



28 February 2020

Precautions and Advice regarding COVID-19 coronavirus

We have been following the international and local updates on the spread of the COVID-19 virus, and know that you and your parishioners may be concerned about how to respond in the church setting.

The Archdiocese takes direction in this matter from Alberta's Chief Medical Officer of Health of Alberta, Dr. Deena Hinshaw, and will follow her recommendations in the event of a serious outbreak of influenza or COVID-19. In a statement issued today (February 28) Dr. Hinshaw offered this advice:

"Businesses and employers are encouraged to take this opportunity to review their own business continuity plans, and consider how they would lower the risk of the spread of infection in the workplace.

"It is important to remember that most people who get COVID-19 have a mild illness. That is both a good thing, and a challenge with this virus. As we prepare for the possibility that COVID-19 could come to Alberta, I urge you to practice the good infection prevention habits that we have always recommended.

"As we make these preparations, I want to reiterate that the current risk to Albertans remains low. There are still no cases of the novel coronavirus in Alberta, and the health system is prepared to respond if the virus comes to Alberta."

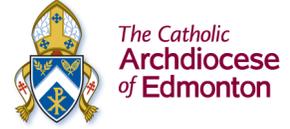
(Full statement at

<https://www.alberta.ca/coronavirus-info-for-albertans.aspx#statement.>)

Therefore, it is most important that the parish maintains preventive measures, especially during flu season. For example, make sure that the church has one or more alcohol-based hand cleaning stations near the entrance. Ensure that Eucharistic ministers disinfect their hands before distribution of Communion.

Since the virus has yet to appear in Alberta, it is important first of all that our response is calm and measured. Here is some information you are invited to share with your staff and parishioners:

- In some countries where the COVID-19 virus has spread quickly, large gatherings have been banned and dioceses have closed churches or imposed restrictions on certain liturgical practices such as hand shaking during the Sign of Peace. Please note that based on lack of COVID-19 cases in Alberta, the Archdiocese has no plans for such restrictions at the moment.
- If you feel vulnerable to infection because of an underlying condition or for any other reason, you are invited to use another gesture during the Sign of Peace, such as bowing with your hand over your heart, and to use personal hand sanitizer before and after Mass.



- If you are ill, the Church does not require your attendance at Sunday Mass. We encourage you to remain home out of respect for your fellow parishioners, especially if your symptoms include fever and cough. You may wish to pray along with the televised Mass from Toronto at <https://dailytvmass.com/daily-tv-mass/>.

Pastors should continue to use their discretion in deciding whether to offer Communion under both species.

As the health authorities have indicated, the COVID-19 spread is increasing daily around the world and the situation is changing rapidly. We are monitoring and will advise you promptly of any changes to our liturgical protocols.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact Father Adam Lech at the Chancery Office.