The Pandemic Planner

A Monthly Newsletter for Health Care Professionals

Emergency Management Unit, Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care November 2006

Health human resources and decision-making protocols are critical to minimizing the impact of any mass casualty emergency – including an influenza pandemic. They are also important for safeguarding our health care system and health care workers. We know this from our experience with Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) in 2003, and from the emerging accounts of the lessons learned from emergency events such as Hurricane Katrina in 2005. November's issue of the Pandemic Planner will highlight the tools available to assist planners in developing effective influenza pandemic response plans that include health human resources and infection and prevention controls during an influenza pandemic. This edition will also feature planning activities that venture beyond the hospital and health care system and in to the funeral and farming industries. We hope you will find this edition of interest and that it helps inform future discussions at your planning tables!

~ Allison J. Stuart, Director, Emergency Management Unit

What's New?

Funeral Services Sector

Earlier this month, Ontario's Board of Funeral Services and the Funeral Service Association of Canada released an influenza pandemic guide, titled: ***The Funeral Service Guide to Pandemic Planning.*** This guide is designed to assist and support the funeral services industry with its pandemic planning activities and business requirements.

A common theme in this guide is "the best protection is knowing what to do" and it focuses on key planning areas including managing a sudden and rapid increase in mortality rates and the impacts on human resources, capacity and services; overall business continuity requirements and strategies; keeping staff healthy and safe and communicating with families.

This guide will be updated as new information becomes available. It is posted on the Board of Funeral Services web site and can be downloaded in PDF format at: http://www.funeralboard.com/public/public.asp?WCE=C=11|K=223422|RefreshT=223422|RefreshS=Container|RefreshD=|A=Body

Avian Influenza and Personal Protective Equipment

We all know that avian influenza and influenza pandemic are not synonymous, but given the potential for cross-over, we are providing the following update.

In October, the Emergency Management Unit released the ***Operational Plan During an Outbreak of Avian Influenza in the Domestic Poultry Population: Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care: Actions and Responsibilities..*** This plan is now accompanied by ***Avian Influenza: A Guide to Personal Protective Clothing and Equipment for Workers and Employers Working With or Around Poultry or Wild Birds***.

This new plan focuses on personal protective clothing, and was developed by representatives from the federal government and from key provincial ministries, including the Ministry of Labour and Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care.

This guide will further assist local health units in appropriate response activities, as well as help further guide and support outbreak control measures when and if there is an outbreak of avian influenza. Both plans can be found on the ministry's web site at: www.health.gov.on.ca/avian.

You Asked….?

Health Human Resources:

At the peak of an influenza pandemic, the modelers tell us that up to 20 to 25% of health care workers may be absent from work because they are ill, they are caring for a family member who is ill or are fearful of the work setting. We know that staffing will be a significant challenge even with the strategies outlined here.

To optimize the availability of staffing resources and to ensure patient-centred care during a pandemic, health care emergency planners are using a competency-based approach to identify "workers" who can meet the wide variety of needs. The following competency areas are key in structuring a comprehensive care response to influenza patients:

- administrative support;
- transportation;
- education;
- infection control; and
- care services, including care of the "well" (those who do not require hospitalization and/or on-going medical attention) and care of the "ill" (those requiring hospitalization and/or on-going treatment).

Ontario

This type of planning goes beyond traditional approaches to health human resource deployment, which typically focus on job/position specifications and/or professions. Using a competency-based approach helps to ensure that the health care system is optimizing resources in a time when there will be higher absenteeism, coupled with a sharp increase in demands for service.

The five key competency areas are expanded in more detail in the 2006 Ontario Health Plan for an Influenza Pandemic (OHPIP). Planners will also find additional tools and questions to consider that will help them apply a competency-based approach to preparing for health human resources (HHR) deployment in an influenza pandemic situation.

For more information please refer to chapters 8 & 8A of OHPIP at: www.health.gov.on.ca/pandemic. And remember – if your facility requires additional materials, background papers or guides to help develop a HHR strategy using competency-based approaches, please contact the Emergency Management Unit at: emergencymanagement@moh.gov.on.ca. We would be happy to send these documents to you.

Hierarchy of Infection Prevention and Control Measures:

There has been renewed discussion about infection control in the health care system. This is occurring throughout the world – and in Ontario. Health care providers are inquiring about the importance of the Hierarchy of Infection Prevention and Control Measures, and what role it can play in effective emergency planning and infection control - including influenza pandemic.

The term Hierarchy of Infection Prevention and Control Measures was developed during the resurgence of tuberculosis in the early 1990's, and is being applied to influenza pandemic planning based on the lessons learned from SARS.

What is key and important for planners to keep in mind is that the hierarchy provides a framework not only for infection control procedures, but for other intervention measures and decision making based on the type of patient, the provider and the environment.

The hierarchy consists of:

1. Engineering Controls:
Engineering controls are at the highest level in the hierarchy primarily because they do not rely on the provider's direct performance but rather physically isolate the hazard from the worker. This includes single and negative pressure rooms, as well as ventilation systems in a facility.

2. Administrative and Work Practice Controls:
These involve prescribing and directing operating procedures and policies to reduce and minimize the intensity or duration of exposure to healthcare workers. It includes workplace policies to encourage workers to stay home when they are ill; screening procedures; restricting contact with sick patients, and disinfection of equipment and surfaces. It also involves worker immunization; transmission-based routine and enhanced isolation precautions; higher levels of protection and other controls for high risk activities; and worker education and training.

3. Personal Protective Equipment (PPE):
The use of PPE can be variable and is largely dependent on fit testing, provider education and practice. While proper use of appropriate PPE is an important component of infection control it cannot be the only "line of defense." PPE must be part of the framework and used in conjunction with the two other components of the Hierarchy of Controls.
For more information on Hierarchy of Controls and how it can support effective influenza pandemic planning activities within your health care facilities or sector, visit chapters 7 & 7A of the 2006 OHPIP at: www.health.gov.on.ca/pandemic. These chapters will assist you and your planning efforts.

Local Profile

Planning continues in communities across Ontario – including in Peterborough where the Interagency Pandemic Influenza Planning Team held a successful public information session on October 17, 2006. Approximately 200 people attended the session and heard presentations on: what is an influenza pandemic, how to protect yourself from influenza, and the influenza pandemic planning activities being undertaken by the city, county, health unit and community.

The Interagency Pandemic Influenza Planning Team has also held information session on influenza pandemic for health care workers and first responders; as well as workshops on pandemic planning and business continuity for key stakeholders in the County and City of Peterborough. For more information, or for a copy of the Peterborough County-City Health Unit Pandemic Influenza Plan, please visit: www.pcchu.ca/.

Important Dates: December 2006

November 30, 2006 – "Lessons Learned from the Storm" web cast. For more information, please visit: www.adph.org/alphtn/509flyer.pdf

December 4, 2006 – "Vulnerable Populations and Emergency Management" web cast. For more information, please visit: www.adph.org/alphtn/510flyer.pdf

December 5, 2006 - the City of Greater Sudbury and the Sudbury District Health Unit are holding a large scale influenza pandemic exercise.

December 8, 2006 - the County of Simcoe and the District of Muskoka are holding a large scale influenza pandemic exercise.

December 12, 2006 - The Health Care Network of Southeastern Ontario, Incident Management Committee presents: the ***Second Annual Southeastern Ontario Emergency Preparedness Symposium.*** For more information, or to register, please visit the web site at: http://seohealthnet.com/.

December 14, 2006 – Emergency Management Ontario - York University Learning Series Session II - *Evaluation of Disaster Impacts and Multi-criteria Decision-Making*.

Useful Resources On-Line

http://www.euro.who.int/Document/e89231.pdf : The World Health Organization released "***A practical tool for the preparation of a hospital crisis preparedness plan, with special focus on pandemic influenza***." This document aims to offer a practical tool for planning appropriate measures to be adopted by a hospital/health facility in order to be better prepared to face a critical situation.

http://www.cmaj.ca/cgi/reprint/175/11/1377: The November 21 2006 edition of the CMAJ (Volume 175, Issue 11), includes the research article ***Development of a triage protocol for critical care during an influenza pandemic***. The article outlines the research, methods and development of 2006 OHPIP triage protocol (chapter 17 and 17A). This issue of CMAJ also includes the article ***Laboratory diagnosis of human infection with avian influenza***, found at: http://www.cmaj.ca/cgi/reprint/175/11/1371 .

www.ontario.ca/birdflu: The provincial government has created a new home for avian influenza information.