

Flue Prevention Guidelines for Holy Communion

What about taking communion? Is it safe?

Studies have shown that being in church, interacting with parishioners and receiving Communion constitute only minimal health risks.

The Rev. Clay Morris, program officer for worship and spirituality at the Episcopal Church Center in New York, said his office has been collecting research that shows that the practice of sharing the chalice, called the "common cup," generally carries a very low risk of infection. "We are told repeatedly that the common cup is not a health hazard," he said.

However, there are some common sense precautions that not only will protect worshippers but will help allay normal fears.

1. **Clergy, servers should wash their hands.** Clergy, Eucharistic ministers, acolytes and anyone else handling communion elements should wash their hands (or use hand sanitizer) immediately before distributing communion and again afterward. Proper hand washing includes vigorous rubbing with soap and warm water for at least 20 seconds; sing the first verse of any song and it will be about the right length of time. If using hand sanitizer, use a dime-sized amount and rub vigorously until hands are dry

2. **Rotate and firmly wipe the chalice.** Those administering the chalice should be certain to rotate the cup at least a quarter-turn after each communicant and to wipe the inside **and** outside of the chalice rim **firmly** with a purificator. Use fresh purificators frequently, and wash soiled linens in hot, soapy water.

3. **Intinction cautions.** Studies have shown that the greatest risk of contamination during communion comes when worshippers intinct for themselves. To minimize risk, it is may be suggested to congregants during this time that only the clergy or Eucharistic minister dip wafers into the chalice. Care should be exercised to place the wafer on the person's tongue without touching the tongue or mouth.

4. **Communion in one kind.** Worshippers should also know that if they are concerned about receiving the wine, communion in one kind – bread only – is a full communion.

5. **At the Peace.** Casual handshakes during the Peace have not been documented as a high risk for infection. Those concerned, however, can offer the Peace by word only.

6. **Make sanitizing gel available.** Churches may wish to make hand sanitizing gel (containing alcohol) available to worshippers. Use before receiving communion will reduce the risk of infection, also.

As with any illness, worshippers who exhibit any symptoms of flu should be encouraged to stay home.

More information about liturgical practices and the risk of infection is available from [the Church of Canada](#).