



## CONTAGIOUS ILLNESS AND GOING TO MASS

When Catholics gather in Jesus' name to celebrate the Eucharist, our first concern is sharing our gratitude, our faith, and our belief in Christ among us.

However, in any gathering of people, the sharing of germs is inevitable. In the midst of the cold and flu season, each of us has the responsibility of taking precautions to prevent the spread of these and other illnesses. Frequent hand-washing, covering of mouth and nose when coughing and sneezing, and vigilance regarding habits and procedures for disease prevention in high risk areas should be common practice. As we face a severe flu outbreak in our community, greater attention must be given to keeping one another healthy. Some practical steps, along with common sense are critical to achieving this.

**WHAT IS THE CONCERN?** Concern has been raised over whether the sharing of the cup at Holy Communion contributes to the spread of the flu and any other contagious disease. The Center for Disease Control notes: "Most healthy adults may be able to infect other people beginning one day before symptoms develop and up to five to seven days after becoming sick. Children may pass the virus for longer than seven days. Symptoms start one to four days after the virus enters the body. That means that you may be able to pass on the flu to someone else before you know you are sick, as well as while you are sick. Some people can be infected with the flu virus but have no symptoms. During this time, those persons may still spread the virus to others" (CDC, Oct 5, 2017; [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov))

Those at higher risk of contracting the flu are children under five, women who are pregnant, people over 65, and anyone with a compromised immune system (Center for Disease Control, February 6, 2018).

**SHOULD YOU COME TO MASS?** The Obligation to attend Mass on Sunday and other Holy Days of Obligation is the ordinary expectation for Roman Catholics (Canon 1247). However, extraordinary circumstances such as sickness or severe weather excuse the faithful from this obligation. If you suspect you have the flu or are suffering from a serious cold or other contagious illness, please stay at home and do not risk spreading infection to others.

**HOLDING HANDS DURING THE LORD'S PRAYER:** Well-intentioned folks introduced this practice into parishes in the 1980s. Although holding hands can be a beautiful expression of people united in prayer, the gesture is not envisioned as a proper action in any Church documents governing the Sacred Liturgy, and therefore, neither called for nor required. It is most fitting to pray the "Our Father" with hands folded in prayer.

**THE SIGN OF PEACE:** Please do not take offence should someone choose not to shake hands with you during the Sign of Peace. An appropriate gesture for those who are concerned about spreading the flu virus might be to clasp your hands together and with a smile say "Peace be with you".

**RECEIVING HOLY COMMUNION:** Roman Catholics believe that both the Body and the Blood of Christ are contained fully in the Holy Eucharist under the form of either the Consecrated Host or the Precious Blood; that is, whether one receives only the Host or only the Precious Blood, one receives Jesus fully. While the Church encourages reception of both Forms at Mass as a fuller expression of the Last Supper, this may not always be possible. If you are feeling sick or suspect that you might have been exposed to something contagious, please refrain from receiving Holy Communion from the cup, and receive only the Sacred Host. It is never appropriate to dip your host into the cup, as this is irreverent and can contaminate the cup. Pastors may exercise discretion as to temporarily refraining from distributing Holy Communion under both Forms, depending on the severity of an outbreak and how widespread it has become within the parish boundaries.

**HEEDING MEDICAL ADVICE:** If you've been told by your medical advisor that you are particularly susceptible to infection or to complications due to flu in particular, please refrain from practices that might make you sick, including shaking hands, receiving Holy Communion on the tongue, drinking the Precious Blood from the Chalice, etc.