

Christian Congregation of Jehovah's Witnesses



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October 3, 2009

TO ALL CONGREGATIONS

Re: Dealing with infectious disease

Dear Brothers:

Recently, some have expressed concern over the possibility of the H1N1 virus affecting our brothers. Whether or not there will be a significant outbreak of this virus remains to be seen. In any event, this letter is to provide spiritual reminders and practical direction in dealing with a sudden increase of any infectious disease in your area. We hope the answers to the following questions will prove helpful to you individually and as a congregation.

What practical steps can I take to protect myself and others in the congregation?

We can demonstrate “practical wisdom” by following a few simple suggestions. (Prov. 3:21) The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) states that the most effective way to reduce the spread of influenza is to avoid contact with individuals who are infected. Family heads should be alert to those in their family with flu-like symptoms, reminding them to limit contact with others so as to avoid infection. The person we may unwittingly infect could develop more serious complications than we may personally experience from the illness. Philippians 2:4 tells us that we should be “keeping an eye, not in personal interest upon just your own matters, but also in personal interest upon those of the others.” For example, it is recommended that you sneeze or cough into a tissue or article of clothing, such as a shirt or blouse sleeve, to keep germs from becoming airborne. To limit exposure to the virus, wash your hands often with soap and water, and avoid touching your face as much as possible, especially your eyes, nose, and mouth. Additionally, we encourage you to review the reminders regarding hand washing on page 31 of the November 22, 1998, *Awake!* Also, congregation members would benefit by reading the article “Influenza—What We Know Now” on pages 7-9 of the December 22, 2005, *Awake!* This material may be used during Family Worship.

How is my congregation activity going to be affected if there is a widespread outbreak of the virus in my area? The majority of congregation members will no doubt follow the sound advice to temporarily avoid close contact with their brothers while they are contagious with any disease. (John 13:35) Whether we are at our meetings, in the field ministry, at work, at school, or in other day-to-day activities and we come in contact with someone who has influenza symptoms, we should keep an appropriate distance and follow with proper hygiene. During any time we are experiencing symptoms, we may be able to tie in by telephone for our meetings, or others may record them for us. Usually we can keep up with personal and Family Worship while ill. Other features of service, such as telephone witnessing and letter writing, can help us keep active and joyful in our ministry even if we have an illness.

While it is important that we take this matter seriously, as Jehovah's people our having clear insight as to the events occurring deep into the time of the end helps us not to overreact. One of the features of the sign that Jesus gave of the last days, recorded at Luke 21:11, included

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pestilence. Therefore, these events serve to strengthen our hope and faith that the new system of things is getting ever closer.—Luke 21:28, 31.

If you have any questions regarding this matter, we encourage you to speak with your local elders, who will be able to provide direction and spiritual comfort.

We pray for Jehovah's blessing to be upon all your efforts to serve him as "you keep listening to the voice of Jehovah your God."—Deut. 28:2; Prov. 10:22.

Your brothers,

*Christian Congregation
of Jehovah's Witnesses*

cc: Traveling overseers

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PS to body of elders:

Please arrange for the above letter to be read to the congregation at the first Service Meeting after its receipt. Thereafter, it should be posted on the information board. (**This postscript should not be posted on the board.**) During the next local needs part, the elder assigned should review the references and highlight the main points of the letter.

The purpose of this letter is to inform without raising undue alarm. Basic health care and hygiene are promoted. Please note that the primary responsibility for reducing the spread of the influenza virus is placed on the one infected. For example, there is admonition to stay at home when symptomatic for influenza. This will be a change in thinking and habits for some of our brothers. The discussion of the letter during the local needs part should be positive, focusing on concern for others.—Luke 10:27b.

At times the branch office receives calls requesting direction on whether meetings should be canceled because of schools in the local area closing. In such cases, we have encouraged the elders to pay close attention to the directions provided by the local city or county officials. Local information of this type can usually be found online through local news sources or at the city's or county's official Web site. If this information is not available, it may be necessary to make a telephone call to the city's or county's Department of Health. The decision on whether to have meetings should be made by the circuit overseer and the body of elders after carefully investigating the direction of the local officials. Of course, each publisher must decide whether to attend the meetings based on his personal concerns or circumstances.—Gal. 6:5.

By encouraging brothers and sisters and their children to apply the simple suggestions mentioned in the above letter, much can be accomplished to limit exposure to the H1N1 virus or other communicable diseases at our meetings, which are open to the public. However, if the local health officials *recommend* “no public assembly” in the community, we encourage you to consult with your circuit overseer to assess matters and make a decision as noted above. While we want to be sensitive to the possible threats, we should not be the first to shut down our meetings. Of course, if the authorities *mandate* that all public events should be temporarily canceled, we would cooperate with them.

We also would like to encourage you to consider what other practical steps could be taken to limit exposure to this illness. For example, please ensure that your Kingdom Hall is well equipped with supplies for hand washing to encourage good hygiene. Hand sanitizer dispensers can be made available in high traffic areas. However, hand sanitizing is not as effective as hand washing. Extra attention should be given to cleaning areas that receive greater human contact, like microphones, door handles, and countertops. After discussing these matters as a body, you may have additional ideas that are practical and reasonable that you will want to put into practice.

It is important to remember the need to shepherd members of the congregation who may get overwhelmed or concerned about the H1N1 virus. Since much attention is being focused on this matter, some of our brothers and sisters may become affected emotionally. As elders, we well know the importance of monitoring the physical and spiritual aspects of the congregation, but in such cases as diseases and disasters, extra consideration is needed to care for the emotional welfare of our brothers and sisters.—Ps. 55:22; 91:2; w88 11/15 pp. 21-24; w88 10/15 pp. 26-27.

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We certainly appreciate the loving way in which you care for all the brothers and sisters. We pray that you may have “power beyond what is normal” to accomplish all that you do to care for Kingdom interests.—2 Cor. 4:7.