



The Pandemic Planner

A Monthly Newsletter for Health Care Professionals

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

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Recent issues of the *Pandemic Planner* focused on the importance of testing our plans and their interoperability, as well as exercising our roles and responsibilities in advance of a health emergency. By testing our plans, we are not only able to evaluate effectiveness, and identify successes and areas for improvement, but we are also able to provide education and training opportunities to health professionals including front line staff. Education and training are important to supporting the skills and core competencies of health professionals not only in preparation for a health emergency such as an influenza pandemic, but also to support and encourage every day best practices for patient and health worker safety.

In April 2007, we dedicated the *Pandemic Planner* to featuring a number of educational and training resources available including infection prevention and control programs. This issue of the *Pandemic Planner* provides updates on the resources featured in that issue and also highlights new initiatives and training programs taking place at the local level. In addition, this issue features an update on the provincial stockpile of personal protective equipment.

We hope you find this issue of the *Pandemic Planner* informative and that it encourages your organization to continue to support influenza pandemic planning and education and training opportunities.

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

What's New?

Personal and Family Care – for health professionals

Through the latest scientific modelling we know the potential collective impact an influenza pandemic will have on the health system, surge capacity, human resources and as a result - our personal health. As professionals working in the health sector, the importance of preparedness transcends beyond organizational planning, readiness and patient care and safety to include you – the health care provider!

Whether you are staff or a clinician, your health and that of your family is important. That is why the Training Working Group of the Ontario Health Plan for an Influenza Pandemic Steering Committee was asked to develop an interactive curriculum module for health professionals across all settings.

In April 2007, the *Pandemic Planner* featured the mandate of this initiative and since that time much has been accomplished in developing this training and educational resource called Personal and Family Care.

Curriculum development was led by the Emergency Management Unit with input from the Training Working Group. Development also involved the review of available educational programming and other training modules under development including the Provincial Pandemic Planning Portal Project (P5) and the Infection Prevention and Control Core Competency Education program. This was done to ensure curriculum is complementary to existing resources and to prevent duplication of work, effort and purpose.

Through reviewing existing training programs, the working group discovered that a key area to be addressed was personal and family care – a prerequisite for all health workers in any health emergency.

The Personal and Family Care training program is near completion and is specifically designed to provide you – the health worker – with information and tools to help you look after yourself and the people you care about during an influenza pandemic. Some of the topics include: infection prevention and control and personal hygiene, vaccines and antivirals, strategies to help you and your family prepare, and where to get more information.

The Personal and Family Care training program is an interactive online educational resource. In addition to online access, the working group will look at ways to modify the program to support more traditional ways of teaching and learning, such as in the classroom and face-to-face.

The program will be piloted in the coming weeks and the province-wide launch is anticipated for spring 2008. Once launched, the curriculum will be hosted on the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care's (the ministry) web site. Personal and family preparedness is important for everyone, and especially for health workers who will be leading the response to an influenza pandemic.

Watch the ministry's web site (www.health.gov.on.ca) and stay tuned to future issues of the *Pandemic Planner* for updates on this important preparedness program designed for you!

Just Clean Your Hands – a provincial hand hygiene improvement program for hospitals

Did you know that Ontario is at the leading edge of a worldwide initiative to improve patient and health provider safety by improving hand hygiene?

Some of our subscribers may recall that the April 2007 issue of the *Pandemic Planner* profiled the work of the ministry in developing a hand hygiene initiative for acute care settings. Since this profile appeared a lot of work has been done to complete the *Just Clean Your Hands* program.

This initiative is the first of its kind in Canada and represents a comprehensive, multifaceted approach to support hand hygiene in hospitals. It is specifically designed not only to teach proper techniques, but by implementing the program hospitals can better protect patients and health workers, reduce the spread of infection, the cost of treating infections, the length of hospital stays, readmissions and wait times.

Just Clean Your Hands is an evidence-based approach that builds on the work done by the World Health Organization and the United Kingdom (a world leader in hand hygiene initiatives). Provincial train-the-trainer sessions will be offered shortly and hospitals will be invited to send up to three representatives to receive training on program components.

We all know hand hygiene is the single most effective way to reduce the spread of infections. It takes a combination of leadership, education, environmental changes, the right hand-cleaning products at the point of care, a skin care program, visual reminders and measurement to overcome barriers to proper hand hygiene. *Just Clean Your Hands* will support hospitals with the tools and resources needed to foster and maintain a “clean hands” culture.

Just Clean Your Hands will be available to hospitals in the near future. Please watch the ministry’s web site at: www.justcleanyourhands.ca for updates and details on this important program.

Infection Prevention and Control Core Competency Education – an update

April 2007 marked the launch of the first three modules of the Infection Prevention and Control Core Competency Education (IPCCCE) program for acute care professionals. These modules include education and training on chain of transmission, hand hygiene and routine practices (including environmental issues).

The IPCCCE program was developed to establish a standardized approach to infection prevention and control activities for the various sectors of the health care system - based on science and best practices. The ministry facilitated the development of the IPCCCE program by involving stakeholders and experts to ensure the modules would be practical and applicable to the specific health care sector. The program’s design supports training and core competencies and since the first three modules were released, significant and positive feedback has been received from across the province and as far away as Australia.

The development teams have worked hard to ensure that the modules are practical and applicable to this targeted community and that they meet the latest information in science. The modules are being adapted for use in non-acute care and public health settings.

Train-the-trainer sessions were also part of the first phase launch and were provided by Ontario’s Regional Infection Control Networks (RICNs) and local chapters of the Community and Hospital Infection Control Association of Canada (CHICA). Additional train-the-trainer sessions are available and can

be arranged by contacting your local RICN or emailing: icanmakeadifference.moh@ontario.ca.

In the coming weeks an electronic questionnaire will be issued to current users in the acute care sector. The feedback received will be used to inform the development of new modules including: additional precautions, microbiology and asepsis, surveillance, healthy workplace policy (including immunization), and the role of infection prevention & control and communication.

Stay tuned to the *Pandemic Planner* for future updates on this important educational resource!

Provincial Stockpile of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) – an update

The ministry continues to build its provincial stockpile of PPE consisting of N95 respirators, surgical masks, isolation gowns, impervious gowns, examination gloves (vinyl and nitrile), eye protection, hand rinse, surface cleaner, surface disinfectant wipes, adhesive strip bandages, skin disinfectant wipes, absorbent balls, disposable containers and sharps containers.

The purchase of needles and syringes (safety-engineered and conventional) is being planned through arrangements with the federal government.

The N95 respirator survey of the health sector that concluded in September 2007 yielded a purchase profile that accounts for 93% of all N95 respirators currently in use by the field, and manufactured by two companies; 3M Canada and Aearo Technologies Inc. Survey results also demonstrated that about 20% of health workers are fit tested to a small size respirator.

Negotiations with 3M Canada resulted in the commitment to purchase and deliver a significant number of N95 respirators by March 31, 2008. Specific 3M models included in this purchase are 8110S, 8210, 1860S, 1860, 1870, 9210 and 9010.

The ministry was not able to proceed with the purchase of the AO Safety “Pleats Plus” 1050 and 1050S models this fiscal year as these models are no longer available and are being replaced by new models which will require fit-testing. Although the ministry could not proceed with Aearo Technologies Inc. in 2007/2008, our purchase profile included these two models.

The ministry’s procurement strategy in future years will reflect changes in the marketplace that may occur through advances in technology and product innovation. New products that are adopted by the field will be purchased in future years.

Broader Public Service (BPS) health care providers will be able to access vendor agreements (and price points) once ministry requirements have been met. A process is under development to facilitate BPS access to these agreements, and the ministry will work through provider associations to help make this happen. We anticipate that will happen in the first quarter of 2008-09.

You Asked....?

- The Ontario Health Plan for an Influenza Pandemic Public Overview brochure is available on the ministry web site at: www.health.gov.on.ca/pandemic (select “Publications” from the menu on the left. The brochure is posted under the “Fact Sheet” section towards the end of the web page).

- The 6th iteration of the Survey on Community Pandemic Planning has been issued. Surveys are to be completed and returned to the ministry by February 15, 2007.
- The Ontario Hospital Association (OHA) released its Pandemic Planning Toolkit for Small, Rural, and Northern Hospitals in November 2007. More information on the toolkit can be found at: <http://www.srnhs.com/>.

Local Profile

York Region Health Services – Core Competency Education and Training Program

During the height of the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) crisis in 2003, York Region Health Services' (YRHS) Public Health Department operated a SARS assessment clinic in partnership with a local hospital in order to provide rapid assessment and referral services in the community. All non-essential public health programs were suspended to allow for the re-deployment of health human resources to support YRHS's emergency response efforts including the operation of the assessment centre.

As a result, staff were placed in new, unfamiliar roles where they received on-site training to perform novel tasks, such as donning and doffing personal protective equipment and implementing infection prevention and control strategies. In addition, health professionals in the health unit—including those who had been out of clinical practice for some time—were provided with on-site refresher training to conduct physical assessments on clients presenting with symptoms.

During the recovery phase, YRHS extensively surveyed its workforce in order to identify lessons learned and best practices. Many staff identified the need for ongoing education and skill development related to emergency response.

According to Sandra Vessel, manager of health emergency planning at YRHS, "Our health unit's experience during SARS awakened us to the need for improved, advanced planning that emphasizes the education and preparation of our staff in order to increase their confidence and competence in responding to emergencies."

With those lessons in mind, YRHS developed a comprehensive education and training strategy to enhance specific core competencies in its workforce. There was an overwhelming level of support from the senior management team and health unit staff.

This combined energy and interest throughout the organization allowed for development and implementation of a comprehensive awareness training program aimed at ensuring public health unit staff can perform new roles effectively and competently during a health emergency. One key portion of the comprehensive strategy was the core competency training program described below.

The objectives of the program were grounded in the lessons learned from the SARS experience and the feedback and input from staff members was instrumental. Current literature, findings from national and provincial SARS reports, and input from academics and other professionals were also considered when designing the program.

The following provides a brief description of the five modules that comprise YRHS' emergency preparedness core competency program:

- 1. Emergency Planning** – After completing this module, staff will understand the structure of the YRHS emergency response plan, including roles and responsibilities under the Incident Management System.
- 2. Infection Prevention and Control (basic and advanced)** – This module provides staff with awareness and skills on implementing safe and effective infection prevention and control practices, including knowledge on the chain of infection, routine practices, and donning and doffing of personal protective equipment;
- 3. Critical Incident Stress Management/Self-Care** – The objective of this module is to provide staff with the ability to identify symptoms of stress and utilize effective coping strategies during an emergency response phase. It also outlines the types of supports that will be available through YRHS;
- 4. Risk Communications** – Upon completion of this module, staff will be able to communicate clearly and effectively during an emergency. They will also gain the skills to use risk communication tools with confidence in their daily work life; and
- 5. Clinical Skills (for health professionals)** – Although this module is still under development, clinical staff members who complete this training will be able to perform a nursing /medical assessment role at an assessment centre. This module will be delivered in partnership with Seneca College.

As for next steps, YRHS will implement these training modules on a continual basis in order to ensure that all staff – including new recruits to the health unit – have the opportunity to participate.

The program has received significant feedback and positive reviews from staff. "The most important marker of success is the comfort of YRHS staff to be able to respond effectively to an emergency," says Vessel. "My colleagues have reported that they feel a level of greater preparedness which gives me confidence that we are moving in the right direction."

For more information on the YRHS core competency education and training program, email Sandra Vessel at: sandra.vessel@york.ca.

Important Dates: February 2008

- **February 4** – The OHA is presenting a conference on Educating Staff and Engaging Patients in Patient Safety. For more information visit: www.oha.com.
- **February 14 & 15** – A provincial steering committee on the Incident Management System will be meeting on February 14 & 15 to review the submissions received through its consultation on a provincial module held in November and December 2007.

Future Issues

We welcome your feedback and ideas for future issues of the Pandemic Planner. Please send us an email at: emergencymanagement.moh@ontario.ca.

Useful Online Resources

The World Health Organization's global patient safety challenge *Clean Care is Safe Care* can be found at: <http://www.who.int/patientsafety/challenge/en/>.

The United Kingdom's clean hands campaign can be found at: <http://www.npsa.nhs.uk/cleanyourhands>.

The Journal of Public Health (January 20, 2008) features an article titled: *Preparedness of Residential and Nursing Homes for Pandemic Flu*. If you have a subscription to the journal, visit: <http://jpubhealth.oxfordjournals.org/>.