

# Swine flu: churches told to stop offering communion wine to halt virus

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Catholic churches have been told not to offer wine during communion in a bid to halt the spread of swine flu.

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Pope Benedict XVI gives holy communion Photo: GETTY

The Diocese of Plymouth, Devon, has written to all churches telling them to only offer bread.

The move comes after the World Health Organisation upgraded the seriousness of the disease and two cases were found in the city.

Letters were sent out to churches last weekend advising priests against using a chalice filled with wine during communion, instead offering just bread or wafers.

Churches were also advised to hand the sacred host to worshippers rather than place it on their tongues.

The measures have been implemented at several churches following the warning.

Michael Fay, communications officer for the Diocese of Plymouth, said: "The Bishops discussed it and it was left to individual Diocese to decide on what measures they would take."

The Right Reverend Christopher Budd, Roman Catholic Bishop for Plymouth, which includes churches in Ivybridge and Tavistock, took the decision to remove the wine as a temporary measure, Mr Fay said.

He added: "He thought it was prudent to recommend that wine not be offered in the form of blood in the chalice.

"People understand that these are temporary measures while the flu pandemic is as it is."

Swine flu is commonly spread through coughs and sneezes, but can also be picked up if the virus is left on a surface.

Chalices are commonly made of silver, a natural antiviral and antibacterial, and the chalice is wiped between each communicant.

The Plymouth Diocese covers almost the whole of south-west England, serving Cornwall, Devon and Dorset.

It has 93 parishes stretching from Penzance and the Isles of Scilly in the west, to parts of Bournemouth in the east.

There are 18 churches in the Plymouth Deanery – which also covers Ivybridge and Tavistock – including Plymouth Cathedral

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/health/swine-flu/5628674/Swine-flu-churches-told-to-stop-offering-communion-wine-to-halt-virus.html>