



The Pandemic Planner

A Monthly Newsletter for Health Care Professionals

Emergency Management Unit, Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care

September 2007

As health professionals and emergency planners, we know that developing integrated and well-coordinated plans will be critical to our ability to decisively and effectively respond to health emergencies. It is in the best interest of the system, the workers and the public that we continue to build on the foundation we have created together – locally and provincially – since 2004. However, it is important for us to recognize that the value and success of our plans cannot be premised or measured solely by the scope, the level and degree of input from health experts or the relationship our plans have with the latest science. We must also recognize that value, success and effectiveness also rest on testing our plans and exercising our roles and responsibilities in advance of a health emergency – including an influenza pandemic.

This issue of the *Pandemic Planner* will highlight the importance of training and exercises of past and present, as well as future opportunities to test the health system and strengthen response structures. We hope you find this issue informative and that it encourages your organization to continue to build your plans – and to test them, too.

~ Allison J. Stuart, Director, Emergency Management Unit

What's New?

Testing Local Plans: Operation Fever Phix

Some of our subscribers may recall that the November 2006 issue of the *Pandemic Planner* marked December 8 as an important date for the County of Simcoe and the District of Muskoka – the community's first-ever large scale inter-agency pandemic exercise: "Operation Fever Phix."

Operation Fever Phix brought together over 240 senior officials from government, including the federal and provincial governments, the County of Simcoe and its member municipalities, and the District of Muskoka. Participants also included local police and fire services agencies; First Nations representatives; health facilities, organizations and agencies; emergency and community services; the private sector and the media - with the press fulfilling a dual role by participating in the exercise as well as covering the event.

The exercise simulated a pandemic with origins in Asia, spreading quickly across the globe into Canada with cases first identified on the west coast and then in Ontario (Simcoe County and the District of Muskoka).

The goals of the exercise were two-fold. The first goal was to test local plans and the interoperability of the organizations and agencies participating in the exercise. In addition, the exercise aimed to test the role of local media in providing the public with critical health information and precautionary measures to be taken during an influenza pandemic.

Operation Fever Phix was hailed as a success and following the exercise a debrief was held with the participants. The input provided as a result of the debrief has been compiled into a report, "The Joint Findings on the Simcoe Muskoka Pandemic Exercise: Operation Fever Phix."

The joint report was released on September 4, 2007, and includes a series of recommendations based on the input and feedback collected. These

recommendations will help shape and inform action plans to address gaps in local plans and to build and improve preparedness efforts going forward.

For more information on the exercise or the joint report, please visit: www.simcoe.ca. The report can be accessed under the "What's New" section on the left of the Simcoe County home page.

Exercises, Training and More!

Since our creation in December 2003, the Emergency Management Unit (EMU) has led and participated in numerous training opportunities and exercises with both a health and non-health specific focus.

Most notably, in February 2006, the EMU partnered with Emergency Management Ontario (EMO) to host a government-wide table top pandemic exercise. This large scale exercise included the participation of over 350 individuals from municipal, provincial and federal governments, as well as the health and private sectors.

The EMU promotes and supports training and exercises because of the value they bring to increased preparedness. Exercises contribute to the planning process by providing the opportunity to: identify planning gaps, reinforce strengths and assess interoperability, as well as encourage team building and further collaboration with stakeholders. Training and exercises help us keep our plans up-to date, realistic and effective.

There are many types of training and exercises including drills, table top, functional and full scale exercises and a lot of work goes into planning, implementing and follow up.

Big or small, if your organization is looking to develop a table top exercise,

The following helpful tips can guide you in the exercise process:

A. Planning the exercise

1. Assess your organizations needs;
2. Clearly define the goals and objectives of the training or exercise (and communicate these to participants);
3. Determine the scope;
4. Form an exercise team and develop an exercise plan;
5. Develop the scenario (including written narrative and prompts); and
6. Organize an evaluation team and prepare an evaluation format.

B. During the exercise

1. Conduct (lead or participate) exercise.

C. Post-exercise

1. Facilitate/participate in a “hot-wash” or debrief;
2. Facilitate a formal exercise evaluation with participants;
3. Compile observations, debrief comments and evaluation results into an action report;
4. Communicate the findings to stakeholders and participants; and
5. Incorporate recommendations and lessons learned into your planning cycle and revise the emergency response plan(s) accordingly.

The EMU will be looking at ways to take from its experience with leading, developing and participating in training and exercises to help develop an “exercise planning” resource. The resource will include information on training and exercise development, as well as best practices on conducting debriefs and action plans (the important outcome of your training and exercises). The resource will be made available online. Stay tuned for more information on this important resource!

The Incident Management System: Response Structure

Many organizations involved with emergency planning, preparedness and response have a well established Incident Management System (IMS) in place. It is a practical, tried, tested and true system that helps ensure unity, consistency and interoperability within and across organizations.

There are many benefits to creating an IMS structure in your organization. In addition to providing a consistent response structure, IMS provides an efficient and flexible system to managing all incidents/emergencies at every level and scale – including influenza pandemic. IMS facilitates cooperation between response organizations and jurisdictions and it allows for incidents to be managed in a cohesive manner.

Emergency Management Ontario is leading the development and introduction of IMS across Ontario, and has undertaken a collaborative approach with key stakeholders including federal, provincial and municipal governments; associations representing first responders, health and private sectors; and non-government organizations, including the Canadian Red Cross, St. John Ambulance and the Salvation Army.

Through a steering committee and several working groups, a vision for IMS in Ontario is well on its way to completion. Currently, work is underway to finalize an IMS doctrine, supporting annexes, a training program and implementation plan (anticipated to commence in spring 2008).

To find out more about IMS and its importance to emergency planning and response, you can contact EMO or your sector-specific association (resources listed below). Stay tuned for more information and updates as this important initiative progresses.

IMS contact organizations:

1. Emergency Management Unit: www.health.gov.on.ca/emergency ;
2. Emergency Management Ontario: www.gov.on.ca/emo ;
3. Ontario Hospital Association: <http://www.oha.com/> ;
4. Association of Municipal Emergency Medical Services of Ontario: <http://www.emsontario.ca/>

You Asked....?

- The Ontario Health Plan for an Influenza Pandemic (OHPIP) Steering Committee will hold its first meeting since the release of OHPIP 2007 on October 2, 2007. The Steering Committee will discuss planning priorities and next steps for 2007-08.
- The ministry is in the process of migrating staff from the @moh.gov.on.ca (email address) to @ontario.ca. Be sure to confirm your EMU contact’s new e-address and update your contact lists before the migration is complete!

Local Profile

The Wabun Tribal Council, which services seven First Nations communities in northern Ontario (Beaverhouse, Brunswick House, Chapleau Ojibwe, Matachewan, Mattagami, Wahgoshig and Flying Post) recently released its influenza pandemic plan.

The Tribal Council faced many opportunities and challenges during the development of the plan. In addition to the large geographical area and the diverse needs of the communities it serves, there was a level of fear and concern within the general public about an influenza pandemic. To address this, the Wabun Tribal Council took a unique approach to the planning process, which was anchored in extensive education and awareness through broad community engagement.

The Wabun Tribal Council consulted and held planning and information sessions with local health workers and community members. Building on its existing relationships, the Council also participated in information sessions with the Sudbury & District Health Unit, community-based organizations and hospitals from across the region; and held meetings with Nishnawbe-Aski Nation Health Planning Group, and federal and provincial government representatives to inform the community's influenza pandemic plan.

The extensive consultation and involvement of community members and local organizations supported the development of a comprehensive plan that details roles and responsibilities, and well defines the process for response activities including the establishment of flu centres (which is modeled on the community's annual influenza vaccination program).

For more information on the Wabun Tribal Council, visit: www.wabun.on.ca .

Important Dates: October – November 2007

October 11 – Ontario Hospital Association is hosting the Emergency Preparedness, Responding to Chemical, Biological, Radiological and Nuclear Incidents conference in Toronto. For more information, please visit: <http://www.oha.com/> .

October 15 - 19 – Infection Prevention and Control week.

November 2 & 3 – IDEAS Network Pandemic Exercise will be held in Toronto.

Useful Online Resources

Columbia University has posted an online public health emergency exercise toolkit. Visit: http://nursing.columbia.edu/pdf/PublicHealthBooklet_060803.pdf .

The School of Public Health at the University of Albany has numerous online resources (publications and web casts and training courses) on IMS and training and exercises. Visit: <http://www.ualbanycph.org/> .