerned?**

A coronavirus is a type of virus. As a group, coronaviruses are common across the world.

Typical symptoms of coronavirus include fever and a cough that may progress to a severe pneumonia causing shortness of breath and breathing difficulties.

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.

It is important to balance the need to take sensible precautions and plan for a possible increase in the outbreak, yet not to cause panic. At present there is no significant community spread of the disease. Nevertheless it is prudent to ensure our practices and plans are in place should the outbreak get worse.

2. **What are the signs and symptoms of this new virus?**

The symptoms of this new coronavirus (now known as COVID-19) include fever and respiratory symptoms including coughing, sneezing, and shortness of breath. The current evidence is that most cases appear to be mild.

3. **What is the current risk level to the UK?**

The World Health has assessed the global risk of the coronavirus outbreak as very high. The UK Chief Medical Officers have raised the risk to the public from low to moderate. This does not mean that government think the risk to individuals in the UK has changed at this stage, but that government should plan for all eventualities.

4. **How does this new coronavirus spread**

Because it's a new illness, we do not know exactly how it spreads from person to person, but similar viruses spread by cough droplets or sneeze droplets. These droplets fall on people in the vicinity and can be directly inhaled or picked up on the hands and transferred when someone touches their face.

How long any respiratory virus survives will depend on a number of factors; for example:

- what surface the virus is on
- whether it is exposed to sunlight
- differences in temperature and humidity
- exposure to cleaning products

Under most circumstances, the amount of infectious virus on any contaminated surfaces is likely to have decreased significantly by 24 hours, and even more so by 48 hours.

5. **What can I do to reduce my risk of catching coronavirus?**

There are things you can do to help stop germs like coronavirus spreading:

- Always carry tissues with you and use them to catch your cough or sneeze. Then bin the tissue, and wash your hands, or use a sanitiser gel.
- Wash your hands often with soap and water, especially after using public transport. Use a sanitiser gel if soap and water are not available.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth with unwashed hands.
- Avoid close contact with people who are unwell.

6. **Should people wear face masks to protect themselves from infection?**

Face masks play a very important role in clinical settings, such as hospitals but there's very little evidence of widespread benefit from their use outside of these clinical settings. Facemasks must be worn correctly, changed frequently, removed properly and disposed of safely in order to be effective.

The best way to protect ourselves from infections like coronavirus is to wash our hands frequently with soap and water or use a sanitiser gel, as well as always carrying tissues and using them to catch coughs and sneezes, then putting the tissue in a bin.

7. **Can coronavirus be treated?**

Right now, treatment relies on the basics - keeping the patient's body going, including breathing support, until their immune system can fight off the virus. There is currently no vaccine for the COVID-19 coronavirus. The virus is so new and different that it needs its own vaccine.

Simple hygiene measures like washing your hands with soap and water often, and avoiding people who are unwell, can help stop viruses like coronavirus spreading.

8. **How deadly is the coronavirus?**

Based on data from 44,000 patients with this coronavirus, the WHO says:

- 81% develop mild symptoms
- 14% develop severe symptoms
- 5% become critically ill

The proportion dying from the disease appears low (between 1% and 2%) - but the figures are currently not fully reliable because we are still learning about the virus; we are still in an early stage.

9. **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

10. **What should parishes do at this stage?**

I. Ensure **everyone maintains good hygiene** (we should be doing this already as part of normal good practice) at all gatherings, whether services or other occasions. This includes those who prepare or serve food, those handing out books etc or having other direct physical contact with numbers of people, as well as those administering the Eucharist (see below for more guidance.)
   - Provide hand gel at entrances and ensure there is a good supply of soap or hand gel in cloakrooms and kitchens and any other appropriate areas.

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

Follow the 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/

III. Ask **anyone with cold or flu symptoms to refrain from taking communion from the Chalice** and receive the host on the hand only

IV. **Intinction is NOT permitted**, moreover, it is a route for transmission from the individual through handling the host, and tiny fragments of the host could affect people with allergies to gluten etc.

V. The **placing of the host on the tongue** by anyone administering Eucharist is **NOT recommended** as it is a potential source of transmission.

VI. Ensure **good regular cleaning of surfaces people touch regularly**, including such things as door handles, light switches etc.

VII. Ask **those attending the Eucharist in particular to sanitise their hands** as they come into church, using sanitized gel dispensers (make these available in porches or entrances).

VIII. Ensure **ministers of the Eucharist sanitise their hands** before and after distributing communion. This can be done by washing hands thoroughly (for 20 seconds at least with soap and water) or using good quality hand gel.

IX. There is **no need as things stand for the Chalice to be withdrawn**. However anyone with coughs and colds would be advised to refrain from taking communion from the Chalice/Cup and receive the host on the hand only.

X. There is **no need as things stand for the sign of peace to be suspended**. However anyone with coughs and colds would be advised to refrain from shaking hands with others, and instead offer the peace verbally.

XI. When **visiting parishioners at home**, wash hands before and after giving the sacraments.

XII. **No pastoral visits should be undertaken to people who are self-isolating** until isolation ends. However do offer phone support.

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

11. How will I know if/when the Church changes its advice?

Any new or changed information will be posted on the Bishops' Conference Website and posted on the Ad Clerum