

Cold & Flu at Mass: What Should You do?

Whenever two or more people gather, some sharing of germs is inevitable. When Catholics gather in Jesus' name to celebrate the Eucharist, our first concern is sharing our gratitude, our faith and our belief in Christ among us.

However, with the cold and flu season underway, each of us also has the responsibility of taking precautions to prevent the spread of these illnesses.

We need to wash our hands frequently, take care where we cough and sneeze, and scrutinize our habits and procedures where the spread of infection seems most possible. Some things to keep in mind.

SHOULD YOU COME TO MASS? The Obligation to attend Mass on Sunday and other Holy Days of Obligation is the ordinary expectation for Roman Catholics (Canon 1247). However, extraordinary circumstances such as sickness or severe weather excuse the faithful from this obligation. If you suspect you have the flu or are suffering from a very serious cold, please stay at home and do not risk spreading infection to others.

THE SIGN OF PEACE: Please don't be offended if someone chooses not to shake hands with you during the Sign of Peace. An appropriate gesture for those who are concerned about spreading germs might be to strive for eye contact rather than physical contact. You could put your hands together and bow gently to those around you, and with a smile say "Peace be with you."

RECEIVING HOLY COMMUNION: Roman Catholics believe that both the Body and the Blood of Christ are contained in the Holy Eucharist under the form of the consecrated host. But the Church encourages reception from the chalice at Mass as a fuller expression of the Last Supper and Christ's precious blood poured out for us in sacrifice. However, if you are not feeling well or have a cold or a bad cough, please receive Holy Communion in the hand, rather on the tongue, and refrain from receiving communion from the chalice.

PREGNANT WOMEN AND PEOPLE WITH COMPROMISED IMMUNE SYSTEMS: If you've been told by your medical advisor that you are particularly susceptible to infection or to complications due to flu in particular, please refrain from practices that might make you sick, including shaking hands, receiving Holy Communion on the tongue, receiving the Precious Blood from the Chalice, etc.