

Breaking the Chain

Guidelines for Reducing the Spread of Infection

Prevention—The First Step

Preventing an unfortunate event is always preferable to addressing the outcome after something occurs. This is particularly true when talking about the spread of respiratory infections. There are five key areas to address:

1. Stay healthy.
2. Practise hand hygiene.
3. Cover your cough/sneeze.
4. Stay home if you are sick.
5. Keep your distance.

Stay Healthy

Protect your health by

- getting a flu shot each year
- practising a good routine health:
 - Drink plenty of water/fluids.
 - Eat a healthy diet.
 - Exercise regularly.
 - Get enough rest.
 - Decrease stress.

Practise Hand Hygiene

Every day we touch literally thousands of surfaces, including our own face and eyes. Practising good hand hygiene, keeping our hands clean, with soap and water or a hand sanitizer is the first line of defence in good health. Practise good hand hygiene:

- before handling or eating food
- after coughing or sneezing
- before and after visiting with the ill, particularly if you are providing rites
- after shaking hands and touching shared objects
- after using the washroom
- after changing diapers
- whenever your hands are visibly dirty

Hand-Washing Steps

1. Wet hands.
2. Dispense soap into palm of hand.
3. Lather hands for at least 20 seconds, making sure to get between fingers, around the thumbs, and up the wrists.
4. Circle fingertips in the palm of each hand to clean well under the nails.
5. Rinse hands.
6. Dry hands, preferably with paper towels.
7. Use paper towel to turn taps off.
8. Discard paper towel in wastebasket.

Hand Sanitizers

Using alcohol-based hand sanitizer is becoming a common practice, particularly when soap and water are not convenient. However, be aware of guidelines in using these products so they are effective:

- Alcohol content needs to be between 60 and 90% for the product to be effective.
- Hands must be dry and have no traces of visible dirt.
- Using hand cream before or after applying the hand sanitizer reduces the effectiveness of the product.

Hand-Sanitizing Steps

1. Ensure hands are dry and free of visible dirt.
2. Dispense sanitizer into palm of hand.
3. Swirl fingertips in the sanitizer.
4. Switch sanitizer to opposite palm.
5. Swirl fingertips in the sanitizer.
6. Scrub hands with sanitizer, making sure to get between fingers, around the thumbs, and on the backs of hands.



Cover Your Cough/Sneeze

Covering a cough/sneeze with your hands or a handkerchief has been the traditional way to prevent the spread of airborne germs. Current thinking now favours the use of your arm or a tissue to block the spread because our hands touch everything around us and therefore spread germs. Handkerchiefs should be immediately exchanged for a clean one after each, or use tissues.

Cough or sneeze into your upper arm or the crook of your arm. If you use a tissue, discard it in a wastebasket immediately. Then wash or sanitize your hands.

Stay Home if You Are Sick

“It’s only a cold—I can go to work” isn’t always true. Sometimes, it’s better to stay at home and rest or do your work at home.

You should stay home if you are exhibiting the following flu symptoms:

- fever
- runny nose
- shortness of breath
- new cough
- diarrhea/vomiting

Keep Your Distance

Gathering in small groups or as a large congregation is an integral part of who and what we are. This does not stop when we are under the weather and, at times, is part of what we do—visiting the sick. How do we protect our health and others’ health while meeting the needs of those who are sick or can’t get out?

“Social distancing” is one way. Keeping a distance from others of 1 metre reduces the spread of airborne droplets expelled during

coughing or sneezing. Sitting beside people rather than face to face also reduces the spread.

Take the time to explain why you are doing things differently when visiting. These practices are meant to protect those being visited as well as the visitor.

Facilities

Keeping our facilities clean and stocked with the necessary supplies to promote a healthy environment is a vital part of a prevention plan. Keep the following in mind as you review your own facilities:

- Keep washrooms and kitchens well stocked with paper towels and pump liquid soap.
- Post “Hand Hygiene” signs in washrooms and kitchens to remind people to wash their hands.
- Consider a supply of facial tissues and garbage cans for disposing of them in meeting rooms.
- Consider providing alcohol-based hand cleaner and where to place it:
 - where people congregate
 - before and after hand contact
 - before and after touching communal religious objects

Public Health Offices

Your local public health office is a valuable resource. Contact the office for hand-washing and hand-sanitizing signs you can post throughout the church.

The public health office can also provide you with other helpful information as you continually promote the “healthy congregation.”

