



CORONAVIRUS (COVID-19)

The Presbyterian Church in Ireland issues the guidance outlined below in relation to the Coronavirus (Covid-19). This guidance reflects previous advice provided by the Church as a response to pandemic flu.

While the notes below will be useful for congregations, they do not purport to be comprehensive. **The most important thing to stress is that congregations should follow all public health guidance provided by state authorities** – the Public Health Agency in Northern Ireland (www.publichealth.hscni.net) and the Health Protection Surveillance Centre in the Republic of Ireland (www.hpsc.ie). **Congregations should refer to the relevant website regularly as advice will continue to be updated.**

1. CURRENT GENERAL ADVICE INCLUDES:

- A common sense approach should be followed at all times.
- Good hand hygiene is the most effective protection.
- Catch your cough or sneeze in a tissue, bin it and wash your hands.
- Hard surfaces and especially often touched areas (e.g door handles, back of pews and seats) should be cleaned regularly.
- Ensure there are good stocks of soap, hand gel and paper towels are available in toilets and kitchens.

2. CURRENT SPECIFIC ADVICE INCLUDES:

- Members of congregations and organisations should stay at home if they feel ill and display influenza-like symptoms. They should not come to church services and activities until they feel well.
- The symptoms to be aware of in the case of the Coronavirus include cough, shortness of breath, difficulty in breathing, and fever.
- Specifically, members who have been advised to self-isolate should not come to Church Services or other meetings or activities, until they have been advised otherwise by their medical practitioner.

3. PASTORAL VISITING BY MINISTERS AND OTHERS:

- Pastoral support for parishioners who are unable to attend church services etc because they are exhibiting influenza–like symptoms should be provided by telephone or online (e.g. Skype).
- When possible try to ascertain if there have been any symptoms of the Coronavirus in a home where a visit is intended. If such symptoms exist it is best not to visit in person, but make contact by telephone.
- The Church’s duty of care extends to Ministers and other members of Pastoral Care staff. If members have influenza–type symptoms they should not seek visitation from pastoral staff, elders etc.
- Special care should be taken when visiting hospitals, residential and nursing homes. The advice on the Public Health website should be followed (checking regularly for updates), as well as local advice.
- Follow good personal hygiene by using alcohol-based hand gel before and after such visits.

