



Pope Francis gives his thumbs up as he arrives for his weekly general audience in St. Peter's Square, at the Vatican, Wednesday, Sept. 18, 2024. (AP/Andrew Medichini)

Nicole Winfield

[View Author Profile](#)

Associated Press

[View Author Profile](#)

[**Join the Conversation**](#)

Send your thoughts to *Letters to the Editor*. [Learn more](#)

Vatican City — September 23, 2024

[Share on Facebook](#)[Share on Twitter](#)[Email to a friend](#)[Print](#)

The Vatican confirmed that plans remain in place for Pope Francis to go to Belgium and Luxembourg later this week, despite having canceled all his audiences Monday because of a “slight flu-like state.”

Vatican spokesperson Matteo Bruni said the cancellation only concerned Monday's audiences. He spoke to reporters before the official start of his Vatican briefing to illustrate details of the trip.

Earlier in the morning, the Vatican announced that Francis had canceled his audiences Monday as a “precaution.”

Francis is due to visit Luxembourg on Thursday and then spend the rest of the week in Belgium, ending with a Mass in Brussels on Sunday.

The 87-year-old pope, who has been using a wheelchair for two years, has battled a series of health problems in recent years and had part of one lung removed as a young man because of a respiratory infection.

He has had a packed schedule of audiences since returning from a [four-nation, 11-day journey](#) through Asia on Sept. 13, which was the longest and farthest trip of his pontificate. The audiences have included multiple meetings with visiting bishops, individual audiences with his Vatican aides as well as a big encounter on Friday with members of popular movements.

The statement from the Holy See press office described Francis as having a “flu-like state.” Through much of last autumn and winter, Francis battled acute bronchitis and recurring bouts of influenza, which forced him to cancel a [quick trip to Dubai](#) in November to participate in the U.N. climate conference.

He did so, the Vatican said at the time, at the recommendation of his doctors.

Advertisement

In Belgium, Francis is due to celebrate the 600th anniversary of the country's main Catholic universities, and minister to Belgians who have been rocked by years of unrelenting revelations of clergy sexual abuse and cover-up.

The challenging Asia trip, followed so closely by the Belgium and Luxembourg visit, was already going to test Francis' health, especially as he heads into a busy autumn. As soon as he returns from Belgium, he is due to preside over a three-week synod, or meeting of bishops, which involves long days of closed-door debate about the future of the church.

Francis' scheduled audiences on Monday included with the members of the Pontifical Academy of Sciences, who are meeting at the Vatican this week for their plenary assembly, and participants in a Christmas contest. The Vatican published the texts Francis was supposed to have delivered to both.

Francis has had several health problems in recent years. In 2023, he spent three days in the hospital receiving [intravenous antibiotics](#) to treat a respiratory infection. In 2021, he had 13 inches (33 centimeters) of his [colon removed](#), and then had a follow-up surgery two years later to repair an abdominal hernia and to remove scar tissue.