

However, washing hands thoroughly and using hand sanitizers when hand washing is not possible can significantly reduce the risk of transmission of infectious organisms.

What can be done?

The use of an alcohol-based hand rinse

is encouraged as an effective means of cleansing hands of pathogens. A Diocesan protocol has been developed for those who participate in public worship and administer the sacraments. Members of the congregation are encouraged to use such a hand rinse or wash their hands before receiving the sacrament.

Receiving in one kind only:

While Anglicans have asserted since the Reformation that receiving both bread and wine is normal practice within our Church, current practice allows for receiving the bread only.

Therefore, those who are uncomfortable or anxious about receiving in both kinds (bread and wine) are encouraged to receive the bread only.

The cleaning and storage of purificators and chalices: The Diocese of Toronto has developed procedures for the cleaning of the chalice and purificators. It is important that these procedures are followed. Copies of these procedures are available through the Diocesan Centre.

Parishioners who have a cold, the flu or an infection, should receive communion in the form of the bread only.

It must be stressed that the present use of the common cup and the exchange of peace does not pose a significant health hazard. Common sense and basic hygiene is our best defence.

References:

SARS Working Group of the Diocese of Toronto
The Anglican Church Women of Canada
The World Council of Churches
The Anglican Church of Canada

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*Liturgical Practice
and the
Risk of Infection*

Risk of transmission:

Heightened awareness of the public health implications of communicable diseases (e.g. SARS and threat of an influenza pandemic) has raised concerns about hygiene and questions relating to the risk of transmission of disease via the common cup and the liturgical practice of exchanging the peace. Fear of communicable diseases is an aspect of our human nature. By addressing our fears, we can reduce levels of anxiety and make judgments as to how we wish to participate in our public worship.

What is the risk?

It is important to recognize that there are general principles that govern the transmission of infection.

The chain of infection:

For disease to spread there needs to be a route or chain which allows the pathogen to be transferred. The links in this chain are: an infectious agent, a source or reservoir of the agent, a means of exit, a method of transmission, a port of entry and of course a susceptible new host.

An example would be: a person with a cold coughs into his hand and shakes the hand of another person who rubs her eye and then “catches” the same cold.

Breaking the chain of infection reduces or eliminates the risk of transmission.

Degree of exposure: Our defences against stray bacteria are immense and can only be overwhelmed by very large numbers of infectious agents. Each infective agent has its own virulence, and each individual has her/his own “host factors” which determine that person’s susceptibility to infection. The interaction of these two determines the risk of infection for the individual.

What is the risk? Risk is relative. Every day we engage in the risk-filled activities of daily living. We shake hands, attend theatres, walk in public places, and possibly share a cup or utensil. All of these interactions involve the risk of exposure to disease. However, in all of these ordinary acts, the risk of exposure sufficient to cause infection is minimal.

The common cup and act of intinction: Science confirms that sharing a common cup is a route for the transmission of pathogens.

However, if precautions are adopted, risk can be reduced significantly.

Intinction, long thought to be a practice that reduces the risk of contagion, may actually increase such risk. Hands (children’s and adults’) are at least as likely a source of contagion as lips (often more so). Dipping the wafer into the wine may contaminate the wine with pathogens clinging to fingers, thus spreading contagion to others. **Intinction offers no additional protection to the communicant.**

Science and current infectious disease research tell us that, while there is risk of transmission of disease in sharing the common cup, such a risk is minimal and well within the norms of daily behaviors.

Sharing the Peace, with a handshake: Shaking someone’s hand is one of the most common human behaviours we know. It symbolizes the act of welcome, it is a sign of friendship and it is a reflection of the bonds of a community. It can also be a means of passing on disease. Refraining from hand shaking when you have a cold, flu or infection is a considerate gesture.