

**The Catholic Bishops' Conference  
of England & Wales  
Healthcare Executive Group**



# **Coronavirus**

*Guidelines for the Church*

***Version 1 February 2020***

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

These guidelines were compiled on behalf of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales by Professor Jim McManus, a member of the Healthcare Executive Group.

## Foreword

At the time of writing the risk to the public from coronavirus remains low. We issue these guidelines purely to enable Catholic churches and organisations to find in one place the relevant information to them.

Because this is a rapidly changing situation, we may change these guidelines as the situation changes. But in the meantime, it will be crucial to ensure as you read these you check the latest guidance from Government

At the time of writing our guidance focuses on the hygiene measures needed to disrupt the spread of coronavirus should we get a number of cases in England and Wales. But at present we remain as individuals in England and Wales at low risk.

As Catholics we reiterate the commitment of the Church to health care ministry. Ensuring we disrupt the spread of the virus is core to effective mission. Part of this is reassurance that we have no cause for fear.

**+ Right Revd Paul Mason**

Lead Bishop for Healthcare

Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales

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## Key Messages

- At the time of writing, individuals in the UK remain at low risk from coronavirus.
- The best way of protecting us from spread is for everyone to use universal good hygiene, which will effectively disrupt spread of the virus. We should be doing this all the time for 'flu:
  - Catch it - sneeze into a tissue
  - Bin it - bin the tissue
  - Kill it - wash your hands with soap and water
  - Do not touch your face unless you've washed your hands
  - Ensure good regular cleaning of surfaces lots of people touch regularly
- There is a government campaign on hygiene and posters can be downloaded and placed in parishes. It would be sensible to place these in churches and premises and alert people to this in newsletters and bulletins. The link can be found in the **further materials** section below.
- Government has issued guidance for the public and this remains the best source of advice. The link can be found in the further materials section below.
- At the time of writing there is no need to take special measures on suspending the Chalice or Sign of Peace. Should that become necessary, more detailed pastoral care guidance will be issued.
- Ensuring ministers of the Eucharist wash their hands before distributing communion or sanitise them is a good practice to encourage **always**.
- Catholic Schools and Care Facilities should have regard to guidance from government, and for ease of reference this guidance has been summarised in this document
- Pastoral care remains important
  - Chaplains and others working in institutions where people with coronavirus are being cared for should seek and follow hygiene guidance from that institution
  - Those who have been asked to self-isolate in the community as a precaution by medical staff will understandably be anxious but equally it is important not to breach this isolation. "In person care" should be kept to a minimum and advice taken from **NHS 111 or call NHS Direct Wales on 0845 4647** on any precautions needed.

## Coronavirus – understanding the outbreak

On 31 December 2019, the World Health Organisation was informed of a cluster of cases of pneumonia of unknown cause detected in Wuhan City, China.

The cause is now identified as a coronavirus, one of the family of viruses which caused the SARS (Serious Acute Respiratory Syndrome) outbreak in 2002-2003 across the world, though it is less severe than SARS. The virus is now called Novel Coronavirus (2019-nCoV).

As a family of viruses, these viruses are fairly common, and can range from mild to very severe in effect.

Typical symptoms of coronavirus include fever and a cough that may progress to a severe pneumonia causing shortness of breath and breathing difficulties. Most people who get coronavirus will have mild to moderate illness, a bit like 'flu.

Generally, coronavirus can cause more severe symptoms in people with weakened immune systems, older people, and those with long term conditions like diabetes, cancer and chronic lung disease. The death rate is low, typically at present around 2%, which is a little above the death rate for 'flu. But it has understandably caused concern because of the lack of information and because of myth. Some of the most important things Catholics can do would be to restate the facts accurately, reassure, counter prejudice against Chinese and other communities.

There has been a great deal of anxiety because of people assuming wrongly that the virus is more serious than it is. A key issue is to reassure people.

This is a rapidly evolving situation and latest updates can be found on the Gov.uk website here

- For the public <https://publichealthmatters.blog.gov.uk/2020/01/23/wuhan-novel-coronavirus-what-you-need-to-know/>
- For professionals <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/wuhan-novel-coronavirus-background-information>

The NHS has processes in place to manage cases where people may have or do have the virus.

## People returning from China and self-isolation

This advice may change, and it is important to check against the Public Health England and Foreign and Commonwealth Office websites.

If you have visited Wuhan or Hubei Province in the last 14 days you should stay indoors and **avoid contact with others** as you would with flu, and call NHS 111 informing them of your symptoms and your recent travel to the city. If you are in Northern Ireland, call 0300 200 7885.

Please follow this advice even if you do not have symptoms of the virus. If you develop a fever, difficulty breathing or a cough, you should continue to follow the advice above. Please do not leave your home until you have been given advice by a clinician.

If you have travelled from elsewhere in China (but not Macao or Hong Kong) to the UK in the last 14 days and develop symptoms of cough, fever or shortness of breath, you should immediately:

- stay indoors and avoid contact with other people as you would with the flu
- call NHS 111 or call NHS Direct Wales on 0845 4647 to inform them of your recent travel to the country

### What does self-isolation mean for people who don't have symptoms?

Just like when you have the flu, individuals should remain at home and should not go to work, school, church or public areas. Where possible, individuals should avoid having visitors to their home, but it is ok for friends, family or delivery drivers to drop off food. Individuals should not use public transport or taxis until 14 days after their return from Wuhan. In religious communities members returning from China are advised to limit their time with other members of the community as much as possible. (Avoid common meals or common Mass, worship and recreation times) until after the 14 days.

- Further advice on self-isolation is here <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/wuhan-novel-coronavirus-self-isolation-for-patients-undergoing-testing/advice-sheet-home-isolation>

Individuals should monitor their symptoms and call NHS 111 or call NHS Direct Wales on 0845 4647 or their GP if they develop any of the following symptoms – fever, cough, runny nose, sore throat and difficulty breathing. In religious communities members returning from China should mention they live in community (e.g. seminary or community) when they ring.

Advice for those living in community with someone in self-isolation (e.g. communities of clergy, religious, seminaries) can be found here <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/wuhan-novel-coronavirus-self->

[isolation-for-patients-undergoing-testing/advice-sheet-for-people-who-live-in-the-same-accommodation-as-the-patient](#)

## Advice for Parishes and Community Facilities

The key things for parishes to do are:

1. Ensure everyone maintains good hygiene especially at Mass and parish gatherings.

The best way of protecting us from spread is for everyone to use universal good hygiene, which will effectively disrupt spread of the virus. We should be doing this all the time for 'flu:

- Catch it - sneeze into a tissue
  - Bin it - bin the tissue
  - Kill it - wash your hands with soap and water
  - Do not touch your face unless you've washed your hands
2. Ask anyone with cold or flu symptoms to refrain from taking communion from the Chalice and receive the host on the hand only. (We should be doing this anyway, every 'flu season.)
  3. Ensure good regular cleaning of surfaces lots of people touch regularly.
  4. Ensure you combat discrimination against Chinese people and others wrongly assumed to have or be spreading the virus.
  5. Display the public information poster (See Further Materials below).
  6. Consider asking everyone at large gatherings like Mass to sanitise their hands as they come in, especially communal meals.
  7. Ensure Ministers of the Eucharist sanitise their hands before and after distributing communion (we should be doing this anyway as a matter of course.) This can be done by washing hands discreetly before proceeding to the sanctuary or using good quality hand gel discreetly.

Remember to use good hand washing and gel use technique. You can find more here: <https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/healthy-body/best-way-to-wash-your-hands/> and a poster here: <https://www.who.int/gpsc/5may/resources/posters/en/>

8. There is no need as things stand, for the Chalice to be withdrawn or the sign of peace suspended, such as was advised during the 2009 'flu pandemic. This advice would only come if we had a very serious epidemic in the UK and at the time of writing this is unlikely.

## Pastoral Visiting from parishes

9. If people are not known to have coronavirus or flu-like symptoms or not asked to self-isolate because they have recently returned from an area of very high prevalence, pastoral visiting is fine. If they do have coronavirus then pastoral visiting should be suspended. Hospital chaplains or those ministering in hospitals should follow any advice from the hospital staff.

## Community Facilities e.g. day centres

1. Follow the hygiene advice for parishes.
2. If you have a suspected case of someone in a school, it is best to put the person in a room away from others while you take immediate advice from NHS 111 or NHS Direct Wales on 0845 4647. Follow advice from there. They will also give you advice on any cleaning needed.

## Advice for Residential Catholic Care Facilities

1. People using residential care facilities are likely to have weakened immune systems. It is therefore important to protect them from 'flu-like illnesses as much as possible.
2. Follow good hygiene guidance and take advice from your infection control provider or adviser.
3. Follow the guidance here on staff who have recently been to or returned from China:  
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/novel-coronavirus-2019-ncov-guidance-for-healthcare-providers-with-staff-who-have-travelled-to-china/guidance-for-healthcare-providers-healthcare-workers-who-have-travelled-to-china>

## Advice for Catholic Schools, Early Years and Education Settings

1. The Department for Education has issued advice to Schools.
2. Universities, colleges, seminaries and houses of studies with staff or students returning from China should follow the advice above and the basic hygiene advice for everyone. You may wish to contact your local Health Protection Team for specific advice:
  - a. England <https://www.gov.uk/health-protection-team>

- b. Wales call 0300 00 300 32.
3. Hygiene measures as advised above for parishes are the most effective things to do.
4. Getting into the routine of practising good hygiene for colds and 'flu is the best way to disrupt spread of the virus if it does start circulating in the UK.
5. People who have returned from China and who are in self-isolation should not bring their children to school or college.
6. If you have a suspected case of someone in a school, it is best to put the person in a room away from others while you take immediate advice from NHS 111 or NHS Direct Wales on 0845 46 47. Follow advice from there. They will also give you advice on any cleaning needed.
7. Contact your local Public Health England Team or Public Health Wales Health Protection Team (see para 2 above) if you have an outbreak of 'flu-like illness.
8. Resources for Universities can be found here:  
<https://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/policy-and-analysis/Documents/2020/coronavirus-resources.zip>

## Cleaning Advice

This advice does not apply to residential care settings, and you should follow the advice from your infection control adviser in such facilities.

Because the virus is not yet circulating widely in the UK there is **no need** for any special cleaning. This may change as cases grow, and it is possible that as cases grow the advice on cleaning will change to using chlorine-based or chlorine-releasing cleaning agents.

In any case, regular cleaning to disrupt spread of colds and flu will be sufficient for workplaces, homes and most non-care settings. The best way to prepare for the possibility of any virus circulating in the UK is to get into the rhythm of doing this.

- Regular cleaning with ordinary detergent of surfaces touched frequently and thus likely to have droplets of cold or flu virus on them like worktops, tables, door handles, light switches, lift button panels.
- There is **NO** need at present to use special detergents.

- Because coronavirus is a virus not a bacteria, antibacterial cleaning agents are **not** required.
- Spillages of body fluids (e.g. vomit, blood etc.) should be cleaned following the usual protocols for your situation e.g. parish or care home.

## Advice for Catholic Employers (e.g. Charities)

1. Follow the general hygiene advice for parishes.
2. For any staff who have returned from China recently follow the advice for those returning and self-isolation or take occupational health advice if you have it. Staff advised to self-isolate should not report for work until clearance has been given.

## Further Materials

**For the latest information go to:**

<https://publichealthmatters.blog.gov.uk/2020/01/23/wuhan-novel-coronavirus-what-you-need-to-know>

**NHS Information**

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/wuhan-novel-coronavirus/>

**Public Information Poster**

<https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5e35b25740f0b609169cb52a/coronavirus-public-info-poster-2.pdf>

**Catch it, Bin it, Kill it Poster**

<https://www.england.nhs.uk/south/wp-content/uploads/sites/6/2017/09/catch-bin-kill.pdf>

**Information for Professionals and care settings**

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/wuhan-novel-coronavirus-background-information>

**Further advice on self-isolation is here**

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/wuhan-novel-coronavirus-self-isolation-for-patients-undergoing-testing/advice-sheet-home-isolation>

**Advice for those living in community with someone in self-isolation (e.g. communities of clergy, religious, seminaries) can be found here**

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/wuhan-novel-coronavirus-self-isolation-for-patients-undergoing-testing/advice-sheet-for-people-who-live-in-the-same-accommodation-as-the-patient>

**Hand washing technique resources**

<https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/healthy-body/best-way-to-wash-your-hands/> and a poster here <https://www.who.int/gpsc/5may/resources/posters/en/>

**Resources for Universities can be found here**

<https://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/policy-and-analysis/Documents/2020/coronavirus-resources.zip>



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