



The Pandemic Planner

A Monthly Newsletter for Health Professionals

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

April 2008

Emergency Preparedness Week (EP Week) is fast approaching and many health facilities and organizations, voluntary groups and governments across Canada are planning awareness events and activities to mark the occasion – including the Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care’s Emergency Management Unit (EMU). In last month’s issue of the *Pandemic Planner*, we highlighted the importance of recognizing EP Week within the health sector and informed our readership of the online *Emergency Preparedness Week Virtual Kit* designed to support your awareness efforts (www.health.gov.on.ca/emergency).

Some of you may ask what EP Week has to do with influenza pandemic planning? The answer is that it is an opportune time to feature, share and promote your organization’s influenza pandemic planning accomplishments. After all, our efforts in influenza pandemic planning help us to prepare for all types of emergencies that may impact and affect the health system.

In recognition of EP Week, this month’s issue of the *Pandemic Planner* features some of the accomplishments in pandemic planning to date. From government-wide pandemic plans and guides to strategies that support first responders, and from testing hospital pandemic plans to Six Nations’ pandemic exercises, we hope you find the April *Pandemic Planner* informative and that encourages your planning deliverables and EP week activities.

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

What’s New?

As health professionals we know that influenza pandemic planning is a priority for the health system at all levels. We also know that the health sector is not a separate or isolated entity - especially in times of emergencies. In fact, the work we do and the response actions we take are inextricably linked to other sectors.

In your health planning capacity, have you wondered who or what organization is responsible for leading and guiding coordinated influenza pandemic planning outside the immediate health sector? Or, who takes provincial leadership for guiding influenza pandemic planning in the area of public safety, such as first responders (fire, police and emergency medical services), coroner’s offices and correctional services? The answer is: Ontario’s Ministry of Community Safety and Correctional Services (MCSCS).

In the fall of 2006, MCSCS brought together a team of experts to form the Ministry Pandemic Working Group. This group included representation from key public safety sectors and provincial ministries (such as the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care), and its mandate was to develop MCSCS’s first-ever community safety and correctional services influenza pandemic plan.

This welcomed plan is now complete. It defines roles and responsibilities as well as provides planning tools and resources in seven key strategic areas:

- MCSCS (provincial coordination);
- Communications;
- First Responders;

- Natural Death Surge Planning Strategy;
- Legal Strategy; and,
- Ministry Business Continuity Strategy (internal to the Ministry).

The plan provides guidance to support and meet the needs of specific public safety sectors that will have a direct role in pandemic planning and response across the province. There are two strategies included in the plan which have an important relationship with Ontario’s health sector – chapter 6: First Responders Strategy and chapter 8: Natural Death Surge Planning Strategy.

Chapter 6, the first responder chapter, outlines considerations for infection prevention and control, personal protective equipment, vehicle cleaning protocols, and tiered response agreements as well as other planning tools and resources. The chapter also refers to the “First Responders’ Web Site”, hosted by the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care, as the single entry point for influenza pandemic preparedness for this public safety community service sector (visit: www.health.gov.on.ca/pandemic) .

Chapter 8 is a very welcomed chapter from many sectors including local government, community emergency management coordinators and the health sector. This chapter identifies the role of the Office of the Chief Coroner during an influenza pandemic and provides a variety of tools and resources for communities to use, as well as a natural death screening questionnaire and planning chart. It also provides guidance for communities in responding to natural death surge calls in the home.

It should also be noted that this plan is a stand-alone document that supports and aligns with the Ontario Health Plan for an Influenza Pandemic,

Emergency Management Ontario's Provincial Coordination Plan for an Influenza Pandemic, MCSCS's Emergency Response Plan and Business Continuity Plan.

The MCSCS's influenza pandemic plan will be released to stakeholders and communities in mid-May 2008. Additional information is available by contacting Barney Owens, MCSCS's Ministry Emergency Management & Security Coordinator at: barney.owens@ontario.ca ; or by calling: 416-314-2393.

Congratulations to the MCSCS, its Pandemic Working Group and all the stakeholders who have worked together to develop this comprehensive influenza pandemic plan!

Government of Ontario - Pandemic planning and the public service

Ontario's Ministry of Government and Consumer Services (MGCS) has the responsibility for ensuring the provision of provincial government services in times of emergency – including an influenza pandemic.

As a large scale public organization with approximately 66,000 employees who serve over 11 million people everyday, business continuity plays an important role in the Ontario Public Service's corporate objectives and planning requirements. That's why in late 2005 a team of ministry professionals developed the Workplace Health Emergency Plan (WHEP) – a framework for pandemic planning within Ontario's public service.

The WHEP identified a number of key areas in health emergency planning, including influenza pandemic planning. A team of experts was pulled together to form the Pandemic Advisory Committee (PAC). The committee included representation from the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care (public health and emergency management); public safety, I&IT, public facilities, occupational health and safety and others. The PAC was given the mandate to provide recommendations on the strategic issues identified in the WHEP. Through the PAC's work and direction from the Deputies' Committee, the Pandemic Planning Guide for the Ontario Public Service (the Guide) was completed by MGCS and released in December 2007.

Much like private sector businesses and the health system, the OPS will experience high absenteeism rates during an influenza pandemic. An overarching goal of the guide is to support ministry planners and managers in planning for the many impacts of an influenza pandemic on the public service - in particular the effects of human resource shortages while trying to maintain a baseline of service delivery.

In addition to providing planners and managers with important planning tools, the guide is designed as a support to all government employees in preparing for an influenza pandemic. Key features of the guide include a range of government service issues that involve staff directly including:

- Workplace and worker reassignments
- Employee health and wellness
- Infection prevention and control
- Compensation issues
- Employee absenteeism and counseling

How will the OPS Pandemic Planning Guide be implemented in such a large organization? Well, it is through the business continuity planning/continuity of operations planning process (an OPS requirement for every ministry) that the guide's key elements, lessons, tools and requirements will be implemented. For example, the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care's EMU is the designated lead for continuity of operations planning at the ministry. The EMU will use the guide to help the various units, branches and divisions develop continuity of operations plans that incorporate influenza

pandemic planning. This will help us ensure that the ministry's business and emergency planning objectives meet corporate government requirements – as well as the public's expectations and need for services.

In the short time since its release, the OPS Pandemic Planning Guide has been made available to all ministries. It has also been shared with a number of jurisdictions and external stakeholders - earning it great reviews and positive feedback. The guide's accessibility, user friendliness, and plain language have been noted in particular.

To learn more about the OPS Pandemic Planning Guide, please send an email inquiry to: askEMSB@ontario.ca .

University Health Network – “The only thing worse than planning for an emergency...

...is not planning for one!” On April 11, 2008 the University Hospital Network (UHN) in Toronto put its emergency preparedness planning to the test in a hospital-wide influenza pandemic exercise. The exercise brought together over 80 participants for a tabletop mock-disaster, which included UHN leadership, care providers, and support staff.

The objectives of the exercise ranged from increasing an understanding of UHN's pandemic response plan, to the testing the practical application of decision-making regarding service reductions, distribution of personal protective equipment, and patient care decisions.

The exercise was also designed to test the set-up of UHN's Incident Management System (IMS). Given that the organization includes three distinct locations in Toronto (Toronto General, Toronto Western, and Princess Margaret hospitals), planning efforts have been exploring ways to coordinate a consistent, unified pandemic response across all locations. During exercise play, UHN central command and the site-specific command centres were given specific inputs to test and assess how well the locations could interact during the response to a multi-site incident.

Overall, the exercise demonstrated that UHN has a solid pandemic plan. The coordination of the response efforts across the organization went well, and staff members walked away with a better understanding of IMS and its application in UHN's multi-site environment.

The exercise was also useful in highlighting areas for further improvement, such as the need to develop enhanced psychosocial supports for front-line workers during a prolonged human health emergency, as well as improving the coordination of communications across all hospital sites.

"I think the most exciting thing I witnessed was that nobody seemed particularly surprised by the scenario," said Dr. Michael Gardam, Director of Infection Prevention and Control. "This demonstrates that UHN has been doing a good job planning and that staff members have been taking the time to understand their roles and responsibilities in responding to an influenza pandemic."

For more information on UHN's pandemic exercise, contact Leah Gitterman at 416-946-4501 x 3946.

You Asked....?

- EMU is interested in profiling your EP Week 2008 awareness activities in the May issue *Pandemic Planner!* Send us an email about your events. Be sure to include your contact information: emergencymanagement.moh@ontario.ca .

- Emergency Infection Control Kits (EICKs) are available for registered nurse practitioners in Ontario. To order a kit, please contact the Nurse Practitioners Association of Ontario (NPAO) at: 416-593-9779 or info@npao.org (please note that you do not have to be a member of the NPAO to be eligible for a kit).

Local Profiles

Perth County – A full-scale exercise

In 2006, the Perth (County) Emergency Planning for Health Care Group released its interagency influenza pandemic plan. By May 2007, this group formed the Perth County Pandemic Exercise Committee with a mandate to develop and implement a full-scale local exercise to test the interagency pandemic plan (complete with roles and responsibilities) including the incident management system (IMS) structure.

This exercise – called Operation Busboy – was funded through a successful application to the Joint Emergency Preparedness Program (JEPP), a federal/provincial cost-sharing funding initiative (visit Public Safety Canada’s web site at: www.publicsafety.gc.ca/prg/em/jepp/index-eng.aspx for more information) and took place over three days in January 2008. It involved over 85 participants representing several organizations including the health unit, local municipalities, fire, police, CCAC, and hospitals.

Operation Busboy’s scenario involved an unknown influenza A virus starting in Asia and quickly spreading to Toronto and Perth County at the same time.

The first day of the exercise focused on the Pandemic Emergency Control Group (PECG), which is the decision making body regarding Pandemic in Perth County. This group is chaired by the Medical Officer of Health.

The second day focused on the relationship between the PECG and seven local emergency control groups, and included the communications component.

The third day brought all of the players together into their IMS structure. This day tested the PECG’s ability to make decisions and delegate. It also tested people’s familiarity with their roles and responsibilities under the IMS structure.

The exercise highlighted a number of strengths as well as opportunities for enhancing the Perth County Influenza Pandemic Plan. Through the post-exercise debrief, 10 key recommendations for next steps in pandemic planning have been identified. These recommendations include:

- enhancing communication resources (personnel as well as laptops, blackberries, etc.)
- improving communications throughout the event
- revamping the IMS structure and Command, and
- developing business continuity plans (including volunteer recruitment) for organizations involved.

Congratulations to the Perth County Pandemic Exercise Committee on a successful exercise that will inform future planning efforts and objectives at the local level. For more information on this exercise or the County’s interagency plan, contact Donna Taylor at dtaylor@pdhu.on.ca.

Towards Local Pandemic Readiness: Six Nations’ Pandemic Exercise

The Six Nations of the Grand River Council has been hard at work planning for an influenza pandemic. In addition to developing a comprehensive pandemic response plan that outlines the roles and responsibilities of local

stakeholders, the Six Nations Emergency Management Planning Committee (the Committee) recently held a two-part pandemic exercise. Known as *Respiratory Tract Infection (RTI) Bug Exercise*, the exercise brought together over 70 stakeholders from a variety of agencies for two days in the summer of 2007. The goal of the exercise was to test specific components of the community’s influenza pandemic response plan.

The first day, held in July 2007, was a tabletop scenario. The focus was on testing command and control measures through the community’s Emergency Operations Centre (EOC), as well as communication procedures between the EOC and community departments, including the Six Nations Elected Band Council, administration, health, social services, fire, public works, and the police. The table-top exercise also included inputs designed to test the triggers for activating a flu centre - a key part of the community’s surge capacity strategy.

Day 2 was held in August 2007 and was a functional exercise - or “dress rehearsal” – for setting up the community-based flu centre at the local on-reserve elementary school, with student volunteers on hand to act as patients.

In addition to testing the logistics of flu centre set-up, the Committee also designed the exercise to test patient flow procedures and various occupational health and safety considerations including the school’s ventilation system and the use of personal protective equipment.

RTI Bug provided an excellent opportunity to train the Six Nations Emergency Control Group, assigned flu centre site staff, and other community partners on their respective roles and responsibilities in responding to an influenza pandemic affecting the Six Nations of Grand River.

“By providing participants with an opportunity to exercise the community’s response to an influenza pandemic, we were able to improve the overall operational readiness of the Six Nations’ emergency management system,” said Barbara Miller, the Community Emergency Management Officer and member of the exercise design team.

The Committee completed a comprehensive lessons learned report on the outcomes of both parts of the *RTI Bug*, available on the Six Nations of the Grand River Council website at www.sixnations.ca/snemergencyplan.htm. For more information, visit the web site or contact Barbara Miller, Community Emergency Management Officer, at bmiller@sixnations.ca.

Important Dates: May - June 2008

May 4 – May 10: Emergency Preparedness Week. Check out the EP Week Virtual Kit at: www.health.gov.on.ca/emergency for resources, information and awareness ideas!

June 7 – June 11: Canadian Association of Emergency Physicians 2008 Conference will be held in Ottawa. For more information, please visit: <http://www.caep.ca/>.

Useful Online Resource

http://www.astho.org/pubs/ARPP_Guidance_041508.pdf
The Association of State and Territorial Health Officials (ASTHO) has released *At-Risk Populations and Pandemic Influenza: Planning Guidance for State, Territorial, Tribal, and Local Health Departments* for public comment. <http://www.cidrap.umn.edu/cidrap/center/about/index.html>
The Centre for Infectious Disease Research & Policy (CIDRAP) Pandemic Influenza section features selected pandemic planning related research articles. Check out the latest article posted: *Panalysis: A New Spreadsheet – Based Tool for Pandemic Planning* (click on the web address above, select “Pandemic Flu” from the menu on the left, and then “Selected Reading”).