



24 November 2022

COVID-19 UPDATE (UPDATE #27)

We have made incredible progress in our fight against COVID-19 (C-19), but we are now facing some imminent threats that will likely cause further spread of the virus and related health challenges for many. This “trifecta” is a combination of a surge of C-19 infections, a particular virus affecting children called RSV, along with the start of another “cold and flu” season. This update is a reminder of practices that we adopted in the early stages of C-19 and others as we went along, especially with the annual campaigns against influenza.

1. Vaccinations and Flu Shots

The vast majority of medical professionals emphasize the importance of getting the vaccine to fight C-19. These are readily available for almost all ages of children, youth, and adults. By now, booster shots are also available, and people should avail themselves of at least two booster shots by this time. Some have had more, and those with pre-existing conditions are getting the boosters as often as they can. This is still the best way for us to fight this pandemic if all who are able to be vaccinated do so.

The annual “flu” shots are available and are a great weapon for fighting off the flu. A special shot is available for seniors and others with compromising conditions.

2. Masks

Our national Chief Medical Officer of Health, Dr. Theresa Tam, continues to advocate for the use of masks in all public buildings, as well as outside when people find themselves in a crowd.

I strongly encourage all people, then, to wear masks when gathering in our parish churches, halls, or other related buildings. As before, it is quite acceptable for those who are leading prayers, proclaiming the Scriptures, leading song, or preaching to remove their masks while performing their specific liturgical function.

The federal government leaves legislation for such mandates to the provinces. The government of the province of Ontario has stated clearly that there is no intention to reinstate a mask mandate at this time, yet local Medical Officers of Health in the counties have freedom to enforce such a mandate. Each region of the Diocese will need to find out what mandates may be in force in your own region and follow accordingly. These mandates change from time to time.

Wearing proper masks – and wearing them properly – has been proven to stop the spread of viruses or, at least, to slow them down. This small sacrifice may help to keep our churches open as we deal with this “trifecta”. We do not want to see our churches closed for another Christmas!

3. Washing Hands

It was noted throughout the first two winters of C-19 how so few people had either colds or flu. Many attributed it to the fact that handwashing and sanitizing were promoted as ways to fight C-19. Lessening the number of those infected by colds and flu not only helps individuals, but the population at large, since these virus-related illnesses easily spread.

4. Other Safety Measures

The directive to offer a **Sign of Peace** should still be given with an expression that allows for people to feel comfortable if they do not wish to shake hands or make any bodily contact. A presider or deacon may say, "Let us offer each other some sign of peace."

I continue to expect that **all ministers of Holy Communion** who exercise their ministry in a church, seniors residence, nursing home, or private home **wear a mask and sanitize their hands properly** before distributing Communion, and after each time a communicant receives Communion on the tongue. The act of giving Communion on the tongue makes it possible for someone with C-19 – knowingly or not – to pass on the virus simply by breathing on the priest's fingers at the moment Communion is given. Such a hand may infect the next communicant or compromise the integrity of any Hosts in a ciborium. It is important to note: this directive does not allow the possibility of giving Communion on the tongue even to two people in a row without sanitizing after each person receives, even if those people are related.

If we all do our part, we will overcome these viruses and be prepared to deal with the next one to come along. Let us continue this joint effort, and let us continue to pray for those who have been afflicted by C-19, especially our children and seniors.

I ask that pastors communicate these recommendations and expectations to all of their parishioners at the earliest possible moment after receiving them.

Bishop Joseph and I are united with all of you in our prayers. May you have a blessed Advent season as we prepare for the celebration of the Nativity of the Lord.

Most Rev. Ronald P. Fabbro, CSB
Bishop of London