

Being Faithful during Cold and Flu Season

Colds and flu are typically associated with the cold weather, but it pays to be prepared anytime. Here are some tips to help keep your community of faith healthy when colds and flu strike.

Stay Healthy

Prevention is always better than cure, so consider doing the following to help keep yourself healthy:

- Get a flu shot each year.
- Drink plenty of water/fluids.
- Eat a healthy diet.
- Exercise regularly.
- Get enough rest.
- Decrease stress.

Practise Good Hand Hygiene

Statistics show that good hand hygiene is a first line of defence against germs. Wash your hands thoroughly

- before handling or eating food
- after coughing or sneezing
- before and after visiting with people who are ill, particularly if you are providing communion, laying on of hands, or other liturgical acts involving touch
- after shaking hands and touching shared objects
- after using the washroom
- after changing diapers
- whenever your hands are visibly dirty

For more information on good hand hygiene, check out [Breaking the Chain](#).

Pass the Peace, not the Germs

Passing the Peace to one another during worship often means handshakes and even hugs. During cold/flu season and if people are already sniffing, why not offer alternative gestures such as

- folding hands in a prayer gesture and slightly bowing to others
- raising your hand gently in a sign of blessing
- exchanging elbow bumps works too

Healthy Communion

This excerpt, written for lay Sacraments Elders but applicable to ministry personnel, is from the United Church's *Sacraments Elders* handbook (2016):

Hygiene is important in communion, especially during the cold and flu season but also generally.

There is widespread discussion about the relative merits and risks attached to each method of distributing the elements. Without doubt, using individual cups and separate squares of pre-cut bread is the most hygienic method, although even here handling the bread and cups needs to be carefully considered.

Intinction has come under increasing scrutiny, especially when poorly practised. The problem usually arises when small pieces of bread are used, the communicants' fingers get into the wine, and the bread dissolves into the wine, thereby carrying germs from the hand into the wine. The common cup has been used for centuries, and if used correctly—high-alcohol wine, a silver cup, wiped with a clean cloth and turned after each communicant—is quite sanitary. Since most United Churches use grape

juice instead of wine, in pottery cups, there is no disinfectant effect.

It is wise, indeed reverent, to keep the following in mind:

- Wash your hands as close to communion time as possible, and rinse them with an antibacterial hand sanitizer just before beginning your part of the service.
- If you sneeze or cough at any time during the service, use the sanitizer again, even if you use a tissue or handkerchief. Your community of faith will appreciate your thoughtfulness even if it looks a little unchurchy. Although the risk of transmitting disease is small, due diligence is always in order, and the community of faith won't be able to focus on communion if they're distracted by your cough or sneeze.
- Cut the pieces of bread large enough that people can pick one up easily without touching the others.
- If you will be breaking an entire loaf, it could be sliced partway or pierced with a fork ahead of time to enable a gracious breaking.
- If you use a common loaf, have only one person (you or an assistant) tear it and give

a piece to each communicant so many hands don't touch it.

- When using intinction, tip the chalice slightly toward the communicants to avoid their fingers touching the wine.
- Wash all utensils, glasses, and plates well immediately after the service, and store them in a clean, dry place.

Closing Thoughts

- Consider placing hand sanitizer near the church entrance for worshippers.
- Provide tissues and garbage cans in Sunday school classrooms.
- Review cleaning procedures in the nursery and toddler room, especially for toys.
- Make tissues available for the use of greeters and attendants.

Contact

Bev Oag
Duty of Care, Office of the Moderator and
General Secretary
dutyofcare@united-church.ca