

## COVID 19 and Our Return to the Common Cup

It's hard to know where to start as I'm finding that so much has been written over the years (and now available on-line to have to evaluate) about the risk of catching something from sharing a common communion cup. I have recently spent some time reading through many of these articles, both scientific and otherwise, to educate myself on this challenging topic. I would like to share excerpts and portions of some of the documents, in chronological order, that I have found to be helpful in forming my own opinion on this risk. (In my professional life as an occupational health and safety consultant, I deal with risk quite a bit, and find it a very interesting topic.)

There was a **paper published in 1966** detailing experiments conducted on the communion cup based on a request to the Medical Research Council in England. It concluded that the common communion cup may serve as a means of transmitting infection; however, the risk (there's that word again) of transmission is "very small" and "probably much smaller than that of contracting infection by other methods in any gathering of people." (It does explain why.)

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2130181/pdf/jhyg00103-0044.pdf>

Here is the summary portion of a **2020 Letter to the Editor** of the Royal Society of Public Health by four individuals from British and Greek Hospitals (It doesn't list their positions) published on an NIH affiliated website.

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7439816/>

"In summary, the common communion cup may theoretically serve as a vehicle of transmitting infection, but the potential risk of transmission is very small. Currently, available data do not provide any support for the suggestion that the practice of sharing a common communion cup can contribute to the spread of COVID-19 because SARS-CoV-2 transmission from a patient with COVID-19 or asymptomatic carrier to other people has not been reported....

For immunocompromised patients, the risk of COVID-19 seems to be higher, and these individuals may require alternate means of receiving Holy Communion, should they insist on receiving it. Some Orthodox churches keep those individuals' share aside before Holy Communion is offered to the rest of the congregation. Any individual experiencing respiratory infections, such as the common cold, influenza and COVID-19, as well as those with obvious lip or mouth lesions, such as a herpes sore on the lip, should avoid receiving communion, thus minimizing the unproven but theoretical risk of contaminating the rim of the chalice and passing on their infection to healthy people."

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Finally, here is a portion of a **summary of a paper\*** by the (Anglican) bishop of Ottawa's public health advisor, Rev. Michael Garner. Before joining the priesthood, he worked in public health and epidemiology for more than 20 years, including 13 years as an infectious disease epidemiologist at the Public Health Agency of Canada.

"People have questioned the hygiene of sharing chalices during communion for more than 100 years, but during the AIDS epidemic in the 1980s, research showed the risk of transmitting HIV by using a common cup was very low. Since then, research on infection risks at communion has focused on whether viruses or bacteria can be found in the common cup after the service, and so far, there is no documented evidence of diseases being spread by sharing the cup. People also worry that during a regular communion service, the chalice will be contaminated by the saliva of the participants. While it's true a shared cup could transmit infection through saliva, the risk is extremely low, with no documented cases of any disease ever being spread that way. In the case of COVID-19, the risk is even lower because it's spread primarily by aerosols and droplets. The fact is the probability of catching COVID is far greater from breathing air exhaled by an infectious person next to you than from sharing a common cup." (July 30, 2021, Josephine Hall, Cathedral Administrator, Christ Church Cathedral, Ottawa) **\*Revised March 2022** <https://dq5pwpg1q8ru0.cloudfront.net/2022/03/30/10/25/15/ffe7bc48-748d-47cd-aff-225018d36e8a/2022-03%20The%20Common%20Cup%20M%20Garner.pdf>

I hope this was helpful. More to come on this topic in next week's Happenings.

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