



# **SAFE CHURCH INITIATIVE**

## **Flu Preparedness Guidelines for Churches**

The spring of 2009 saw the arrival of a new strain of flu, H1N1, and public health officials continue to have concerns about the development of other dangerous flu strains. It is important, therefore, for churches to take precautions during flu season to minimize the risk to congregation members.

The following are guidelines to consider:

- Consider forming a Flu Preparedness Team in your church made up of church staff members, healthcare professionals, public safety professionals and/or other interested leaders to develop a specific plan for your church.
- Make sure your public areas are thoroughly cleaned and sanitized regularly, especially children's areas where toys are shared.
- Make sure your church has hand sanitizers, anti-bacterial soaps and disposable tissues located in strategic places throughout the church, including bathrooms, entry areas, nursery check-in stations, kitchens and offices. In some contexts, you may want to add small bottles of hand sanitizer to the pew rack.
- Use bulletin boards, bulletins, newsletters and announcement screens to remind people to cover their mouths and nose with a tissue when coughing or sneezing and to wash hands with soap and water.
- Post signs in each restroom reminding people to wash their hands thoroughly with soap and water. Educate children's ministry/nursery workers on diligent hand washing.
- Ask parents to stop at the restroom and wash children's hands with soap and water before bringing them to nursery/classrooms.
- If an outbreak of H1N1 or other serious flu strain occurs in your community, consider adjusting the greeting times during services to discourage shaking hands as this is one of the most common ways to spread diseases. Think creatively about ways you can help people connect without using physical touches.
- Instruct greeters/ushers to wash hands before they begin greeting people, and keep hand sanitizer available for their use throughout their work.
- Ask greeters/ushers to wipe down doorknobs before and after each worship service.
- Encourage congregation members to get flu vaccinations when they are available.
- Share with congregation members that it's acceptable to stay home from church if they are sick. The Centers for Disease Control recommends that people with flu-like symptoms stay home for at least 24 hours after fever has ended.

## Considerations for Your Church's Flu Preparedness Team

In addition to helping your congregation implement the guidelines above, a church's flu preparedness team should:

- Make contact with your local public health facilities to understand how community health information regarding flu outbreaks and public safety recommendations will be communicated.
- Discuss in advance what level of illness will prompt your church to adjust or cancel services or other church programs. Decide how this information will be communicated to the congregation or participants.
- Consider how your church can minister to the community during a time of high anxiety. Ask these questions:
  - Can you church serve as distribution points for vaccinations?
  - Can you use your church Web site and other communications tools to deliver public health messages that address people's concerns and/or dispel rumors?
  - What are ways the church can provide emotional support and comfort to the community if the community becomes particularly hard hit?

## Helpful Web Sites

The following Web sites provide further information and guidelines about the flu:

- [www.flu.gov](http://www.flu.gov) – A U.S. government Web site managed by the Department of Health and Human Services.
- [www.hhs.gov/fbci](http://www.hhs.gov/fbci) -- Web page where a downloadable copy of *H1N1 Flu: A Guide for Community and Faith-Based Organizations* can be accessed.
- [www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu](http://www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu) -- Centers for Disease Control page on the H1N1 virus.
- [www.healthalerts.ky.gov](http://www.healthalerts.ky.gov) – Kentucky Health Alerts site managed by the Commonwealth of Kentucky.
- [www.kybaptist.org/safechurch](http://www.kybaptist.org/safechurch) - KBC's Safe Church Initiative page.