

As you have been hearing, Influenza is widespread in our community. The latest flu report from the State Health Authority indicates to date there have been over 179 hospitalizations in the Tri-County area, compared to last year at this time when there was only 33. All the area hospital began seeing a significant increase in flu admissions in late December, and the prediction is that the flu could be at high levels for the next two months, making this a **severe flu season**.

- Everyone should increase hand washing/hand gel usage, and cover their coughs and sneezes. Carry gel in your car or purse to use when you're in the community.
- It is not too late to **get a flu shot**. Please contact your health provider or local pharmacy- Yes, even if you are young and healthy as this population seems to be accounting for many of the ill.
- Even if you have had your flu shot, you could get the flu (although most likely a milder case) with symptoms of acute fever, muscle aches, cough, headache, joint aches, chills, eye pain, sore throat and runny nose.

PLEASE STAY HOME if you are ill so that we can take care of each other and prevent spread of the flu to those who are most vulnerable. Contact your health provider if you have questions or concerns.

I would like to also suggest that we **forgo hand-shaking or holding hands at church** for the time being- elbow bumps work if you feel you need to have some type of contact. We will be placing extra hand sanitizer bottles around the church, so please look for them and use them.

Blessings for a safe and healthy winter for everyone.

NJ Smith, RN
Parish Nurse