



226 West State Street
Sharon, PA 16146
www.stjohnssharon.org
stjohns@stjohnssharon.org
phone...724.347.4501....fax...724.347.4502

Influenza Pandemic Prevention and Response Policy

Adopted by Vestry on March 9, 2020

Purpose

In case of the threat of or actual influenza pandemic affecting the members of St. John's congregation and the greater community, this policy will offer guidance to safeguard health and provide a safe environment in which to worship. In our response to an influenza pandemic or other public health crisis, we continue to *Worship God, Care for People, and Grow as Christians* in the ways most appropriate to the situation. We believe that following appropriate guidelines will allow us to love and care for our community in the midst of a crisis.

Pandemic Flu Defined

An influenza pandemic occurs when a strain of flu infects a large portion of the world's population owing to a lack of natural immunity to a new or mutated strain of an influenza virus. Humans spread the virus to other humans so the more humans that become infected, the faster the disease spreads. An influenza pandemic threatens public health and the global economy; disrupts communications and delivery of vital goods and services.

Key Personnel

In the case of an influenza pandemic the essential operations of St. John's will rest on the rector and members of the Vestry. Should the rector and vestry become ill or unavailable, the vital operations of St. John's will be assumed by the Episcopal Diocese of Northwestern Pennsylvania.

Access to Church Building

During an influenza pandemic, local, state, or federal authorities may limit or prohibit individuals' access to public services, transportation; and buildings. Should such limitations or prohibitions be in place, St. John's will comply with the directives of authorities. Parishioners may communicate with the rector and other key personal via telecommunication.

Should the church proper be required to house the ill, health providers and emergency personnel, or for quarantine, St. John's will provide such service for the greater good.

Access to the church by outside organizations may be cancelled during times of significant outbreaks if doing so is believed to prevent the transmission of the virus through the community or to protect a vulnerable population.

Infection Prevention and Control

To minimize exposure to and the spread of infection, the Centers for Disease Control recommends the following measures:

- Wash your hands often for 20 seconds using soap and water. When soap and water are not available, use alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
- If you are sick or have had a recent known exposure to the flu stay home. Avoid public places and contact with others.
- Seek medical attention as necessary and appropriate.
- Maintain up-to-date vaccinations.
- Limit handshakes and hugs
- Use disinfectant wipes on tabletops, countertops, doorknobs, handrails, and frequently used items.
- Cough and sneeze into the bend of your elbow, rather than your hand. Alternatively, cover your cough or sneeze with a tissue, then throw the tissue in the trash and wash your hands.
- Avoid close contact with people who are sick.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth.
- If you have flu symptoms, wear a mask to help prevent the spread of infection to others.

Communication

St. John's will make available reliable, up-to-date public health advisories in written and/or digital form to its parishioners and the greater community. Important updates will be offered during worship, meetings, and classes.

Parishioners are encouraged to communicate directly with their health care professionals regarding individual health concerns.

The rector and other key personnel will be available to answer questions, to address spiritual concerns, and to make appropriate referrals as warranted and available. Such referrals could include mental health counseling, access to food, and other necessities, housing, and healthcare. PA-2-1-1 Southwest is a referral resource that is working with the Center for

Disease Control and United Way Worldwide on both disease prevention and appropriate referral opportunities for each zip code in our community.

Worship Adaptations

During influenza pandemic or other adverse situations, St. John's will continue to hold scheduled worship services unless the gathering is prohibited by the proper authorities in the interests of public health or clergy and other leaders are unable to lead services. However, all parishioners should use their best judgment regarding going out. Those who are ill or vulnerable should choose to stay home. If services are canceled, St. John's will try to use Facebook live to offer some type of worship service that parishioners may stream at home.

Special care should be given to communion, the peace, and other interactions. During the peace, please consider exchanging the peace with a smile and nod, kind words, or a wave.

Communion will be distributed as normal, however parishioners are asked to keep in mind a number of things. First, to receive the host, keep your hands flat so the host can be laid into it without hand-to-hand contact. Second, although there are no cases of the common cup transmitting illness, if you are sick, please refrain from partaking. Third, intinction appears more likely to transmit disease than drinking from the common cup, so consider avoiding intinction. The Church's eucharistic theology has always held that receiving either the bread or the cup provides all the benefits of each, so no one need partake of the cup.

Since hand shaking is a common method of disease transmission, be aware of that when shaking hands with the clergy or other parishioners who may have shaken many hands. Again, a non-contact greeting may be better.

Visitation

During times of an influenza pandemic it may become necessary to limit visitation of the sick and infirmed. The rector and key personnel will be available to offer prayer by phone or face-to-face digital communication.

Other Considerations

St. John's will do its share to prevent, limit or respond to influenza pandemics by offering its facilities for immunization clinics, community education, and emergency preparedness and response meetings; and by assisting other faith-based and community organizations with the development of their influenza pandemic response plans.