

**A Diocesan Response
with Guidance Concerning COVID-19**



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Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) is a respiratory illness that can spread from person to person. COVID-19 is spreading from person to person in parts of the United States. The risk of infection with COVID-19 is higher for people who are close contacts of someone known to have COVID-19, particularly people within the same household and close working quarters. The virus is thought to spread mainly between people who are in close contact with one another (within about 6 feet) through respiratory droplets produced when an infected person coughs or sneezes. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has advised that there is currently no vaccine to protect against, or specific antiviral treatment for COVID-19.

The Diocese of Austin continues to monitor the situation arising about the potential spread of COVID-19 in the United States, and particularly Central Texas. In view of COVID-19, the uncertainty of how widespread and impactful it could be, as a precaution, we issue this document

The general message from the CDC and the Texas Department of State Health Services (DSHS) is that all should be prepared, but not panicked. The diocese will continue to monitor advisories regarding precautions on the coronavirus and share any appropriate information.

Advisory for the Pastoral Center and other Diocesan Employees

Deacon Ron Walker, Chancellor

The Very Rev. James A. Misko, Vicar General and Moderator of the Curia, formed a team to continue to study and provide information about proper responses to the concerns related to coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19). The situation and information changes daily, necessitating the need to continually update or change our approach. All Pastoral Center employees should follow the protocols outlined below.

1. Michael Scarpato is the contact person to address questions regarding all matters related to COVID-19 issues. He may refer employees to another staff person, but please address the question first to him. This will ensure consistency in responses and information. He will also provide employees with updated information as is appropriate.
2. Each employee should review and follow the recommendations in the attached information related to proper hygiene, washing of hands, and taking proper precautions, as published by the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).
3. An employee may politely refuse to shake hands with others (including visitors) if he or she so chooses.
4. We have been informed by medical professionals that keeping 6 or more feet away from someone who has contracted COVID-19 is the "safe distance." If an employee is concerned about exposure to the virus from any other person, keeping that distance is advisable.
5. Each employee should regularly wash his or her hands, use hand sanitizer, and wipe down his or her work area with sanitizing wipes.
6. An employee should stay home if he or she has respiratory symptoms (coughing, sneezing, shortness of breath) or a temperature greater than 100.4. Such an employee should advise his or her supervisor accordingly and keep his or her supervisor apprised of the employee's condition.
7. We have been informed by medical professionals that keeping 6 or more feet away from someone who has contracted COVID-19 is the "safe distance." If an employee is concerned about exposure to the virus from any other person, keeping that distance is advisable.
8. Medical professionals inform us that the most important risk reduction practice is to wash one's hands frequently with soap and water for 20 seconds. Using hand sanitizer may be effective if washing hands is not possible.
9. Secretariat directors and department heads should minimize travel as much as is reasonably possible and look for alternative means (such as teleconferencing or phone conferencing) to hold larger meetings with outside groups. An employee is not required to cancel events which are

already scheduled or booked but should still discuss with the supervisor whether such events or travel should be canceled.

10. Each department-head should identify whether a “work-from-home” possibility exists for each position in the department and report that information to the secretariat director. This information may be used to make decisions if a work-from-home situation is necessary for one or several employees.

11. If a “medium” or “high-risk” exposure to COVID-19 occurs, an employee who is so exposed may be asked to stay at home and a determination will be made as to whether a work-from-home arrangement is possible. A medium or high-risk exposure generally occurs when one has been in close contact with someone who is known to be infected or has recently traveled from a high-risk region.

12. Rumors and fears can spread quickly. It is imperative for the diocese be able to reach all employees in case of emergency or time-sensitive matter. Each employee should ensure that his or her department-head and secretariat director have the employee’s mobile phone number. Additionally, all employees should be able to receive text alerts from the diocesan texting system. Employees may contact Christian Gonzalez, the Director of Communications, for accessing the proper text-alert Application.

13. At this time, employees should follow the normal PTO request policy, found in the Diocesan Employee Manual, when taking leave for any purpose.

Advisory for Catholic Schools

Misty Poe, Superintendent

(512) 949-2499

On February 11, 2020, Misty Poe, the Superintendent of Catholic Schools, notified all schools through their principals of the threat of COVID-19. In that communication, she shared information and guidance from the Texas Department of State Health Services. The following information details the measures in place for Catholic schools.

Preventative Measures

1. All school employees and students should wash their hands with soap, under warm or hot water after using the restroom; use hand sanitizer products after contact with foreign objects; avoiding direct hand to eye, hand to nose, or hand to mouth contact; covering the mouth and nose with the bend of the arm when sneezing or coughing if tissue is not readily available; and frequently clean and sterilize surfaces like doorknobs, desktops, keyboards, copiers, and telephones.
2. School employees and students should stay home if they are sick. Persons should stay home or see a physician if: (1) they have returned from a level 1 or 2 country within the prior 14 days; and (2) they are having lower respiratory issues; or (3) they have had known exposure to someone with symptoms; or (4) they have fever of 100.4 or greater. Persons with fever cannot return to school/work until they have been fever-free for 24 hours.
3. All school facility teams should use hospital grade disinfectant agents to wipe down all handles on doors, toilet bowl handles, and tabletops.

School Closures

1. Any decisions that may need to be made regarding a change to school operations should be done so with guidance from the CDC, local and state health officials, Texas Education Agency (TEA) and guidance of the diocese.
2. Schools should follow local independent school districts and recommendations from local health departments.
3. Schools have all prepared for an e-learning option, should the school close for an undetermined period.
4. When schools must be closed for a disease prevention, the employee compensation should follow the "Severe Weather" policy outlined in the Employee Manual. Custodial staff should be provided all necessary safety attire and appropriate cleaning materials to

conduct a deep clean and disinfection of the facilities and premises prior to the reopening of the school.

Travel Restrictions

1. Schools may need to postpone or cancel trips that could expose students and staff to potential community spread of COVID-19. Students returning from travel to areas with community spread of COVID-19 must follow guidance they have received from health officials.
2. School will suspend all school-sponsored domestic travel to states where there is community-wide spread of the virus and where the local government has declared a state of public health emergency.
3. Parents of students who do travel to China, Iran, Italy and South Korea over Spring Break or have plans to do so, should contact the school administrator and plan to self-quarantine for 14 days after returning to the United States, per the CDC's guidelines. The self-quarantine days will be counted as excused absences.
4. All School sponsored Spring Break trips to China, Iran, Italy, and South Korea have been cancelled.
5. All non-essential travel is discouraged. This includes field trips in populated areas, such as Sea World, Six Flags, the Alamo.

IF no one from the community has been identified to have COVID-19

1. Use this time to review, update, and implement emergency operations plans (EOPs).
2. Ensure the plan includes strategies to reduce the spread of a wide variety of infectious diseases (e.g., seasonal influenza). Effective strategies build on everyday school policies and practices.
3. Review attendance and sick leave policies. Encourage students and staff to stay home when sick. Use flexibility, when possible, to allow staff to stay home to care for sick family members.
4. Identify critical job functions and positions, and plan for alternative coverage by cross-training staff.
5. Include strategies for sharing information with staff, students, and their families, and information about steps being taken by the school to prepare, and how additional information will be shared.

6. Schools should survey the school families to ensure all students will have appropriate access to computers and the internet should instruction need to transition to e-learning.

What IF there is an identified case of COVID-19 in my school or my parish community?

1. The first step for schools in this situation is to talk with local health officials.
2. With guidance from the Office of Catholic Schools, Texas Catholic Conference of Bishops Education Department (TCCB ED), and TEA, the campus will close from all operations and will send teachers, staff and students home.
3. The campus will undergo a deep clean.
4. Teachers will continue to develop and deliver lessons and materials remotely, using the e-learning platform preferred by the school.
5. The duration of school dismissals will be made on a case-by-case basis based on the most up- to-date information about COVID-19 and the specific cases in the impacted community.
6. Per TCCB ED, 4 hours of learning/instruction should occur daily, during the school closure. This learning/instruction can consist of assignments, activities and face to face instruction. This time period may need to be adjusted for Early Childhood.

What IF there is suspicion that a student, teacher, or family member has been exposed to COVID-19, based on illness and travel?

1. The school will require a doctor's note for an individual to return to school.
2. The school should contact the local health department.

Resources

CDC - Stay Home If You're Sick

<https://www.cdc.gov/nonpharmaceutical-interventions/pdf/stay-home-youre-sick-employers-item4.pdf>

CDC - Don't Spread Germs at Work

<https://www.cdc.gov/nonpharmaceutical-interventions/pdf/dont-spread-germs-work-item3.pdf>

American Academy of Pediatrics - Germ Prevention Strategies

<https://www.healthychildren.org/English/health-issues/conditions/prevention/Pages/Germ-Prevention-Strategies.aspx>

American Academy of Pediatrics - Reducing the Spread of Illness in Childcare

<https://www.healthychildren.org/English/health-issues/conditions/prevention/Pages/Prevention-In-Child-Care-or-School.aspx>

U.S. Department of Education

Guide for Developing High-Quality School Emergency Operations Plans

https://rem.ed.gov/docs/REMS_K-12_Guide_508.pdf

TCEA - Online/Blended Learning in the Age of COVID-19

https://zoom.us/rec/play/tZ0ofrqhqzM3TzG5QSDUfAvW9W1L6Ks2iUf-PYNy0y8WnEANILzYLMWY-YBxEzkT5sHO_TDDXbhQ78C?continueMode=true

Template Survey to Gage Students Access to Electronic Devices and Internet at Home

<https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLScRYYYcUFjrtRBrk6Mcu6F4cp1INEPfYfU71NuW1fXj7BVHwA/viewform>

Advisory for Parishes

DeKarlos Blackmon, Secretariat Director of Life, Charity, and Justice	(512) 949-2471
Alison Tate, Secretariat Director of Formation and Spirituality	(512) 949-2465
Gustavo Rodriguez, Director of Evangelization and Catechesis	(512) 949-2442
David Wood, Director of Worship	(512) 949-2453

General Recommendations for Parishes

1. Pastors are encouraged to monitor maintain regular contact with their respective county health departments, in addition to monitoring the latest information on COVID-19 from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), and the Texas Department of State Health Services (DSHS).
2. Pastors are encouraged to select a contact person to address questions regarding all matters related to COVID-19 issues in the parish. This will ensure consistency in responses and information.
3. Sacred ministers should provide pastoral care to those with cases of COVID-19 in medical facilities with full compliance with infection prevention and control guidance, and in close consultation with the treating doctor according to medical protocols.
4. Parishes with schools should blend their COVID-19 protocols as students often use parish facilities, and parishioners often use school facilities.
5. Each employee should review and follow the recommendations in the attached information related to proper hygiene, washing of hands, and taking proper precautions, as published by the CDC.
6. An employee may politely refuse to shake hands with others (including visitors) if he or she so chooses.
7. Each employee should regularly wash his or her hands, use hand sanitizer, and wipe down his or her work area with sanitizing wipes.
8. An employee should stay home if he or she has respiratory symptoms (coughing, sneezing, shortness of breath) or a temperature greater than 100.4. Such an employee should advise his or her supervisor accordingly and keep his or her supervisor apprised of the employee's condition.
9. Pastors should encourage staff members to minimize travel as much as is reasonably possible and should look for alternative means (such as teleconferencing or phone conferencing) to hold larger meetings with outside groups.

10. If a "medium" or "high-risk" exposure to COVID-19 occurs, an employee who is so exposed may be asked to stay at home and a determination will be made as to whether a work-from-home arrangement is possible. A medium or high-risk exposure generally occurs when one has been in close contact with someone who is known to be infected or has recently traveled from a high-risk region.
11. We have been informed by medical professionals that keeping 6 or more feet away from someone who has contracted COVID-19 is the "safe distance." If an employee is concerned about exposure to the virus from any other person, keeping that distance is advisable.
12. Medical professionals inform us that the most important risk reduction practice is to wash one's hands frequently with soap and water for 20 seconds. Using hand sanitizer may be effective if washing hands is not possible.
13. *Masses should only be canceled after consultation with the Bishop and Vicar General.*

Preventative Measures for Faith Formation Programs for Adolescent Catechesis, and Youth and Adult Formation

1. If children, youth or adults are sick for whatever reason they should stay home. Students should be fever free for 24 hours before returning to parish sponsored activities or as indicated by physician.
2. Evangelization and Catechesis has been working with directors of religious education to begin developing packets for instruction in English and Spanish.
3. Parish catechetical leaders and youth ministers have been instructed to contact publishers of instruction materials that can be used as a home study, many of the publishers have already developed make-up lessons designed for parent home instruction.

In the case of school closures

1. Religious education programs are encouraged to follow the closures of local independent school districts.
2. Directors of religious education should communicate to parents and provide online resources and/or instruction packets in English and Spanish as needed.

Observance of Sunday and Holy Days without Mass

Sunday is always a celebration of the complete Paschal Mystery including the resurrection of Jesus Christ. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* reiterates the precept of the Sunday obligation while noting exceptions:

The faithful are obliged to participate in the Eucharist on days of obligation, unless excused for a serious reason (for example, illness, the care of infants) or dispensed by their own pastor. (CCC 2181).

The obligation requires participation in Mass, rather than solely the reception of Holy Communion or hearing a particular set of prayers or readings. Parishioners who are concerned about attending Mass due to their own health condition, or that of others, are excused from the Sunday obligation. Parishioners with a high risk of contracting a virus due to illness, age, a chronic health condition or compromised immune system should remain at home and join the parish in prayer through spiritual communion. This may also apply to caregivers.

The obligation is not morally binding when it is impossible to be observed.

“If because of lack of a sacred minister or for other grave cause participation in the celebration of the Eucharist is impossible, it is specially recommended that the faithful take part in the Liturgy of the Word if it is celebrated in the parish church or in another sacred place according to the prescriptions of the diocesan bishop, or engage in prayer for an appropriate amount of time personally or in a family or, as occasion offers, in groups of families” (CCC 2183 citing Canon 1248.2)

When a person is ill and unable to participate in the Sunday Mass they may individually, as they are able, engage in private prayer in thanksgiving to God for the resurrection and the gift of grace and salvation that is offered. It would also be appropriate to read and reflect on the gospel for the day and even all the readings assigned to the day. Both the readings and a reflection for each day are available from the USCCB online.¹ The person might also choose to pray either morning or evening prayer for the day. The app iBreviary is a popular means of this.

In the case that Masses have been canceled, it is recommended that family members gather to pray together.

In the instance that a parish is unable to celebrate Mass because the priest is sick, the faithful would still be obliged to participate in Mass at another Catholic Church unless reasonably prevented by distance.

¹ <http://www.usccb.org/bible/reflections/>

In summary:

- If a person is ill, they should not participate in the Sunday Eucharist and are dispensed from the obligation, but it is *recommended* that they spend a period of time in prayer in observance of Sunday.
- If Mass is not offered due to the priest being sick, the faithful are obliged to participate in Mass in a nearby parish unless prevented by distance.
- If it is reasonably impossible for the person to make it to Mass, the obligation is not morally binding.

What you need to know about coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19)

What is coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19)?

Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) is a respiratory illness that can spread from person to person. The virus that causes COVID-19 is a novel coronavirus that was first identified during an investigation into an outbreak in Wuhan, China.

Can people in the U.S. get COVID-19?

Yes. COVID-19 is spreading from person to person in parts of the United States. Risk of infection with COVID-19 is higher for people who are close contacts of someone known to have COVID-19, for example healthcare workers, or household members. Other people at higher risk for infection are those who live in or have recently been in an area with ongoing spread of COVID-19. Learn more about places with ongoing spread at <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/about/transmission.html#geographic>.

Have there been cases of COVID-19 in the U.S.?

Yes. The first case of COVID-19 in the United States was reported on January 21, 2020. The current count of cases of COVID-19 in the United States is available on CDC's webpage at <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/cases-in-us.html>.

How does COVID-19 spread?

The virus that causes COVID-19 probably emerged from an animal source, but is now spreading from person to person. The virus is thought to spread mainly between people who are in close contact with one another (within about 6 feet) through respiratory droplets produced when an infected person coughs or sneezes. It also may be possible that a person can get COVID-19 by touching a surface or object that has the virus on it and then touching their own mouth, nose, or possibly their eyes, but this is not thought to be the main way the virus spreads. Learn what is known about the spread of newly emerged coronaviruses at <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/about/transmission.html>.

What are the symptoms of COVID-19?

Patients with COVID-19 have had mild to severe respiratory illness with symptoms of

- fever
- cough
- shortness of breath

What are severe complications from this virus?

Some patients have pneumonia in both lungs, multi-organ failure and in some cases death.

How can I help protect myself?

People can help protect themselves from respiratory illness with everyday preventive actions.

- Avoid close contact with people who are sick.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands.
- Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. Use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol if soap and water are not available.

If you are sick, to keep from spreading respiratory illness to others, you should

- Stay home when you are sick.
- Cover your cough or sneeze with a tissue, then throw the tissue in the trash.
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces.

What should I do if I recently traveled from an area with ongoing spread of COVID-19?

If you have traveled from an affected area, there may be restrictions on your movements for up to 2 weeks. If you develop symptoms during that period (fever, cough, trouble breathing), seek medical advice. Call the office of your health care provider before you go, and tell them about your travel and your symptoms. They will give you instructions on how to get care without exposing other people to your illness. While sick, avoid contact with people, don't go out and delay any travel to reduce the possibility of spreading illness to others.

Is there a vaccine?

There is currently no vaccine to protect against COVID-19. The best way to prevent infection is to take everyday preventive actions, like avoiding close contact with people who are sick and washing your hands often.

Is there a treatment?

There is no specific antiviral treatment for COVID-19. People with COVID-19 can seek medical care to help relieve symptoms.



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For more information: www.cdc.gov/COVID19

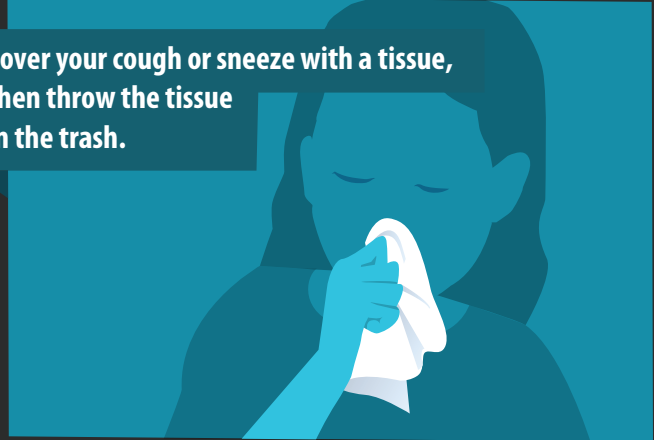
STOP THE SPREAD OF GERMS

Help prevent the spread of respiratory diseases like COVID-19.

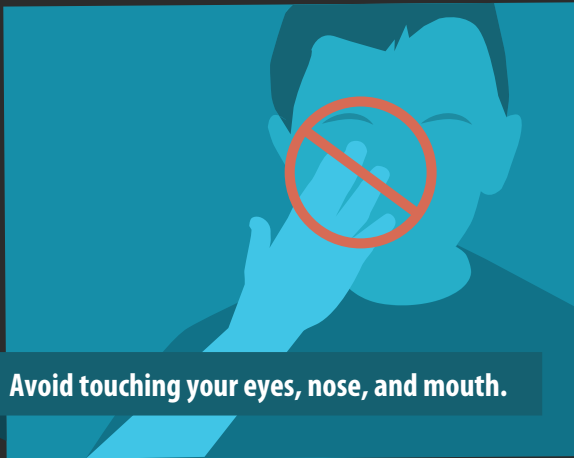
Avoid close contact with people who are sick.



Cover your cough or sneeze with a tissue, then throw the tissue in the trash.



Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth.



Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces.



Stay home when you are sick, except to get medical care.



Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds.



For more information: www.cdc.gov/COVID19

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