

Greetings!



Presbyterian Church
of Aotearoa New Zealand

In May we looked at the possibility of an outbreak of Swine Flu. Since then a number of New Zealanders and workplaces (and churches!) have now been affected by the illness so in this issue we will take another look at working during a pandemic.

Juliette

Health and safety plans for parishes

Over the last few weeks I have received a number of telephone calls and emails from parishes concerned about whether they are on the right track when it comes to being prepared for a pandemic.

My advice to all of these parishes has been the same: refer to your health and safety plan for your parish. It should cover some basic questions such as:

- Do you have adequate facilities for people to wash their hands?
- Is food being prepared safely and hygienically?
- Are people encouraged to stay home when sick?
- Do you have tissues, water and paracetamol on hand if people start to show signs of being sick during an event? And a way of getting them home?
- Do you have first aiders who can manage a situation where a person becomes acutely sick at an event?
- Does it set out clearly who and when decisions are made around canceling parish events or closing facilities temporarily?

I am pleased to say that those who have contacted me are by and large prepared for Swine Flu. Disappointingly, though, I am aware of a minority of parishes who still do not have any health and safety plan in place.

If this applies to you, and you have not already done so, please email Kim at Thinking Safer to register for the Presbyterian Working Safe course. This course is available free to all parishes and will show you how you can develop a plan for your parish. Kim's email address is kimt@thinkingsafer.com.

For parishes with a plan already, visit the [AON Situation Room](#).

On the following pages we will look at what to do if a parishioner is quarantined and how to plan for a shutdown.

Parishioners in quarantine

Participation in parish life forms a significant part of many parishioner's lives and it is understandable that they would like to be involved even when sick. Furthermore, some people who have had Swine Flu have spoken publicly about the level of anxiety that they felt due to the high profile of the illness and that there is a lot we don't know about it. It is likely that parishioners will feel this way if they become sick and seek out the support of their parish.

This is a difficult situation for parishes to face. They want to support the person who is ill and they do not want the person to feel excluded from parish life. On the other hand the parish has a duty to manage risks to its parishioners, including the possibility of contracting an illness. So what can a parish do?

Your parish can help the parishioner follow any instructions they have been given by their medical practitioner and/or by the regional public health office by:

- Staying in regular contact via telephone or email to let them know they're not on their own
- Running basic errands or leaving a few groceries at their front door, collecting their mail if they're unable to reach the mailbox etc
- Providing updates of what is happening at the parish or their study group
- Notifying the regional public health office if you believe the person is deteriorating (particularly important for people on their own)

Your parish can also promote proactive messages about Swine Flu. It is not "just a cold" or an illness restricted to those with underlying medical problems. Likewise, those with Swine Flu who separate themselves from others are not "being dramatic" but are demonstrating care for those around them.

Above I have given a few suggestions for supporting people through Swine Flu and I am sure that parishes will be able to come up with many more ways to provide support. Please share your ideas with the wider Church in future issues of Presbyterian People by emailing me at juliette@presbyterian.org.nz.

Managing a parish shutdown

In the event your parish has to temporarily shutdown due to Swine Flu you will need to:

- Notify all staff and ministers and ensure that they either work from home, where they are able, or are placed on leave
- Cancel all parish activities, including services
- Notify other users of parish facilities of the closure

Managing a parish shutdown (cont.)

The situation just outlined is the “worst case” scenario and should only occur where a significant proportion of parish leadership and staff are affected at the same time. Where one or two people become sick, and the regional public health office does not prohibit it, it is still likely that a reduced number of parish activities will continue to run with a smaller number of leaders and staff.

However, your parish should expect to have a series of rolling absences whereby first ministers or staff take two weeks sick leave (or more) followed by another wave of sick leave when they in turn care for sick family members. Parish councils must ensure they have in place adequate sick leave policies to deal with this type of situation.

The Department of Labour has provided this advice for preparing for Swine Flu:

Preparing your business to respond to a pandemic

You will be aware that the numbers of Influenza A H1N1 (swine flu) cases in New Zealand are increasing. The Ministry of Health advises that this trend is likely to continue over the coming weeks and months. Obviously, a pandemic of this kind or any similar type of crisis will affect your business, your staff and customers. Just how much you are affected will depend on the severity of the crisis and how well prepared you are.

Planning to see your business through a pandemic is important. This can be done by planning the steps your business will take before, during and after a pandemic. There is no one, single response you can plan for. You and your staff need to respond flexibly depending on the situation. Keeping your plan updated will also be useful in the event of another type of crisis occurring.

Information on the Department of Labour website that could help you with your planning includes:

- Commonly asked Questions and Answers for [employers](#) about potential employment issues that could arise during a pandemic.
- Information to assist with [business continuity planning](#).
- [Workplace health and safety guidance](#), including infection control advice relevant to the workplace.
- Advice on the use of [personal protective equipment](#) in the workplace.
- [Practical scenarios](#) that illustrate the different measures businesses can take to protect themselves.

Keep informed of developments and update your plans, and your employees accordingly. In addition to the existing business networks and organisations you belong to, the [Department of Labour](#), [Ministry of Economic Development](#) and [Ministry of Health](#) websites provide ongoing sources of information on the implications of a pandemic for workplaces, businesses, and public health.

Source: Department of Labour