

# 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 congregation 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 the 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"](http://www.united-church.ca/files/local/duty/chain.pdf) at [www.united-church.ca/files/local/duty/chain.pdf](http://www.united-church.ca/files/local/duty/chain.pdf).

## Pass the Peace, not the Germs

John Henry Weinlick of McDougall United Church in Edmonton, Alberta shared the following experience of his congregation:



Advent 2006 was a time of widespread flu in Edmonton.

McDougall's worship leadership was concerned about protecting the health of worshippers. So, the weekly "Passing the Peace" was renamed "Passing the Peace, but not the Germs."

Clergy announced, "Our passing the peace this Advent season will be a little different. Instead of hugs and handshakes, we invite you to share the spiritual gifts of the season: Hope, Peace, Joy, and Love.

"If you want to share the gift of hope, put your hand above your eyes and look beyond the here and now to the hope of tomorrow. If you want to share the spiritual gift of peace, make the peace sign (two fingers in a V). If you want to share the gift of joy, do a high five, shouting "yes" but not touching. And if you want to share the gift of Christmas love, simply put your hand over your heart. Remember, you can be verbal, but no handshakes and no hugging."

The result was a an explosion of Spirit, laughter, and joy as doing the "old things in the context of a new time and circumstance" gave rebirth to the Spirit and involvement in worshipping God in and through community.

Has your congregation developed an alternative for passing the peace or other worship elements that you would like to share? Send us your story and we will share it with others.

## Healthy Communion



This excerpt, written for lay Sacraments Elders but applicable to ministry personnel, is from the *Sacraments Elder Workbook* (The United Church of Canada, 2008). Used with permission.

Hygiene is important in communion, especially during the cold and flu season but also as a general rule.

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 Great Thanksgiving, use the sanitizer again, even if you use a tissue or handkerchief. Your congregation 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

congregation won't be able to focus on communion if they're distracted by the "ick factor" of your cough or sneeze.

- Cut the pieces of bread large enough that people can pick one up easily without touching the others and so people don't get their fingers wet if they will be dipping the bread in the wine.
- 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 to use before shaking hands with greeters.
- 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.

