

## Guidance for the United Reformed Church on Coronavirus (COVID-19)

The Coronavirus outbreak is a changing situation. This information is correct as of 21st February 2020, and will be updated if the advice or situation changes.

### Background

Coronaviruses are part of a large family of viruses that cause a range of illness in humans, from the common cold to Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS). The first case of a new Coronavirus (COVID-19) was reported on the 31 December 2019 in Wuhan in the Hubei Province of China. The initial outbreak in China has now spread to other countries, including European Countries.

As of 19th February, there have been 75,204 confirmed cases globally, of which 74,280 have been in China. There have been 2006 deaths in China. Outside China, there have been 924 confirmed cases in 25 countries, and 3 deaths. There have been 9 confirmed cases in the UK and no deaths. Although our understanding of the virus and its impact is still not fully known, it seems that the death rate is lower than for other similar outbreaks, such as SARS.

### What are the symptoms of Coronavirus?

Typical symptoms of coronavirus include fever, fatigue and a cough that may progress to pneumonia, causing shortness of breath and breathing difficulties. The symptoms will be more severe for those who already have pre-existing illnesses, such as asthma or heart disease, or those who are elderly.

## How can someone catch Coronavirus?

The incubation period is up to 14 days: this means that it can take someone up to 2 weeks to develop symptoms having been exposed to the virus. It is thought that transmission is via droplets from coughing and sneezing, and also from environmental contact, i.e. touching surfaces touched by an infected person. A vaccine is not currently available, and will take about 2 years to develop.

The threat posed by COVID-19 has been assessed by the Chief Medical Officer as 'moderate'. This permits the Government to plan for all eventualities, although the risk to individuals remains low.

## How to prevent catching Coronavirus

The best way to prevent the virus spreading is by avoiding contact with individuals with the infection, and also by maintaining good hygiene practices. The Department of Health and the World Health Organisation have issued the following guidance:

- Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. Use an alcohol-based hand sanitiser that contains at least 60% alcohol if soap and water are not available. This is particularly important after taking public transport, or being in public places.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands.
- If you feel unwell, stay at home, do not attend work or school or church.
- Cover your cough or sneeze with a tissue, then throw the tissue in a bin.
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces in the home, work environment and church.

Anyone returning to the UK from the Far East, or from another affected country in the last 14 days who develops symptoms of cough or fever or shortness of breath, should immediately:

- Stay indoors and avoid contact with other people as you would with the flu
- Call NHS 111 to inform them of your recent travel to the country and your illness

## Specific advice for the United Reformed Church

Long-standing government advice has been that 'In a pandemic, it makes good sense to take precautions to limit the spread of disease by not sharing common vessels for food and drink.' COVID-19 has **NOT** been declared a pandemic, so at this time there is no need to change worshipping practices, including sharing the bread and the cup during communion.

Churches **should already be following best-hygiene practices** that include advising members who are unwell to stay at home, or those with coughs and sneezes to refrain from handshaking. It is also best practice for churches to have hand-sanitisers available for members and visitors to use. Particular hygiene care should be taken by those serving drinks and food.

In addition, ministers and all those involved in serving communion should wash their hands, preferably with an alcohol-based (minimum 60%) hand-sanitiser. In the situation where a loaf is passed round, we suggest that you ask the congregation to be particularly careful with hand hygiene.

Best hygiene practice should continue to be observed in all pastoral contacts.

Updated advice from Public Health England on Monday 17th February 2020:

Whilst in places of worship there is no need to avoid other worshippers who are well. Take usual infection prevention precautions including washing your hands or using hand sanitiser (containing at least 60% alcohol) after using the toilet facilities; before eating food or snacks or if you are in close contact with someone who is unwell.

For other church activities, including toddler groups, children's groups and other community events, there is no advice or reason to stop hosting these. The above advice applies, particularly reminding people to be careful with handwashing and to stay at home if they are unwell.

## Further information

Further information is available from the UK government and World Health organisation websites.

[https://www.gov.uk/guidance/wuhan-novel-coronavirus-information-for-the-public?gclid=EAlalQobChMIw7OTv7vg5wIVh63tCh2xAA6TEAAYASAAEgLFDPD\\_BwE](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/wuhan-novel-coronavirus-information-for-the-public?gclid=EAlalQobChMIw7OTv7vg5wIVh63tCh2xAA6TEAAYASAAEgLFDPD_BwE)

<https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/advice-for-public>

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