ONTARIO’S FOODBORNE ILLNESS OUTBREAK RESPONSE PROTOCOL (ON-FIORP) 2013

Ontario’s guide to a multi-party response to foodborne illness outbreak investigations
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PREAMBLE

The investigation of and response to multi-jurisdictional foodborne hazards or illness outbreaks in Ontario involves multiple levels of government with complementary responsibilities. To enhance the collaboration and overall effectiveness of government response during multi-jurisdictional foodborne hazards or illness outbreak investigations, government Parties collectively developed the *Ontario Foodborne Illness Outbreak Response Protocol* (ON-FIORP). The ON-FIORP replaces the previous *Ontario Foodborne Health Hazard and Illness Outbreak Investigations Memorandum of Understanding* (2006).

The ON-FIORP adopts many of the principles and core concepts presented in *Canada’s Foodborne Illness Outbreak Response Protocol* (FIORP). The ON-FIORP also follows the same structure as Canada’s FIORP. A major difference that can be found in the ON-FIORP is that an Ontario Outbreak Investigation Coordinating Committee (ON-OICC) can be created when a food-related hazard has been identified, even without any reported illnesses.

The ON-FIORP contains duplication of certain information to underscore its importance and to allow certain sections to be used as stand-alone references.

The ON-FIORP is a voluntary arrangement to help enhance public health through effective and efficient response to foodborne hazards and illness outbreaks in Ontario. The Parties understand and acknowledge that the ON-FIORP has no legal force or effect, and that notwithstanding the definitions below, the terminology used herein shall generally be construed by its informal, colloquial meaning.

Nothing in the ON-FIORP shall be interpreted or construed to fetter or otherwise interfere with the ability of any Party to exercise any of its rights and powers in order to carry out its legislated mandate or bind or limit its operations. It is recognized and agreed that neither Canada nor the Province of Ontario by reason of having entered into the ON-FIORP has surrendered, abandoned, or delegated to another Party any of its powers, rights, privileges, or authorities vested in it under the provisions of the *Constitution Acts 1867 and 1982*, and any amendments thereto or otherwise, or to have impaired any of those powers, rights, privileges, or authorities.
1. DEFINITIONS

The following definitions are provided to ensure a common understanding of the terms in this document:

**Arrangement:** An agreement or understanding between two or more Parties.

**Board of Health:** Boards of Health have responsibility for the delivery of local public health programs and services in Ontario. This responsibility is carried out in collaboration with other organizations in the health system and in partnership with others in local communities. The locus of responsibility and accountability of program delivery for boards of health is local. A board of health is established or continued under the *Health Protection and Promotion Act*.

**Centralized Integrated Analysis:** A centralized collation and analysis of information, used to draw conclusions and inform decision-making based on all available information.

**Class I Food Recall:** A situation in which there is a reasonable probability that the use of, or exposure to, a violative product will cause serious adverse health consequences or death. In most cases, a public warning is also issued, advising consumers not to consume the product.

**Class II Food Recall:** A situation in which the use of, or exposure to, a violative product may cause temporary adverse health consequences or where the probability of serious adverse consequences is remote. A public warning may be issued.

**Cluster:** An unusual aggregation of similar health events, generally grouped together as they appear over a particular period and/or geographical area. A cluster may be seen as the occurrence of cases of disease (human illnesses) in excess of what is usually expected for a given period. A cluster may or may not reach the status of an “outbreak.” The use of the term is particularly common in describing the results of subtype-based surveillance, which may detect a cluster of infections caused by similar microbial strains.

**Confidential Third Party Information:** Information that is not personal information and is in written, electronic, or other form, relating to a third party or a Party that disclosed it, that is of a confidential nature and which is provided in confidence by the disclosing third party or Party in connection with this protocol. It includes but is not limited to trade secrets, scientific, financial, technical or commercial information provided in confidence by a third party to another Party and treated consistently in a confidential manner by that Party.

**Emergency Operations Centre (EOC):** The physical location where an organization comes together during an emergency or significant event to coordinate response and recovery actions, and resources.
Epidemiological Evidence: Data that supports statistically significant associations between exposures and human illness or demonstrates significant aberrations in incidence in a specific population (e.g. age group), place, or timeframe.

Epidemiological Investigation: An investigation to determine the existence, magnitude, and/or cause of an outbreak. The purpose of the epidemiological investigation is to characterize cases with respect to person, place, and time, to develop and test hypotheses that explain the specific exposure that caused disease. The investigation may result in recommendations for appropriate prevention and mitigation measures.

Evidence: That which demonstrates or shows an association between events. Evidence of an association between a consumed food and human illness may be epidemiological and/or based on the results of food safety investigations and/or laboratory analysis.

Food: Includes any article manufactured, sold, or represented for use as food or drink for human beings, chewing gum, and any ingredient that may be mixed with food for any purpose whatsoever. For the purposes of the ON-FIORP, "food" includes drinking water.

Foodborne Hazard: A biological, chemical, or physical agent in, or condition of, food with the potential to cause an adverse health effect.

Foodborne Illness: A human illness, with evidence (including epidemiological or laboratory-derived evidence) indicating a food was the source of exposure to the contaminant causing illness. Contaminants may include harmful bacteria, viruses, parasites, or toxins.

Food Safety Investigation: Investigation activities, including inspection of food premises, sampling, observation of food handling practices, data gathering and other related activities undertaken by regulatory officials to determine whether a foodborne hazard exists or has the potential to cause an adverse health effect, and to determine the nature and extent of the problem. In the case of a foodborne illness outbreak, information gathered during the food safety investigation and epidemiological investigation provides the basis for risk assessment and for the development of appropriate risk management strategies to control affected foods.

Health Risk Assessment (HRA): A scientifically-based process that determines the likelihood and severity of a specific adverse health effect occurring in an individual or a population, following exposure to a hazardous agent. The following steps are used in the development of an HRA: 1) hazard identification; 2) hazard characterization; 3) exposure assessment; and 4) risk characterization.

Health Risk 1: The health risk identified represents a situation where there is a reasonable probability that the consumption/exposure to a food will lead to adverse health consequences which are serious or life threatening, or that the probability of a foodborne outbreak situation is considered high.
Health Risk II: The health risk identified represents a situation where there is a reasonable probability that the consumption/exposure to a food will lead to temporary or non-life threatening health consequences, or that the probability of a serious adverse consequence is considered remote.

Jurisdiction: For the purpose of this document, the area of geography and primary responsibility of one of the Parties.

Multi-jurisdictional Foodborne Hazard or Illness Outbreak: A foodborne hazard or illness outbreak which requires the response of more than two Parties to carry out an investigation.

ON-FIORP Primary Representative: An individual by named position within their respective organization, responsible for briefing senior officials within their organization and ensuring that their jurisdiction leads or participates in an ON-OICC, as required. Contact information for the ON-FIORP Primary Representative will be maintained as part of the ON-FIORP Contact List.

Ontario Outbreak Investigation Coordinating Committee (ON-OICC): A committee with representation from the ON-FIORP Parties, created to coordinate a multi-Party response to a foodborne hazard or illness outbreak in Ontario.

Outbreak: The occurrence of two or more cases of illness (except botulism, where one case constitutes an outbreak) among unrelated persons that are epidemiologically linked in time and experience similar illness after a common source exposure. An outbreak is identified through laboratory surveillance or an increase in illness that is unusual in terms of time and/or geography. An outbreak is confirmed through laboratory and/or epidemiological evidence.

Outbreak Investigation Coordinating Committee (OICC): A committee with representation from the FIORP Parties, which is created to coordinate a multi-Party response to a foodborne hazard or illness outbreak in Canada.

Party: For the purposes of this document, any agency with a responsibility to investigate or respond to foodborne hazard or illness outbreaks in Ontario that share food safety and public health responsibilities. In Ontario the Parties include: Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care, Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs, Ministry of Natural Resources, Ministry of the Environment, Canadian Food Inspection Agency, Health Canada, Public Health Agency of Canada, Public Health Ontario, and Ontario’s 36 Boards of Health.

Personal Information: Has the same meaning as in section 3 of the Privacy Act, R.S.C. 1985, Chapter P-21, when referring to information that federal Parties are collecting, using, or disclosing; or section 2 of the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act, R.S.O. 1990, c. F. 31; or section 4 of the Personal Health Information and Protection Act, when referring to information that the provincial and municipal Parties may be collecting, using, or disclosing.

Public Health Unit: An area that, by or under any Act, is the area of jurisdiction of a board of health. In Ontario, public health units, each governed by a board, deliver public
health programs and services are delivered in communities by the 36 local health units, each of which is governed by a board.

**Ready-to-Eat Food:** Foods not requiring any further preparation before consumption, with the exception of washing/rinsing, thawing, or warming.

**Recall:** The removal, by a firm, from further sale or use, or correction, of a marketed product that poses a risk and/or contravenes legislation administered and/or enforced by CFIA. Denotes the process of recalling the affected product and encompasses all tiers of the affected product distribution system.

**Response:** In the context of foodborne hazard and illness outbreaks, response includes activities related to the determination, investigation, mitigation, and containment of such outbreaks, as well as related communication activities.

**Spokesperson:** Representative identified by each Party to communicate with the public and answer enquiries, as required. The spokesperson represents the face of his or her organization.

**Tampering, Sabotage, or Terrorism:** Actual or suspected deliberate contamination of food.

**Traceback and Traceforward Investigations:** A method used by investigators to determine and document with a high degree of confidence the distribution and the origin of a particular food that has been contaminated or associated with foodborne illness. Depending on where along the food distribution network the investigation begins, traceback or traceforward activities are undertaken.
2. LIST OF ACRONYMS

ARC: Area Recall Coordinator
ASPHIO: Association of Supervisors of Public Health Inspectors - Ontario
BOH: Board of Health
CFEZID: Centre for Foodborne, Environmental and Zoonotic Infectious Diseases (PHAC)
CFIA: Canadian Food Inspection Agency
CIPHI: Canadian Institute of Public Health Inspectors
CMOH: Chief Medical Officer of Health
CNPHI: Canadian Network for Public Health Intelligence (PHAC)
CPHS: Canadian Public Health Service (PHAC)
EOC: Emergency Operations Centre
EMO: Emergency Management Ontario
ESD: Enhanced Surveillance Directive
FNIH: First Nations Inuit Health (HC)
F/P/T: Federal/Provincial/Territorial
HC: Health Canada
HECS: Healthy Environment and Consumer Safety (HC)
HPFB: Health Products and Food Branch (HC)
HRA: Health Risk Assessment (HC)
iPHIS: integrated Public Health Information System
LSB: Laboratory Services Branch (MOE)
MNR: Ministry of Natural Resources
MOE: Ministry of the Environment
MOH: Medical Officer of Health (BOH)
MOHLTC: Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care
MOU: Memorandum of Understanding
NESP: National Enteric Surveillance Program (PHAC)
NFRFP: Non-Federally Registered Fish Processors (MNR)
NML: National Microbiology Laboratory (PHAC)
OAHPP: Ontario Agency for Health Protection and Promotion (PHO)
OFSR: Office of Food Safety and Recall (CFIA)
3. INTRODUCTION

A foodborne hazard or illness results from exposure to a food that has been naturally, accidentally, or intentionally contaminated by microbiological, chemical, physical, or other hazardous substances (e.g. radiological hazards). The impacts of hazards in food may include increased morbidity and mortality, health care costs, loss of consumer confidence, economic losses, and lost productivity to industry.

Changes in food distribution networks and the increased globalization of trade in food have resulted in larger volumes of raw and processed products moving across domestic and international boundaries. Consequently, foodborne hazards or illness outbreaks associated with widely distributed foods can result in human illness that crosses local, provincial/territorial, and international boundaries. Regulatory bodies responsible for human health and food safety respond to these situations through the development of enhanced foodborne illness surveillance networks, including the use of molecular subtyping and other laboratory technology to enable cluster detection and the linkage of seemingly unrelated cases to initiate an outbreak investigation. Increased concern and public awareness of food safety has heightened the demand for swift resolution of food safety issues at a time when they are becoming increasingly complex. This reinforces the need for active participation of all Parties in centrally led efforts to mitigate risk and prevent further illness and collaboration between Parties during outbreak investigations.

Food safety and public health in Ontario are responsibilities shared by federal, provincial, and local governments. Collaboration among these Parties and across jurisdictions is of utmost importance to effectively manage foodborne hazards and illness outbreaks involving multiple Parties. The Parties recognize that formalized approaches will facilitate collaboration and cooperation, protecting the health of Ontarians.

The ON-FIORP provides guidance for collaboration among the Parties during response to foodborne hazards or illness outbreaks in Ontario. The ON-FIORP will be reviewed and shared with Parties and other public health professionals for their endorsement.
4. PURPOSE

The purpose of the ON-FIORP is to set out the key guiding principles and operating procedures for the identification of, and response to, foodborne hazards and illness outbreaks in Ontario, involving the Parties, in order to:

- enhance collaboration and coordination among Parties;
- establish clear lines of communication and information sharing among Parties; and
- improve the efficiency and effectiveness of response, protecting the health of Ontarians.

It is designed to be used in response to suspected or confirmed multi-jurisdictional foodborne hazards or illness outbreaks in Ontario.

The ON-FIORP is not intended to provide detailed instruction on how to conduct investigation and response. Rather, it serves to guide the collaboration of the Parties in the identification and response to foodborne hazards and illness outbreaks.
5. SCOPE

The ON-FIORP covers activities from the determination of a potential for a multi-jurisdictional foodborne hazard or illness outbreak response through the containment of the risk that triggered the outbreak or resolution of the issue. It also includes the post-outbreak debrief process.

The ON-FIORP addresses potential foodborne hazards and illness outbreaks resulting from the natural, accidental, or intentional contamination of foods by microbiological, chemical, physical, or other hazardous substances (e.g. radiological hazards).

The ON-FIORP Operating Procedures (Section 8) focus primarily on developing a coordinated response to mitigate foodborne hazards and illness outbreaks. The ON-FIORP does not specifically address the broader risk assessment process that contributes to policy development and standard setting to reduce the risk of future outbreaks (occurrences). However, there is the opportunity to raise the need for future policy development to manage risk during the post-outbreak debrief (Section 8.15).
6. ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Depending on the scope of the outbreak, responsibilities for responding to foodborne hazards or illness outbreaks may be shared between federal/provincial/local jurisdictions. The response involves collaboration and cooperation among all those involved.

Federal Parties include the Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA), Health Canada (HC), and the Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC). Expertise from other Federal/Provincial/Territorial (F/P/T) or international agencies may be sought to provide advice in the control of outbreaks caused by unusual pathogens or toxic substances in foods.

Provincial and local Parties who may play a role include the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care (MOHLTC), the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs (OMAFRA), the Ministry of Natural Resources (MNR), the Ministry of Environment (MOE), Public Health Ontario (PHO), and Boards of Health (BOH).

If it is suspected that an outbreak is related to criminal activity (e.g., tampering, sabotage, terrorism), law enforcement agencies (local police, provincial police, or the Royal Canadian Mounted Police) assume the responsibility for the law enforcement response and criminal investigation (Section 8.12). Annex 1 (Roles and Responsibilities) outlines each Party’s mandate, relevant legislation, and role in outbreaks.
7. GUIDING PRINCIPLES

The Parties are encouraged to raise awareness of the ON-FIORP within their own organizations, including circulating the document to senior management. Parties are also encouraged to participate in simulation exercises and training.

Subject to applicable laws governing sharing of information, the Parties recognize that information (which could include sharing of personal information) required to investigate, control, and resolve a foodborne hazard or illness outbreak may be exchanged in confidence and in a timely fashion between the Parties. The Parties also recognize that public disclosure of confidential third party and personal information may be required when an outbreak that could pose a risk to public health is identified, and there is a clear public interest in making this information public.

The Ontario Outbreak Investigation Coordination Committee (ON-OICC) established in accordance to this ON-FIORP will serve as the main forum for information sharing and interpretation; clarification of roles and responsibilities; establishment of response priorities; and development of communications strategies related to an actual or suspected foodborne hazard or illness outbreak.

Evidence from laboratory, epidemiological, or food safety investigations is accepted for establishing the association between a particular food or hazard and human illness. When possible, the Parties implementing the ON-FIORP will provide assistance, as requested, including laboratory support, during an epidemiological or food safety investigation.

The ON-FIORP is intended to complement arrangements and procedures already established among the Parties. Where memoranda of understanding (MOUs) or other arrangements between the Parties regarding food safety surveillance, investigation, or control may exist, these will be shared and respected. The ON-FIORP is not intended to substitute for the ongoing relationships between the Parties necessary to discharge other responsibilities and to manage issues as they arise.

Information shared from a third party cannot be published without the permission of the Party that originally received it.
8. OPERATING PROCEDURES

This section outlines the general operating procedures for coordinating the response to a potential or confirmed multi-jurisdictional foodborne hazard or illness outbreak in Ontario. Figure 1 shows communication pathways and activities of Parties when a foodborne outbreak is suspected or confirmed in Ontario.

Figure 1. Communication pathways and activities of Parties when a foodborne hazard or outbreak is suspected or confirmed in Ontario.
8.1 Surveillance Mechanisms for Identifying a Potential Multi-Jurisdictional Foodborne Hazard (with or without Reported Illnesses) or Illness Outbreak

Reportable Disease Surveillance occurs at BOH, provincial, and federal levels. Activities at the BOH level are based on surveillance of Reportable Disease Investigations. At the provincial and federal levels, surveillance is based on laboratory reporting of Reportable Diseases. Private and hospital laboratories also contribute to reporting and surveillance of illness.

A potential multi-jurisdictional foodborne hazard or illness outbreak may come to the attention of public health or food regulatory agencies through notifications from Parties as described in Section 8.3 or through ongoing surveillance activities. Identification of human illnesses, potentially linked to food, may originate from the following sources:

- Illness clusters or potential outbreaks recognized by BOH officials through increased reporting of a particular pathogen or complaints of illness linked to a common event or food product.
- Routine surveillance activities at the provincial or federal level indicating that a possible outbreak, potentially foodborne in nature, is in progress (e.g., PHO laboratory-based surveillance, NESP, PulseNet Canada).

8.2 Identification of a Foodborne Hazard that Could Cause Human Illness

Food safety investigations may be triggered by the following situations:

- Consumer complaints concerning a food, which may involve reports of illness.
- Food processing deviations identified during inspection activities
- Laboratory reports indicating the presence of a hazardous contaminant (e.g., biological, chemical, physical, or other hazard) in a food.
- Notification from industry (e.g., manufacturer, processor, distributor, importer, or common carrier) of a potential food safety problem.
- Information about a food safety problem from other external sources (e.g., foreign health officials, industry, public health associations, academia).
- Emergency response activities involving major fires, natural disasters, industrial accidents, or drinking water system contamination events that impact consumers or food production or processing.
- Tampering, sabotage, or terrorism events involving the contamination of a food product (Section 8.12).
8.3 Triggers for Notification between Parties of a Potential Multi-Jurisdictional Foodborne Hazard or Illness Outbreak

Notification refers to the initial contact between Parties to identify an issue with the potential to become a multi-jurisdictional foodborne hazard or illness outbreak. Each Party will continue monitoring activities and conduct their individual internal assessments until they have identified a need to notify other Parties. When action is required in response to a notification, it is important that the notifying Party obtain confirmation that message(s) have been received.

The Canadian Network for Public Health Intelligence (CNPHI) is one of several effective communication tools used for early notification of possible or confirmed outbreaks with the potential to become multi-jurisdictional. Local/regional health officials and F/P/T health officials have access to CNPHI, in addition to some F/P/T agricultural authorities.

The Enhanced Surveillance Directive (ESD) is a unique system to Ontario and is distributed to BOHs by PHO.

The following are examples of issues with the potential to become multi-jurisdictional foodborne hazard or illness outbreaks. Officials at any level (BOH, provincial, or federal) may notify Parties when the following situations are identified, to allow a complete assessment of the available information:

- A cluster of illnesses or illness above expected amounts are spread over more than one geographic jurisdiction (multiple BOHs).
- Management of outbreak involves multiple Parties (e.g., public health, agriculture and agri-food, food regulatory, emergency management).
- An uncommon or particularly pathogenic organism is suspected or involved (e.g. *Clostridium botulinum*).
- Severe illness or deaths are observed among identified cases.
- A vulnerable population is over-represented among cases (e.g. children).
- An outbreak may be linked to a commercially-prepared, ready-to-eat item that has been distributed widely.
- A large number of unexplained illnesses appear to be involved.
- Identification of a foodborne hazard.
- Intentional contamination (e.g., tampering, sabotage, or terrorism suspected).
- The outbreak is expanding rapidly.
- Significant media attention.

Where a public health emergency of international concern may exist, as described in the *International Health Regulations* (http://www.who.int/ihr/en/), PHAC is required to notify international parties.
The responsible federal Party will act as liaison with other foreign countries, following the procedures outlined in Canada’s FIORP. In international foodborne illness outbreaks, PHAC (Centre for Foodborne, Environmental and Zoonotic Infectious Diseases, CFEZID) will act as the main liaison with international public health counterparts. When international food-safety related issues arise, CFIA will act as the main liaison with international food safety counterparts.

8.4 Routine Weekly Teleconferences among Parties

Routine weekly teleconferences are held for the purposes of sharing information pertaining to any ongoing foodborne surveillance findings of potential concern. Calls take place on a regular basis whether or not there are any ongoing outbreaks.

The teleconferences cover increases in illnesses reported and the identification of hazards that could lead to illnesses. Sharing occurs to the extent permitted by each Party’s legislation on information sharing, allowing Parties to identify potential outbreaks and linkages to food sources at an early stage. Federal and Provincial health and food safety Parties attend the teleconferences. If the situation warrants, further communications among Parties may be initiated.

8.5 Ontario Outbreak Investigation Coordinating Committee (ON-OICC)

Coordination of a unified response to a multi-jurisdictional foodborne hazard or illness outbreak requires collaboration between local, provincial, and federal agencies. Sharing of information between public health and food regulatory Parties is critical to an investigation’s effectiveness and in removing the source of risk to the public.

A central element of the ON-FIORP is the establishment of an ON-OICC to coordinate a multi-jurisdictional response to a foodborne hazard or illness outbreak in Ontario. All Parties are requested to participate in the ON-OICC until it is deemed that their involvement is not required.
8.5.1 Purpose of the ON-OICC

In a timely and effective manner, the ON-OICC will coordinate among Parties:

- the outbreak or food safety investigation;
- the outbreak or foodborne hazard response;
- communication to the public;
- and the post-outbreak debrief

The ON-OICC will achieve this by:

- facilitating communication and sharing of information and expertise among participants, and clarifying roles and responsibilities;
- serving as a central point to share information from all sources and discuss findings;
- formulating and communicating outbreak response strategies and coordinating investigations among Parties, such as follow-up and corrective actions;
- identifying resource needs and opportunities for sharing resources;
- establishing priorities for response where critical resources are limited or constrained;
- gaining consensus in resolving issues that emerge; and
- developing comprehensive communication strategies and coordinating external communications to ensure the release of consistent and complementary messaging to stakeholders and the public.

8.5.2 Composition of the ON-OICC

The ON-OICC will be comprised of representatives from each of the Parties involved in the foodborne hazard or illness outbreak investigation. It is the responsibility of each Party to designate a representative for the ON-OICC. One representative from each Party will be identified at the beginning of each ON-OICC call, to report on his or her organization's activities. The representative can also involve colleagues from their own organization, to provide additional support.

The composition of the ON-OICC will depend on the nature of the foodborne hazard or outbreak and may evolve as knowledge related to the source of the outbreak is generated. The ON-OICC should, at minimum, have representatives that provide epidemiological, food safety, laboratory, and communication expertise from the different levels of government. Other agencies, such as the RCMP and emergency response agencies, may participate as required.
8.5.3 Initial Assessment and Review of Information and Activation of the ON-OICC

Once Parties are notified of a potential multi-jurisdictional foodborne hazard or illness outbreak, a teleconference is held to review available information. The Parties will then assess whether an ON-OICC is required or should be activated. Before creating an ON-OICC, efforts will be made to collect all appropriate information that can be shared between the Parties.

Reasons for activating an ON-OICC may include:

- Reasonable probability that the outbreak is associated with food (other potential sources to explain enteric illness increases have been ruled out, such as travel-related illnesses).
- A confirmed foodborne outbreak or hazard.
- Evidence to suggest a potential hazard from a distributed food product.
- Two or more Parties are involved.

An ON-OICC may also be activated to benefit from the expertise of the Parties or to assist with sharing of information.

Human illness or injury are not required for an ON-OICC to be activated; if a foodborne hazard with the potential to cause human illness or injury is identified, an ON-OICC can be activated. When a potentially contaminated food that could pose a risk to the public has been identified in Ontario, a food safety investigation will be initiated (Section 8.7).

When an ON-OICC is activated, the ON-OICC Lead Agency (Section 8.5.4, 8.5.5) will ask the ON-FIORP Primary Representatives (Section 8.5.6, Annex 3) to inform their senior management.

Where evidence exists that a food product is likely the cause or has the potential to be the cause of a multi-jurisdictional outbreak, any Party involved in an epidemiological or food safety investigation can request that an ON-OICC be established under the leadership described.

8.5.4 Determination of the ON-OICC Lead Agency

The lead Party responsible for coordinating an ON-OICC (ON-OICC Lead Agency) is identified using these guidelines:

- If a foodborne hazard has been identified with the potential to cause a foodborne illness outbreak, but no human illness has yet been identified, the Party who has responsibility for the routine inspection of the food premises of production of the implicated food will lead the ON-OICC.
• If an outbreak occurs within one BOH jurisdiction, the ON-OICC Lead Agency will be the affected BOH. If an outbreak involves more than one BOH, the MOHLTC will be considered the ON-OICC Lead Agency, with the following exceptions:
  o If there is a large outbreak within its jurisdiction, the BOH may request that the MOHLTC be the ON-OICC Lead Agency. The BOH may also remain the ON-OICC Lead Agency and request assistance from the MOHLTC in coordinating the ON-OICC.
  o If there are a minimal number of cases in adjacent BOHs, the MOHLTC may request that the BOH with the majority of cases be the ON-OICC Lead Agency.
• If it is determined that the illness outbreak involves more than one province or has an international dimension, the lead may be transferred to PHAC, who will then initiate a national OICC, in accordance with the Canada’s FIORP. In this case, a food safety investigation will be led by the CFIA and/or the appropriate authority.
• A BOH or provincial officials may request the assistance of HC, PHAC, or CFIA in the response to a potential foodborne hazard or illness outbreak investigation. The local or provincial authorities would provide the case level information required for the collation and analysis of data to HC, PHAC, or CFIA in order to inform decision-making and draw conclusions based on all available evidence.

8.5.5 Responsibilities of the ON-OICC Lead Agency

The ON-OICC Lead Agency is responsible for contacting all ON-FIORP Primary Representatives (Section 8.5.6, Annex 3) to inform them that an ON-OICC will be or has been established, and for ensuring that these Primary Representatives receive summaries of ON-OICC activities and actions.

Responsibilities of the ON-OICC Lead Agency also includes centralized collation and analysis of data (in collaboration with Public Health Ontario), managing meetings, recording and distributing discussion summaries and action items, and maintaining documentation of the response effort.

The ON-OICC Lead Agency will disseminate information in formats required for the response to progress (e.g., outbreak summaries, epidemiological assessments, health risk assessments). An individual identified by the ON-OICC Lead Agency chairs the ON-OICC teleconferences or meetings. The ON-OICC Lead Agency may change the chair as the outbreak evolves.

The ON-OICC will be disbanded by the ON-OICC Lead Agency, with the agreement of the Parties (Section 8.14). It is the responsibility of the ON-OICC Lead Agency to advise the ON-FIORP Primary Representatives that the ON-OICC has been disbanded.
8.5.6 Responsibilities of the ON-FIORP Primary Representatives

Upon notification by the ON-OICC Lead Agency, the ON-FIORP Primary Representatives will be responsible for notifying and providing regular updates to their senior management. The ON-FIORP Primary Representatives are responsible for ensuring that there is appropriate representation from their respective organizations on the ON-OICC.

Contact information for the ON-FIORP Primary Representatives will be maintained as part of the ON-FIORP Contact List (Annex 3). The MOHLTC will maintain the ON-FIORP Contact List.

8.5.7 Information Sharing between ON-OICC Parties

The leads for the various investigations (Epidemiological, Food Safety, and Laboratory; Sections 8.6-8.8) are responsible for coordinating communication and sharing pertinent information with the ON-OICC.

The exchange of information among Parties will be conducted according to applicable provincial and/or federal access to information and privacy legislation and common law principles, and existing information-sharing arrangements. Confidential third party information provided by industry that is shared between the Parties will be treated appropriately.

Information sharing is subject to any applicable federal or provincial laws and common law principles, including applicable access and privacy laws. Information sharing is required to investigate and resolve the food safety situation (which could include the sharing of personal information). Information may be exchanged in confidence between the Parties, when a foodborne hazard that could cause adverse health effects or an illness outbreak is identified, in order to protect the health of the people of Ontario. Confidential information shared could include distribution lists, inspection findings, and background information/history of a food premises facility. In most circumstances, information shared by the Parties is to be used only for the purposes of responding to the foodborne hazard or illness outbreak. For more details on information sharing, refer to Section 7.

8.5.8 Decision-Making and Resolving Differences in Opinion

While the ON-OICC will strive to reach consensus to guide response actions, the ON-OICC Parties recognize that each Party has specific legal obligations, policies, and mandates that must be respected. Decisions made by one Party, pursuant to its obligations but related to the purpose of the ON-OICC, should be communicated to all ON-OICC members.
The ON-OICC will attempt to resolve differences of opinion during the course of an outbreak. However, when consensus cannot be reached, the Parties should seek guidance from senior management through their ON-FIORP Primary Representative. Decisions made by senior management in resolving the issue should be communicated to all ON-OICC Parties.

8.6 Foodborne Illness (Epidemiological) Investigations

To facilitate epidemiological investigations of a foodborne illness outbreak, the ON-OICC will assess what information is required and determine which Party is best able to gather the identified information and has the authority to do so. Every effort will be made to standardize the collected information (e.g., questionnaires and line listings). A review and update of the documents required will take place on an ongoing basis.

PHO will provide CFIA and/or the appropriate food authority with a line listing to identify foods that most likely caused the foodborne illness outbreak. A discussion will then take place between PHO, MOHLTC, CFIA and/or the appropriate food authority to identify which food(s) to potentially investigate, based on all available information. CFIA and/or the appropriate food authority may then decide to exercise its authority to carry out a food safety investigation.

Case investigations will be carried out by the BOH(s). In some instances, case investigations may be coordinated centrally; however, when multiple BOHs are involved, the coordination of epidemiological data may take place within the identified ON-OICC Lead Agency. This analysis will support the examination of findings from all aspects of the outbreak investigation and this information will be shared as described (Section 7; Section 8.5.7). In some situations, it will be important for CFIA to speak directly with cases, event hosts, or other interviewees, to ensure that adequate information required to initiate a recall is collected. BOHs are encouraged to facilitate this access to interviewees in their jurisdictions, as required.

8.7 Food Safety Investigations

When it is suspected that a food is the source of an outbreak, or may be a potential hazard, a food safety investigation will be conducted to determine whether the suspected food source can be linked to the outbreak or adverse health effects. In addition, an investigation should be undertaken to identify the source or cause of contamination of the suspected or affected food.

CFIA and/or the appropriate food authority will coordinate food safety investigations, which may include obtaining information from questionnaires for the identification of the food item, requesting a HC Health Risk Assessment (HRA), traceback and traceforward of the food product, and investigation of the food premises plant.
Multiple Parties may be involved in the food safety investigation. The roles and responsibilities of each Party during the investigation are outlined in Annex 1. For example, CFIA will coordinate food safety investigations in Federally Registered Establishments and OMAFRA will coordinate food safety investigations in Provincially Licensed Plants. In general, BOHs conduct food safety investigations at retail food and retail service premises.

Other food premises may be investigated by any of the Parties, based on an assessment of each situation and their respective legal authority. However, for Federally Registered Establishments or Provincially Licensed Plants, joint food safety investigations with a BOH may be conducted. During joint inspections, inspectors should discuss in advance who will lead the joint inspection, who will handle specific aspects of the inspection, and who will ask particular questions of the operator.

Should the food safety investigation expand to include issues of employee health at the food premise, MOHLTC will notify the Ministry of Labour. Where employee records of illness and/or employee clinical test results are required, PHO will notify the BOH, who will conduct any required follow up of human illness.

### 8.8 Laboratory Investigations

Both epidemiological and food safety investigations usually involve laboratory testing. Each Party is responsible for collecting samples and arranging appropriate laboratory analyses as part of their respective investigations and mandates. If an ON-OICC is in place, the ON-OICC will coordinate laboratory analyses in order to avoid overlap and duplication, permit discussion of issues, and facilitate the sharing of results.

If a Party does not have the necessary capacity or expertise to perform the necessary test(s), the Party should make the necessary contacts as per Annex 2, in order to send the samples to a laboratory that has the required expertise and capacity.

### 8.9 Centralized Integrated Analysis

When Parties are providing information and analysis from various sources (e.g., epidemiological, laboratory, food-related), centralized collation and analysis of information by the ON-OICC Lead Agency is required. This ensures that informed decision-making can be made and conclusions can be drawn based on all available information, in order to identify the potential cause of the outbreak or foodborne hazard, the source of the outbreak or foodborne hazard, and areas requiring further investigation.
8.10 Health Risk Assessment (HRA)

HC is responsible for conducting HRAs when requested by the CFIA or any other Party. Within the CFIA, the Office of Food Safety and Recall (OFSR) is responsible for formulating requests for HRAs and they are the primary point of contact with Health Canada. HRAs may be requested in the absence of a standard or guideline, or where the standard or guideline does not provide adequate indication of the expected controls for adequate health protection relative to the identified health concern. Time frames for receiving results for HRAs are as follows: Health Risk I - within 8 hours; Health Risk II - within 24 hours.

HRAs are completed as per service standards, in order to ensure that appropriate risk management decisions are taken to prevent contaminated food from reaching the consumer. Data gathered through the investigation, and its analysis, are considered in the HRA for determining the level of risk posed by a food. HC has a written process that follows the guidelines developed by the Codex Alimentarius Commission (Food and Agriculture Organization/World Health Organization, 1999), which is responsible for developing international food standards and guidelines.

HC will convey the HRA results and rationale to the requesting Party or Parties. The results may be routinely shared and discussed at the ON-OICC, to ensure that evidence provided by ON-OICC members is appropriately captured in the HRA process. HC representation on the ON-OICC ensures that the necessary background and information is collected to support the HRA process.

All ON-OICC Parties will be informed once an HRA has been initiated. ON-OICC members will identify after-hours contacts, for use in the event that HRA results are completed after regular business hours (Annex 3). The results of the HRA will be sent to CFIA, who will determine if a food recall is to be initiated. If required, CFIA will draft a public warning (known as a Health Hazard Alert), which will be shared with the ON-OICC Parties, including the after-hours contacts. If after-hours contacts have not been identified, CFIA will contact the MOHLTC after-hours service (ex. Spills Action Centre), a 24-hour telephone line staffed for emergencies, with contact numbers for on-call MOHLTC and PHO staff. The MOHLTC after-hours service will notify appropriate parties as per any existing agreements.

It is recognized that public health will conduct an assessment of health risk based on available information, to inform possible actions to prevent the spread of a foodborne illness outbreak or to limit a food hazard, in addition to or in parallel to HC’s HRA. In certain circumstances, public health actions may be warranted where there is a lack of confirmed laboratory test results; however, the risk of human exposure to a potential source of illness may be high.
8.11 Public Health and Food Safety Actions

Actions undertaken by one or more Parties during a foodborne hazard or illness outbreak to address the source of the outbreak and prevent further cases of human illness may include:

- Investigation of food premises and, where appropriate, sample collection.
- Mandatory and voluntary recalls of a commercially prepared food, or fresh fruit or vegetable, and verification of effectiveness of food recalls detention of food product(s).
- Disposition of contaminated or suspected foods.
- Public communication outlining recommended prevention and control activities, and raising awareness through communication with populations at greater risk.
- Case and contact management.
- Prevention and control measures.
- Provision of prophylaxis (e.g. vaccination for Hepatitis A contacts).
- Provision of treatment (e.g. botulism anti-toxin).

Each Party will conduct the appropriate actions to address and support the investigation, as necessary under its respective mandate. The ON-OICC coordinates information-sharing related to these actions and facilitates discussions concerning the timing of actions by multiple Parties.

8.11.1 Food Recalls

8.11.1.1 CFIA Notification to all Parties

CFIA will immediately notify the Parties through the CFIA’s “Food Recalls/Allergy Alerts” notification system when a Class I or Class II food recall has commenced and a public announcement has been issued. Parties must subscribe to the CFIA e-mail notification system to receive these notices, at: http://www.inspection.gc.ca/english/util/listserv/listsube.shtml?foodrecalls_rappe lsaliments

8.11.1.2 CFIA Notification to the MOHLTC

The CFIA Ontario Area Recall Coordinator (ARC) may request assistance from the BOH through the MOHLTC. The MOHLTC will advise the Medical Officers of Health (MOHs) and other affected branches of the MOHLTC of the recall and the assistance requested.
8.11.1.3 MOHLTC Notification to all Parties

In the case of a public health or food safety action initiated by a BOH or the MOHLTC, as directed by the CMOH or MOH, the MOHLTC will notify the appropriate Parties. The MOHLTC may request the assistance of other Parties, as necessary to support public health actions.

8.12 Tampering, Sabotage, and Terrorism

In the event that a multi-jurisdictional foodborne hazard or illness outbreak investigation results in the identification or suspicion of intentional contamination of a food product, the appropriate local/regional law enforcement agency shall be immediately notified. Because these types of activities are criminal, law enforcement requirements take precedence. This document is not intended to conflict with any internal policies for dealing with tampering, sabotage, and terrorism that each Party may have. Should a Party not have internal policies for dealing with these situations, the following may be used: the Party that is first aware of real or suspected deliberate contamination of food (tampering, sabotage, terrorism) will make the appropriate contacts, as follows:

- Incidents involving suspected tampering/sabotage will be referred to the police of the local jurisdiction or the Ontario Provincial Police (OPP).
- Incidents of suspected terrorist activity involving food fall under the guidelines of the National Counter Terrorism Plan. The Party that first identifies the suspected activity should contact the police of the local jurisdiction, followed by the RCMP’s National Operations Center (613-993-4460), and the OPP’s Provincial Anti-Terrorism and Hate Crimes Section (888-310-1122).

Federal Parties (i.e., CFIA, HC, and PHAC) must contact OMAFRA for situations involving suspected or confirmed terrorism in Ontario. OMAFRA will then contact Emergency Management Ontario (EMO), which will in turn contact all appropriate ministries, laboratories, and municipalities that are required to be informed and involved, in accordance with established EMO protocols.

If another ministry of the Ontario government becomes aware of a situation first, they should contact EMO directly, and EMO will contact other ministries.

EMO will determine whether the Provincial Emergency Response Plan for Terrorism is to be activated, to deal with the terrorist threat (as defined in the Plan), and whether the Emergency Operations Centre will be activated to coordinate the Ontario government response. EMO, CFIA, and/or HC will contact Public Safety Canada (PSC), which will then inform the appropriate federal governments and laboratories.

The Parties may continue to follow the ON-FIORP for their response to the situation, taking into account any guidance/direction provided by the local police and/or RCMP. Preservation of evidence will be required and should be discussed with the police and/or RCMP. Parties in a position to collect evidence will make every effort to ensure that an adequate chain of custody procedure and documentation is followed.
8.13 Communication with the Public

8.13.1 Responsibility

Each of the Parties has the responsibility to communicate with the public within its respective jurisdiction. Should any Party decide to take action regarding a public communication that was not agreed on or discussed by the ON-OICC, it should advise members of the ON-OICC of the communication, and share draft messaging prior to releasing the information. In the case of public advisories that are issued late at night or early in the morning, messaging will be shared as soon as reasonably possible. This Party will also be responsible for addressing any calls from the public or media in regards to their public messaging. However, the Parties are aware that the information shared with the public is limited to their own information and must not include information shared by or belonging to another Party. Public messaging must always respect the confidentiality of information shared within the ON-OICC, as outlined in Section 8.5.7 of this document.

Table 1 defines what Parties lead communication activities during foodborne hazard or illness outbreaks that are restricted to a single BOH, multiple BOHs, and conveyances such as cruise ships, aircraft, etc. within Ontario.

Table 1. Responsibilities for public communications for foodborne hazard or illness outbreaks.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Situation</th>
<th>Primary Responsible Party</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Public Health Measures</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Food Recall</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Public Education</td>
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<tr>
<td>Within one BOH</td>
<td>Affected BOH</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>CFIA, MOHLTC, affected BOH</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Affected BOH</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than one BOH</td>
<td>MOHLTC</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>CFIA, MOHLTC, affected BOH</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>MOHLTC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conveyances</td>
<td>Health Canada, in collaboration with PHAC</td>
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<tr>
<td>(trains, buses, airlines,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cruise ships and cargo</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>vessels in international</td>
<td></td>
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<td>waters)</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Communication to health professionals may also be required as part of the response to a multi-jurisdictional foodborne hazard or illness outbreak. Distribution of communication products to health professionals remains the responsibility of the MOHLTC and BOHs.
8.13.2 Public Communications

Public communication activities will be guided by the following objectives:

- Communication activities are coordinated among all Parties and are timely, consistent, and appropriate to the circumstances.
- Key messages are aimed at the general public and those at greatest risk.
- Approach reflects general risk, emergency and crisis communications principles.
- Effective information-sharing among communications staff of all Parties to support prioritization, surge capacity, and after-hours availability of communications/media relations staff.

If requested by any Party, the ON-OICC will evaluate communications activities, to assess effectiveness.

8.14 Conclusion of the ON-FIORP Response

The ON-OICC Lead Agency, in consultation with the Parties, will close the investigation when the foodborne hazard is no longer present or the illness outbreak has been declared over. The ON-OICC Lead Agency, with the assistance of Parties represented on the ON-OICC and with the support of PHO, will prepare and circulate an ON-FIORP response summary or final report that chronicles key events and findings from the food hazard or outbreak investigation.

8.15 Post-Outbreak Debrief

Post-outbreak debriefs (reviews) may be conducted, at the request of the ON-OICC Lead Agency or any of the Parties involved. For a large outbreak involving multiple Parties, a formal debriefing meeting is recommended and should be organized by the ON-OICC Lead Agency. The goals of the post-outbreak debrief should include, but are not limited to:

- Confirmation of the source of the outbreak.
- Assessment of the effectiveness of public health and food safety actions, and any difficulties met in their implementation.
- Identification of the immediate and long-term measures to prevent reoccurrence, such as new or revised policies or standards.
- Evaluation of the collaborative response efforts, including communication and coordination between jurisdictions.
• Clarification of resources, organizational changes, or training needs to optimize future responses.

• Identification of the necessary improvements or adjustments to the ON-FIORP. Any recommendations for the purpose of updating the ON-FIORP should be provided to the MOHLTC. Changes will only be made with the agreement of all Parties.

• Discussion of any privacy and/or legal issues which may have arisen.

• Assessment of a need for further scientific studies.

Post-outbreak debriefs should be conducted in a timely manner after the resolution of the outbreak, in order for all Parties to benefit from the lessons-learned. Unless otherwise agreed upon by the Parties, the ON-OICC Lead Agency will chair the post-outbreak debrief. It is the chair’s responsibility to provide a summary report to all other Parties. The ON-OICC members will distribute the report to other officials within their organizations.

9. EMERGENCY OPERATIONS CENTRE (EOC) ACTIVATION

Most foodborne hazard and illness outbreak investigations do not require the activation of emergency operations centres (EOCs). However, some Parties may consider using such an approach for some public health emergencies, including foodborne hazard and illness outbreaks, to help coordinate their resources and response. Parties are responsible for notifying other Parties of their intent to activate their EOCs. Information from the ON-OICC is to be integrated into the EOCs.

10. ADMINISTRATIVE REVIEW

The MOHLTC will be responsible for reviewing and updating the ON-FIORP main document, with the agreement of all Parties. The Annexes will be updated as needed. The review will be conducted periodically as required, or at the request of one of the Parties, to ensure the accuracy of organizational names, and roles and responsibilities, and to assess the recommendations received through the post-outbreak debriefs. The MOHLTC will also update the ON-FIORP Contact List on a regular basis.
11. EFFECTIVE DATE

This ON-FIORP will be effective on the date of the last signature of the Parties and will remain in effect for a Party unless it is terminated earlier by that Party, upon thirty (30) days written notice to the other Parties.
12. SIGNATURES

Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care
Dr. Arlene King
Chief Medical Officer of Health

Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs
Debra Sikora
Assistant Deputy Minister (A)

Ministry of the Environment
Paul Nieweglowski
Assistant Deputy Minister and Chief Drinking Water Inspector (A)

Ministry of Natural Resources
Rosalyn Lawrence
Assistant Deputy Minister

Public Health Ontario
Dr. Vivek Goel
President and CEO

Canadian Food Inspection Agency
Dr. William Teeter
Executive Director, Ontario Area

Health Canada
Dr. Samuel Godfroy
Director General, Food Directorate

Public Health Agency of Canada
Dr. Mark Racette
Director General, Centre for Food-borne, Environmental and Zoonotic Infectious Diseases