



The Pandemic Planner

A Monthly Newsletter for Health Care Professionals

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

December 2007

The September issue of the *Pandemic Planner* featured the importance of testing our pandemic plans and training staff on the incident management system. We received a lot of positive feedback on that issue of the newsletter and in the spirit of supporting the momentum to test pandemic plans across Ontario and in local health settings this month's issue is dedicated to Operation Mass Immune – a recent exercise that tested provincial and local mass immunization plans and involved many key health organizations including local public health units.

This month's issue of the *Pandemic Planner* will profile five key participating organizations that were instrumental in the design and implementation of the exercise. This issue will also highlight an exercise led by Smart Systems for Health Agency and the work this information technology organization is undertaking to support pandemic planning and the health sector.

We hope you enjoy this issue of the *Pandemic Planner*. On behalf of the Emergency Management Unit and the ministry's Public Health Division, we wish you all the best in 2008 and look forward to continuing our important work together!

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

Operation Mass Immune!

Public health units across Ontario and the Ontario Government Pharmacy and Medical Supply Services (OGPMSS) have in place an infrastructure and system to effectively distribute seasonal influenza vaccine to Ontarians. This program is known as the Universal Influenza Immunization Program – or UIIP for short.

Using the UIIP as a springboard for mounting an emergency mass immunization campaign, four local public health units and the OGPMSS played an instrumental role in Ontario's first ever provincially coordinated mass immunization exercise – Operation Mass Immune.

The objective of Operation Mass Immune was to test the implementation of provincial and local mass immunization plans and the coordination that would have to occur to mount such an effort in the context of an influenza pandemic. The contributions of participating organizations were instrumental in achieving this objective and their efforts will inform future pandemic and mass immunization planning.

Read on to learn more about the contributions of each of these players!

Strategic Decisions

The first module of Operation Mass Immune tested the strategic decision-making structure and process required as part of an emergency mass immunization campaign. Senior officials from the ministry's Public Health Division including the acting Chief Medical Officer of Health, the Acting Assistant Deputy Minister, Public Health Division, the Chief of

Emergency Management Ontario, public health unit representatives from Durham and Simcoe-Muskoka and others were on hand to act through the process of dealing with the challenges of public health and safety. This module was exercised to inform a decision-making framework that will be included in the provincial mass immunization and other emergency plans.

Ontario Government Pharmacy and Medical Supply Services (OGPMSS) – Mass Distribution

"This exercise provided us with an excellent opportunity to test how quickly we could deliver the pandemic vaccine and we are looking forward to incorporating the lessons learned into future planning and exercises."
~ Paul Latremouille, Director Financial and Supply Services, OGPMSS

The OGPMSS is important to the work we do every day in public health. Amongst a number of things, the organization is responsible for the procurement and distribution of vaccines and drugs and medical supplies to health units, long-term care homes, Ontario Public Service institutions and other health organizations.

During a large scale infectious diseases outbreak, the OGPMSS will play a critical role and Operation Mass Immune was a perfect opportunity to test a provincial vaccine distribution and delivery strategy.

As part of the second module of Operation Mass Immune, the OGPMSS designed a strategy to expedite vaccine delivery and put it to the test. This strategy resulted in the OGPMSS revising their delivery routes by

eliminating non-critical deliveries and by mapping orders based upon the most efficient routes. The goal was to reduce the routine delivery time from one week to two days in an emergency – which was accomplished through the exercise.

The OGPMS also implemented a system to streamline the transfer of the vaccine from delivery trucks to the public health unit by pre-arranging the availability of health unit staff to sign for and receive the vaccine.

Through Operation Mass Immune, the OGPMS also learned the importance of effective human resource planning and ensuring adequate staffing for filling orders, managing and mapping distribution routes and transportation.

The OGPMS completed its debrief on the exercise and are looking forward to sharing lessons learned. The organization is also looking forward to a future opportunity to test other aspects of a mass immunization campaign including enhancing security requirements for vaccine delivery.

Congratulations to all the staff at the OGPMS for their efforts, valuable input and support in making Operation Mass Immune a success!

Leeds, Grenville and Lanark District Health Unit – Getting the Word Out

“In times of emergencies, clear and timely communication is essential. Operation Mass Immune allowed us to determine the most effective methods of communication for our community.” ~ Dr. Anne Carter, Medical Officer of Health, Leeds, Grenville & Lanark District Health Unit

Leeds, Grenville & Lanark District Health Unit undertook a unique approach to their role in Operation Mass Immune. In addition to testing the local mass immunization plan, the health unit also tested broader public communications and multi-faceted distribution strategies (the “push” or “pull” approach to vaccination and dispensing medication. See chapter 9A of the Ontario Health Plan for an Influenza Pandemic (OHPIP) at: www.health.gov.on.ca/pandemic).

Leeds, Grenville & Lanark District Health Unit implemented the “push” and “pull” approach to immunization. The “push” approach was incorporated in to the exercise by setting up clinics in several school locations – bringing the vaccine to the student population. The “pull” approach was incorporated in to the exercise by setting up a clinic at the local mall – pulling in the general public.

As this health unit covers a large geographical area, the exercise planning team also implemented three approaches to communicating with local residents about the exercise to encourage participation in the immunization clinics. In addition to placing ads in the local newspaper and sending direct mail-outs to local residents, radio announcements were broadcasted before the exercise and while the immunization clinics were in operation.

Using multiple locations and effective communication strategies helped the health unit test all response activities that would be vital to the success of a mass immunization campaign during a public health emergency including an influenza pandemic. The exercise was very successful. In addition to testing the local mass immunization plan, the health unit was able to test the Incident Management System (IMS) structure.

On behalf of the EMU, congratulations to all the dedicated staff at the Leeds, Grenville & Lanark District Health Unit who helped make this exercise a valuable experience.

Kingston, Frontenac and Lennox & Addington Public Health – The Public Health Emergency Operation Centre

“Not only did Operation Mass Immune allow us to fully implement our public health emergency operations centre, but it also gave us an opportunity to assess the appropriateness of the sites identified in our mass immunization plan. It was a very valuable exercise!” ~ Dr. Ian Gemmill, Medical Officer of Health, Kingston, Frontenac and Lennox & Addington Public Health

Kingston, Frontenac and Lennox & Addington Public Health saw Operation Mass Immune as an opportunity to put its emergency operations centre (EOC) and IMS structure to the test!

For the health unit this was the first time the EOC was fully activated. Staff were notified of EOC activation and a back-up team was put on stand-by if additional support and resources were required. A key lesson learned was the value of effective health human resources planning - a skill set based approach to maximizing human resources during a health emergency (see chapter 8 of the OHPIP at: www.health.gov.on.ca/pandemic).

Within the EOC, the health unit organized roles and responsibilities around the IMS structure. A key learning was how IMS can provide further definition and distinction around public health’s roles and responsibilities during a public health emergency such as an influenza pandemic. Although the implementation of IMS requires a long-term approach, the use of it during Operation Mass Immune helped the health unit in coordinating response activities.

On behalf of the EMU, congratulations to all the dedicated staff at the Kingston, Frontenac and Lennox & Addington Public Health who helped make this exercise a success!

Peterborough County-City Public Health Unit – Testing Linkages with Community Partners

“During the recent mass immunization exercise, the Peterborough County-City Health Unit plan was put to the test and passed with flying colours. The exercise reinforced the importance of effective communication between different community partners.” ~ Dr. Garry Humphreys, Medical Officer of Health, Peterborough County-City Health Unit

As one of the first health units to complete a mass immunization plan in Ontario, the Peterborough County-City Health Unit provided valuable input in to the development and design of Operation Mass Immune.

During an influenza pandemic, the health unit would establish an emergency response team to maintain key linkages with the city and county. Operation Mass Immune provided an opportunity to test these linkages and lines of communication.

During the exercise, the health unit also involved the participation of the United Way of Peterborough & District (United Way) and put the Emergency Volunteer Registry or EVR to the test (some of our subscribers will recall the October issue of the *Pandemic Planner* featured the emergency volunteer registry).

On behalf of the EMU, congratulations to Peterborough County-City Public Health Unit for making this exercise a success!

Niagara Region Public Health Department – Surge Capacity and Client Flow

“This exercise provided us with a unique experience to test our capacity to prepare for, and respond to, a significant public health emergency such as an influenza pandemic.” ~ Dr. Robin Williams, Medical Officer of Health, Niagara Region Public Health Department

When the EMU put out the call for health units to participate in Operation Mass Immune, the Niagara Region Public Health Department answered the call and also offered its support on exercise design. Their expertise in exercise planning (an important skill established through their relationships with cross-border partners) contributed to the success of Operation Mass Immune. The health unit demonstrated its ability to effectively and efficiently set-up an immunization clinic and test its competency in surge capacity and client flow.

For the exercise, the Niagara Region Public Health Department used its regional headquarters as the location for the immunization clinic. This site has never been used before and the exercise helped evaluate whether this facility would be an appropriate location to be used in a real-life mass immunization campaign.

Community participation in the exercise was a tremendous success. While the exercise started at 0900 hrs, volunteers started lining up at 0800hrs – ready to be received and immunized! In the first few hours, almost 400 people were immunized. By 1700hrs the immunization clinic processed more than 1,100 people.

During Operation Mass Immune’s clinic operation, the health unit’s EOC was activated using the IMS. The EOC oversaw clinic operations and client flow. It managed the exercise inputs, and ensured timely response and action.

The exercise was very successful and it reinforced the local plan’s strengths and opportunities. On behalf of the EMU, congratulations to all the dedicated staff at the Niagara Region Public Health Department who helped make this exercise a success.

Smart Systems for Health Agency – Getting ready to ensure support from the inside out!

Many of our subscribers are familiar with Smart Systems for Health Agency (SSHA) and its electronic products and services designed to improve health care delivery in Ontario. In addition to developing, implementing and supporting secure and reliable systems and solutions for the health sector, did you know that SSHA has also undertaken pandemic planning?

In March 2007, SSHA embarked on developing a pandemic plan for the Agency. The objectives of the planning process were four fold:

1. Develop a plan that aligns with the OHPIP;
2. Develop a priority list of SSHA product and services during the peak period of an influenza pandemic;
3. Develop a human resources strategy that ensures the continuity of operations, client support and product maintenance during an influenza pandemic; and
4. Develop a communications plan and influenza pandemic education and awareness strategy and program.

The SSHA pandemic planning team worked diligently to develop its plan within a short timeframe and by September 2007 the team completed a first draft for review and input.

Following the completion of first draft, the planning team determined that there would be tremendous value in testing the draft plan and its various components prior to its release, and moved forward with a half-day table top exercise based on the World Health Organization’s (WHO) Pandemic Periods and Phases (see chapter 2 of the OHPIP at: www.health.gov.on.ca/pandemic).

The exercise took place on October 19, 2007 and included the participation of departments across the Agency.

The exercise was successful and highlighted the plans strengths and opportunities as well as some gaps in continuity, decision-making and response requirements. Through a post-exercise debrief the planning team was able to incorporate important lessons-learned and successfully addressed areas that required improvement in time for the plan’s release on October 31, 2007.

Through establishing clear planning objectives and by undertaking an exercise prior to the release of its pandemic plan, SSHA was able to focus its overall goal on creating a realistic, flexible and evergreen document that addresses the needs of the Agency and its staff, as well as its clientele (thousands of health care providers) – from the inside out.

The SSHA pandemic planning team will continue to build and update its plan as new information becomes available and as the business system requires. The planning team is also looking at opportunities to develop an IMS structure for the Agency to implement during any significant health emergency that affects its products and services.

Stay tuned for updates on the Agency’s work in future issues of the *Pandemic Planner*. For more information on SSHA visit: www.ssha.on.ca .

Useful Online Resources

University of Illinois at Chicago School of Public Health’s virtual game that simulates various roles in a mass immunization clinic:
<http://www.thepodgame.com/> .

CDC Guidelines for Large-Scale Influenza Vaccination Clinic Planning:
http://www.cdc.gov/flu/professionals/vaccination/vax_clinic.htm .

The Council of Canadian Academies released a study entitled "Influenza Transmission and the Role of Personal Protective Respiratory Equipment: An Assessment of the Evidence":
<http://www.scienceadvice.ca/influenza.html> .