



World Council of Churches

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To:
Participants of the
WCC Central Committee Meeting
Geneva, Switzerland
26 August – 2 September 2009

Geneva, 31 July 2009

Dear sisters and brothers in Christ,

Next month I look forward to welcoming you to Geneva for the WCC central committee meeting. For the majority of you this means international air travel in order to get here. As you well know, the influenza A (H1N1) virus has now spread to all regions in the world. I thought it would be important to remind us all of the facts surrounding this virus and the precautions that we are all asked to take in order to prevent further spread as we travel from our homes.

On 11 June 2009 the World Health Organizations (WHO) declared phase 6 for the A(H1N1) 'flu virus. This means that the global spread of the virus can no longer be avoided. This phase 6 does not however have any bearing on how dangerous the virus is nor on the seriousness of the illness.

Transmission

The virus first appeared in Mexico and is easily passed from one person to another: it is transmitted in droplets which are projected when an infected person sneezes or coughs, or by contact with contaminated surfaces (for example door handles or work surfaces).

Symptoms

According to the most recent evidence the symptoms of influenza A (H1N1) are more or less identical to those of seasonal 'flu: both forms of 'flu have severe infection of the respiratory system together with a temperature of over 38°C. In some cases there is no rise in body temperature. Most often those who are ill have sore throats, coughs and colds. Other typical symptoms are: shivering, headaches, aching muscles and joints, nausea, vomiting or diarrhoea

What to do if you have these symptoms?

If you have symptoms we recommend you see your doctor immediately for advice on what precautions to take before you travel.

With 'flu people infected are already contagious during the incubation period of the illness, which is about a day before the first symptoms appear. An adult can transmit the virus for between 3 and 7 days following the declaration of the illness; however children are often contagious for a longer time.

Protection

To protect yourself against the virus it is essential to frequently wash one's hands with soap or disinfectant based hand cleanser. Try also to touch your eyes, nose or mouth as little as possible. Anyone who coughs or sneezes must cover their nose and mouth with a disposable tissue or try to sneeze into the crook of their elbow.

The best thing to do is to wash your hands carefully with hot water and soap for at least 20 seconds. It is important to rub your hands against one another, to wash each finger carefully as well as the skin between the fingers and thumbs. If it is difficult to get access to water and soap a hand disinfectant can be used.

The WCC will ensure that a good stock of soap and paper towels is available during the time of the central committee meeting.

Masks

The Office of Public Health here in Geneva recommends that people have a stock of masks. The wearing of masks is only effective if other personal hygiene measures are also respected (frequent hand washing, etc.). Wearing a mask is no guarantee of absolute protection but it can help to contain the spread of the virus: by covering their nose and mouth, a person with 'flu symptoms retains the droplets secreted by their respiratory system. In this way those who are ill avoid infecting those close to them by sneezing or coughing.

When you arrive in Geneva we will have a supply of hygienic masks for those who wish to wear them.

Travel

Travellers coming from affected regions must all without exception observe the following hygiene measures: careful and regular washing of hands, using a disposable tissue to sneeze or cough into. These measures will help to stem the spread of the virus.

This strain of 'flu is present in different regions of the world and the situation is changing rapidly. Travellers should keep their distance (over a metre) from anyone showing 'flu-like symptoms, avoid shaking hands with people and follow the hygiene and prevention measures detailed above.

Anyone with 'flu symptoms should not travel.

Further information concerning influenza A (H1N1) will be available in your folders when you arrive at the central committee meeting. The WHO's web site can also provide you with additional information (www.who.int/csr/disease/swineflu/en/). A medical service will be available for all participants during the central committee meeting.

The WCC secretariat is committed to ensure that every precaution is taken to hinder the spread of this virus during the meeting of the central committee.

I look forward to seeing you here next month.

Yours in Christ,



Rev. Dr. Samuel Kobia
General Secretary