

Christian Congregation of Jehovah's Witnesses



Hse. No. J348/4 - Tema Beach Road - Nungua, Accra
P. O. Box GP 760, Accra, Ghana Tel. No.: (030) 2712456-8; 7010110 Fax: (030) 2712454

August 6, 2014

TO ALL CONGREGATIONS

Re: Dealing with infectious diseases

Dear Brothers:

There is growing concern in West Africa about the outbreak of the Ebola virus. In addition, at times, diseases such as cholera may spread in the community. We do not know whether or not there will be a significant outbreak of any of these diseases in the country but we are sending this letter 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) Many experts say 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 who become unwell, reminding them to limit contact with others so as to avoid infection. Philippians 2:4 tells us: “look out not only for your own interests, but also for the interests of 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. The common practice of sharing a bowl or cup can also quickly spread infection and some family heads may decide to limit this. 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 a contagious disease 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 symptoms of illness, we should keep an appropriate distance and follow the rules of proper hygiene. During any time we are experiencing symptoms, we may choose to avoid going to the Kingdom Hall, perhaps arranging for someone to record the meeting 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 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.

Re: Dealing with infectious diseases
August 6, 2014
Page 2

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
Convention committees

PS to body of elders:

(This postscript should not be posted on the information board.) 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. **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 the brothers, without causing them to panic. Basic health care and hygiene are always encouraged. Please note that the primary responsibility for reducing the spread of infectious disease is placed on the one infected. For example, the letter says it is better for someone to stay at home when they think they may have the symptoms of a contagious disease. 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.

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 any infectious diseases at our meetings, which are open to the public. NOTE: If there is a serious outbreak of infectious disease in your area, each local body of elders should decide whether it would be appropriate to announce to the brothers that they should desist from shaking hands or other common expressions of greeting, for a temporary period.

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. 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 make sure that your Kingdom Hall is well equipped with supplies for hand washing to encourage good hygiene. Make sure that enough soap is provided at hand washing areas and that when it runs out it is immediately replenished. (Regular hand washing with soap and water is one of the best ways to avoid the transmission of germs.) 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 spread of infectious diseases. At times, much public attention can be focused on this matter and 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.

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.