

30TH October 2009

SWINE FLU : STATEMENT FROM THE ARCHBISHOPS TO THE COLLEGE OF BISHOPS

Following our statement in September this year, we have reviewed the situation in light of the latest advice from the Department of Health.

Their latest update, issued last night, shows that the number of new cases has risen. There were 78,000 new cases in England this week with 751 people currently hospitalised. The additional information now available confirms earlier guidance that children under 16 are significantly more susceptible to the virus, and up to 30% may fall ill during this second wave. Deaths worldwide have increased by 12% this week. The Health Protection Agency (HPA) believes that about 520,000 people have been infected by swine flu in England since the outbreak of the pandemic.

The vaccination programme in this country has started this week. The plan is to offer it to all at risk groups by the end of November.

In the light of this, our recommendation, made on 22nd July 2009 to those presiding at Holy Communion in parishes and dioceses, remains unchanged.

It remains important

- a) to encourage everyone to recognise that the Church has a responsibility to take public health considerations seriously;
- b) to ensure communication around the Church is good so that we don't appear at sixes and sevens; and
- c) to remember that responsible practice in these areas is not primarily about protecting ourselves but about avoiding transmitting infection unwittingly to others.

In the light of this rapidly changing situation, we do not believe this is the time to issue fresh advice. We are keeping in regular contact with the Department of Health and will continue to consider all relevant information.

We will review our own advice in a month's time. Until then, we would encourage you to continue to show patience and to pray for all those affected.

+ Rowan Cantuar

+ Sentamu Ebor