

The Incident Management System Providing Efficient Emergency Management

Ontario is working very closely with the Public Health Agency of Canada and all provinces and territories to monitor cases of swine flu and severe respiratory illness in light of the urgent public health situations in Mexico and the United States.

On April 23, 2009 the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care (MOHLTC) elevated the province's emergency response level from "Routine" to "Enhanced Monitoring" to reflect the ministry's higher level of external surveillance and communications with health system stakeholders across the province.

Incident Management System is activated

Recognizing the potential serious impact on the province, MOHLTC has partially activated its Emergency Operations Centre (MEOC). It has also centralized all related activity under the Incident Management System (IMS) structure.

Reporting to the Chief Medical Officer of Health, the MEOC is headed by the director of the MOHLTC's Emergency Management Unit. Functions within the MEOC include:

Operations

- Public health: Conducting surveillance for severe respiratory illness and swine flu, liaising with local public health units
- Pre-hospital: Liaising with Emergency Medical Services, Central Ambulance Communication Centres
- Other Health Care: Liaising with hospitals, long-term care homes, community care facilities, primary care providers

Planning

- Scientific and technical advice on next steps (research, risk assessment, precautions and procedures)
- Development of Incident Action Plans and status reports
- Collection and management of incident data

Communications and Information

- Public communication
- Media relations

Liaison

- Formal communication with the Public Health Agency of Canada, provincial ministries and other organizations, as required

Finance and Administration

- Documentation tracking and retention

Logistics

- Management of teleconferences among key partners and players
- Staff and shift rotations scheduling

Key Facts on the IMS:

The Incident Management System is the organizational structure through which the MOHLTC directs emergency response operations from the Ministry Emergency Operations Centre.

IMS is an international emergency management structure that has been adopted by the Government of Ontario as its operational framework for emergency management. The system originated in the United States in the firefighting community. It quickly expanded to other first responders and eventually went nation-wide following the events of September 11, 2001.

IMS provides the basic command structure and functions required to manage an emergency situation effectively. This simple structure allows organizations to standardize coordination information across groups, making communication and cooperation easier, and the process of managing an emergency more efficient. In Ontario, numerous organizations, both provincially and locally (e.g. acute care hospitals), have adopted this model for use during emergencies.