



DIOCESE OF BUFFALO



OFFICE OF THE BISHOP

Dear Diocesan Family,

This year's influenza virus is the most widespread outbreak since public health authorities began keeping track more than a dozen years ago, according to the National Center for Immunization and Respiratory Diseases. The New York State Department of Health reports that cases of influenza rose by 54% last week and new cases were diagnosed in all counties of the state. In addition, 1,606 New Yorkers have been hospitalized with laboratory-confirmed influenza – the highest weekly number since the Department of Health began reporting in 2004!

I urge the clergy and faithful to observe necessary standard precautions to protect the health of others during this flu season. The best way to prevent the spread of contagious diseases is to practice good hygiene, such as washing your hands frequently with soap and water. In addition to these customary measures of flu prevention, I urge the following actions:

Liturgical Directives

- Holy water fonts are to be drained, cleaned with disinfecting soap, and re-filled with holy water on a regular basis. Sponges should be removed. Please note that old holy water should be disposed of in the sacrarium.
- The distribution of the Precious Blood for the faithful is suspended, with the exception of those who must receive from the cup due to medical reasons. The faith of the Church teaches that Christ, whole and entire, is received even under only one species.
- The exchange of the Sign of Peace is to be offered without any physical contact. If the priest celebrant chooses to extend the invitation for the sign of peace, the faithful, instead of a handshake, may bow to the persons nearby.
- While the faithful retain the option of receiving Holy Communion on the tongue or in the hand, all ministers of Holy Communion are advised to distribute the consecrated hosts with care, being cautious not to touch the tongue or the hand of the communicant. Ministers should also wash their hands before Mass in preparation for the distribution of consecrated hosts.
- Parishioners should be reminded that if they are ill or suspect they are ill with a contagious illness, they are not bound by the Sunday Mass obligation. They should remain at home and return to church when they are well.

Recommendations for Schools

- Each morning, all parents/caregivers should assess all family members and especially all school-age children for symptoms of influenza (fever plus cough, sore throat or runny nose) or other symptoms, such as vomiting or diarrhea that might be influenza.
- Each morning all school staff should assess themselves for symptoms of influenza.
- Students or staff with influenza-like illness (fever plus cough, sore throat or runny nose) should stay home and not attend school. All sick students and faculty, including those who are showing symptoms, should stay home from school until at least 24 hours after their fever is gone without the use of a fever-reducing medicine.

CDC General Prevention Guidelines

In addition to the flu vaccination, there are other important precautions you can take to help prevent the spread of the disease:

- Avoid close contact: Avoid close contact with people who are sick. When you are sick, keep your distance from others to protect them from getting sick too.
- If you get the flu, stay home: If possible, stay home from work, school, and errands when you are sick. You will help prevent others from catching your illness.
- Cover your mouth and nose: Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when coughing or sneezing. It may prevent those around you from getting sick.
- Clean your hands: Washing your hands often will help protect you from germs. If soap and water are not available, use an alcohol-based hand rub.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth: Germs are often spread when a person touches something that is contaminated with germs and then touches his or her eyes, nose, or mouth.
- Practice other good health habits: Clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces at home, work or school, especially when someone is ill. Get plenty of sleep, be physically active, manage your stress, drink plenty of fluids, and eat nutritious food.

Be assured of my prayerful best wishes for each of you especially during this flu season. It is my hope and prayer that by following the guidelines above, we may lessen the impact of this outbreak within the Diocese of Buffalo. Thank you for your immediate attention to this important matter!

Yours fraternally in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Richard J. Malone". The signature is written in a cursive style with a small cross at the beginning.

Most Reverend Richard J. Malone
Bishop of Buffalo