



The Pandemic Planner

A Monthly Newsletter for Health Care Professionals

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

November 2007

There has been a flurry of pandemic planning related activities throughout October and November - both north and south of the border. From large scale table top exercises to a cross-border health care symposium, and from new incident management system tools and resources to sharing ideas on surge capacity planning, the last two months have provided us with exceptional opportunities to collaborate, share our knowledge and expertise as well as practice our plans and response capabilities together.

This month's issue of the *Pandemic Planner* will feature some of these opportunities, activities and accomplishments in pandemic planning. We hope you enjoy this issue and that it provides you with important information that will assist and inform your planning goals and priorities!

~ Allison J. Stuart, A/Assistant Deputy Minister, Public Health Division

What's New?

Operation Mass Immune

As featured under the Important Dates section of the October issue of the *Pandemic Planner*, Operation Mass Immune is an exercise that has taken place over a series of days in October and November.

The exercise was designed in partnership with the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care's Emergency Management Unit (EMU), local public health units and key stakeholders. It was the first-ever provincially coordinated mass immunization exercise in Ontario, and it set out to practice both provincial and local mass immunization plans in the context of an influenza pandemic, as well as the coordination of these plans and communications within and between the public health system and the province.

To achieve the exercise objectives, Operation Mass Immune consisted of three exercise modules, with each one testing key elements necessary to successfully implement and supply an emergency mass immunization campaign during the peak period of vaccine demand.

The first module was a tabletop exercise that involved key players from the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care including the Acting Chief Medical Officer of Health and senior representatives from the EMU, Public Health Division, Communications and Information Branch, Supply and Financial Services and the Ontario Government Pharmacy and Medical Supplies Services (OPGMSS). The Chief of Emergency Management Ontario (EMO) also participated in this tabletop exercise.

The objective of the first module was to practice the strategic decision making processes that would be necessary to operationalise a pandemic mass immunization and distribution strategy. The group was challenged by limited supply, lost trucks and conflicting priorities.

The second and third modules were full scale exercises. Module 2 specifically focused on practicing vaccine distribution within an expedited timeframe and was led by the OPGMSS.

Module 3 involved the participation of four local public health units including Niagara Public Health Department, the Peterborough County-City Health Unit, Kingston, Frontenac and Lennox and Addington Public Health and the Leeds, Grenville and Lanark District Health Unit, and took place over two days. It built upon the previous two modules and its objective was to test the implementation, set-up and operation of community mass immunization clinics.

A joint debrief will take place and will involve feedback on each of the modules and from all participants. Once the debrief is completed, an after action report will be prepared. This report is expected to provide invaluable feedback to help shape and inform our plans as we go forward.

The exercise highlights our significant progress made to date and met the goal of informing a decision-making framework that will be incorporated in to provincial mass immunization planning. The collaborative development, design and implementation of this exercise is a testament to the province's and the local health system's commitment to influenza planning, preparedness and response readiness. Congratulations to all the participating organizations!

Stay tuned for more details on this exercise and the outcomes in the December issue of the *Pandemic Planner*.

Sharing our expertise across the border

On Friday, November 16, 2007, the University at Buffalo School of Law hosted a symposium entitled Limited Health Care Resources: Prioritizing Access in Community Emergency. This symposium is a follow-up to a successful public seminar held in November 2006. The issues and planning challenges raised at last year's session informed the agenda for the 2007 symposium.

The November 2007 symposium focused on determining the allocation of, and access to, limited medical resources during a health emergency. It focused on answering the questions “who goes first” and “who decides” from a legal, ethical and medical perspective in both Canada and the United States.

Key Ontario representatives in the fields of pandemic planning, law, community and public health and infectious diseases were invited to attend and present to a diverse audience of students and faculty, public health officials, health law attorneys, hospital administrators and health care providers.

The Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care’s Acting Assistant Deputy Minister for Public Health, Allison J. Stuart, presented a keynote address which raised the issue and importance of cross border collaboration in the event of an influenza pandemic. Following the presentation was a panel discussion facilitated by Dr. Doug Sider, Associate Medical Officer of Health for Niagara Public Health Department. The panel discussion focused on various hypothetical scenarios that emphasized legal, ethical and practical challenges of limited health human resources during an influenza pandemic.

In addition to the key note presentation and the panel discussion, the ministry’s public health counsel (Liam Scott) gave a presentation on the legal aspects of community emergencies and health care. While presenting, Liam Scott brought forward the “top 10 legal lessons” for consideration during the planning stages and response activities of a health emergency.

Other important attendees from Ontario include the EMU’s Scientific Advisor, Dr. Brian Schwartz, and Dr. Michael Christian, one of Ontario’s critical care and infectious diseases expert - both of whom participated in a very public table top scenario and illustrated both their grasp of the content and their acting abilities!

The day was successful and it provided an opportunity for Ontario to share its knowledge and expertise as well as showcase its commitment to planning and working with our neighbours south of the border.

Reaching out: consultation on a common approach to the Incident Management System

Some of our subscribers may recall that the September issue of the *Pandemic Planner* highlighted the work currently underway to develop and implement a common approach to the Incident Management System (IMS) in Ontario. This initiative is being led by EMO with a steering committee of over 30 key stakeholders involving associations representing first responders, health and private sectors, non-government organizations, federal, provincial and municipal governments – including the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care’s EMU.

IMS is an operational framework for emergency response that facilitates communication and cooperation within and between organizations. Its structure allows for incidents to be managed in a decisive and cohesive manner.

Since last reported in the *Pandemic Planner*, Ontario’s IMS steering committee has released a new guidance document (doctrine) that provides the groundwork for the implementation of a standard IMS in Ontario. The doctrine serves as a “toolbox” of common IMS principles and procedures that all organizations involved with emergency preparedness may adopt.

The IMS doctrine and a draft training program are now available for formal consultation. Comments are being sought on how well the doctrine is understood, as well as its flexibility for adaptation in a diverse emergency response community (from first responder to health organizations and the private sector; and from government to volunteer and non-government organizations).

The formal consultation period started mid-November and will end on December 31, 2007. All health care organizations are invited to submit comments to contribute to this important consultation process.

To help support this initiative and facilitate easy access, the ministry has posted the consultation instructions and related materials on its web site at: www.health.gov.on.ca/emergency (follow the link under “What’s New”). Feedback is being collected by EMO through a special email account (found in the instructions). All input and comments will be collected and reviewed by the IMS steering committee in early 2008.

Stay tuned for updates on this important initiative in future issues of the *Pandemic Planner*!

You Asked....?

About recent changes within the ministry’s division of public health:

- Allison J. Stuart has accepted the position of Acting Assistant Deputy Minister, Public Health Division at the ministry for an interim period of time; and Tiffany Jay is Acting Director of the EMU while Allison is on secondment.
- Dr. David Williams has accepted the role of Acting Chief Medical Officer of Health for Ontario, while the recruitment process for a CMOH continues.
- Dr. George Pasut recently accepted the position of Associate Chief Medical Officer of Health for Ontario.

Local Profile

The September 2007 survey results are in! For this fifth version of the survey, public health units once again canvassed health providers in their jurisdiction in order to assess community-wide efforts to prepare for and respond to an influenza pandemic.

Highlights from the September 2007 survey include the following:

1. All public health units have engaged with stakeholders in their locality to start developing a coordinated health sector response plan;
2. Interagency planning has focused on identifying roles and responsibilities of local health organizations/services, planning mass vaccination procedures, developing a communications strategy, and establishing a surveillance system; and
3. The voluntary sector is playing a key role in supporting community efforts to prepare for and respond to an influenza pandemic.

The survey also allowed public health units to provide feedback to the EMU on areas of pandemic planning that require further provincial direction and/or coordination. For more information and details visit:

www.health.gov.on.ca/pandemic (follow the link under “What’s New”).

Important Dates:

- **December 11** – The Health Care Network of Southeastern Ontario is hosting a tabletop exercise, *A Prolonged Heat Wave Affects Northeastern United States and Southeastern Ontario Posing a High Mortality Risk*. To register, visit: [www. http://seohealthnet.com](http://seohealthnet.com).
- **December 14** – The University of Waterloo, Faculty of Mathematics, is hosting a *Pandemic Preparedness: Strategies and Tools* symposium. To register, visit: <http://www.mars.uwaterloo.ca/pandemic.shtml>.