Vatican
Vatican News
Balloons featuring an image of Pope Francis are seen outside Rome’s Gemelli hospital Feb. 27

Balloons featuring an image of Pope Francis are seen outside Rome’s Gemelli hospital Feb. 27, 2025, while the pope is being treated there for double pneumonia. (CNS/Lola Gomez)



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Pope Francis experienced an isolated bronchial spasm resulting in a temporary setback in his hospitalization treatment for double pneumonia, the Vatican said on Feb. 28.

The episode "led to an episode of vomiting with inhalation and a sudden worsening of his respiratory condition," according to a Vatican statement released at 7:15 p.m local time on Friday.

According to the Vatican medical bulletin, the 88-year-old pontiff was provided air and started on noninvasive mechanical ventilation, which led to a positive response.

"The Holy Father always remained alert and oriented, collaborating in the therapeutic maneuvers," the statement continued.

The latest developments come after several days of improvement for Francis, who has been hospitalized since Feb. 14.

As a result, the Vatican said that doctors maintained a "guarded" prognosis for the octogenarian pope.

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Despite the pope's two-week hospitalization, the pope continues to work from the hospital.

On Friday, the Vatican released a letter from Francis to participants in a liturgical course at the Pontifical Athenaeum of St. Anselm here in Rome. The letter was dated Feb. 26 and signed from Gemelli Hospital.

In Rome this evening, the nightly rosary prayer vigils in St. Peter's Square will continue at 9 p.m. Tonight's service for the health and recovery of the pope — the fourth this week — will be presided over by Francis' Argentine compatriot, Cardinal Victor Manuel Fernández, head of the Vatican's Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith.

The Vatican's Ash Wednesday Mass on March 5 will be said by Italian Cardinal Angelo De Donatis, serving as the pope's delegate, the Vatican also announced on Friday. The Ash Wednesday Mass by tradition takes place at the Basilica of St. Sabina on Rome's Aventine Hill.

Francis has missed this service on the first day of Lent in the past due to another health concern. In 2022, he tapped Italian Cardinal Pietro Parolin to stand in for him when doctors ordered the pontiff to limit his physical activities due to acute knee pain.

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>
> —Cardinal Michael Czerny
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The pope's physical absence from certain Lenten liturgies is not a problem or a concern, Jesuit Cardinal Michael Czerny told the Italian daily La Stampa in a Feb. 28 interview.

"For us, for the entire church, for the entire world, Lent has already begun: the day the pontiff entered the hospital. We are all on a journey of penance, prayer and hope," said Czerny, prefect of the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development. "As for the rites, the church will also know how to deal with the possible physical absence of the pope."

Francis might be absent from the altar because of his hospitalization, Czerny said, "but I don't think this is the crucial point now. Faith is lived everywhere and in any situation. The pope does the same: He prays, offers his suffering, accompanies the people of God. And we pray for him, we accompany him and, above all, we continue to carry forward our mission and the vocation of every Christian. The church will hold up, awaiting the return of Francis."

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This story appears in the **Pope Francis' health crisis** feature series. View the full series.