



The Pandemic Planner

A Monthly Newsletter for Health Care Professionals

~Anniversary Issue~

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

August 2007

Welcome to the first anniversary issue of the *Pandemic Planner*! We are pleased with how well the *Pandemic Planner* has been received by the health sector, and the distribution list continues to grow with new subscription requests regularly submitted from across the country. We also appreciate your ongoing positive feedback and receiving your input and ideas for upcoming issues.

In recognition of the one-year anniversary, this month's issue will highlight stockpiling and the recommendations regarding personal protective equipment (PPE) and other critical supplies. We will return to the *Pandemic Planner*'s regular format in September. Until then, enjoy the remaining days of summer and the anniversary issue!

~ Allison J. Stuart, Director, Emergency Management Unit

Personal Protective Equipment: N95 Respirators

Those of us in the health care sector who are also involved in pandemic planning are very aware of the ongoing debate amongst experts regarding the appropriate respiratory protection for health workers during an influenza pandemic: surgical masks versus N95 respirators. The debate has created some challenges for health sector employers in balancing these differing views in planning and procurement strategies.

The current scientific literature supports that influenza viruses can be spread by droplet, air borne transmission or contact. However the relative role of airborne transmission requires further research and consensus. In the absence of clarity, the 2007 Ontario Health Plan for an Influenza Pandemic (OHPIP) recommends the use (and stockpiling) of N95 respirators for health workers working within one metre of patients with influenza during a pandemic (this distance is currently under review).

This recommendation has been reiterated by the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care, George Smitherman. In a recent announcement (August 23, 2007), the Minister reaffirmed the government's commitment and announced the purchase up to 55 million N95 respirators - enough to provide all front-line health workers with facial protection for four-weeks.

Combined with local stockpiles, the provincial supply will ensure that there are enough N95 respirators to last the entire first wave of an influenza pandemic (estimated to be eight weeks).

For more information on Minister Smitherman's recent announcement, visit: www.health.gov.on.ca.

Employers and Health Care Facilities

In the first two weeks of its release, the 2007 OHPIP, as well as its chapters and tools, were accessed online a total of 12,237 times. It is not surprising that of all the chapters and tools within the plan, Chapter 7: *Occupational Health and Safety Measures and Infection Prevention and Control in Health Care Setting*, was the number one chapter viewed during this two week period (accessed online over 830 times).

Since 2005, the OHPIP has recommended all health facilities/employers stock a four-week supply of PPE. As many now know, chapters 7 & 10 in

this year's OHPIP reinforce this recommendation. Health facilities and employers are encouraged to complete a four-week stockpile of PPE and other critical supplies. In addition, the chapters recommend that individual health facilities ensure there is a respiratory protection program; that staff are fit tested (for N95 respirators) and training is provided (donning, doffing and use of PPE); and that their PPE stockpile is stored in a safe and readily accessible place.

In the event that health facilities exhaust individual stockpiles during an influenza pandemic, the provincial stockpile will be made available until regular supply chains are restored. Currently, the ministry is working on an emergency distribution plan capable of making supplies accessible to local health providers.

For more information on stockpiling, visit the 2007 OHPIP at: www.health.gov.on.ca/pandemic.

The Provincial Stockpile

We know that during an influenza pandemic, demands on the health system will be high, as will the need for appropriate supplies and equipment for health workers. To help the health system respond, and to ensure adequate supply of PPE and other critical supplies and equipment, the government has committed to creating a provincial stockpile that would be available for use by local health systems.

In 2006, the provincial procurement strategy was implemented. Since this time, the ministry has successfully begun to stock a variety of supplies and equipment, including Tamiflu and Zanamivir (enough to treat approximate 25% of Ontario population, based on the 2001 census), gloves, gowns, masks, respirators and more.

Putting this volume of supplies in place is a significant logistical challenge, but the ministry continues to move forward. To date, there are more than 350,000 cases or 7,400 pallets of supplies. Each pallet is five feet tall. Stacked on top of each other, this is higher than 37,000 feet - the equivalent of more than 20 CN towers! The ministry will continue to build its stockpile until there is enough supplies and equipment to last four weeks. Stay tuned for updates on the provincial stockpile in future issues of the *Pandemic Planner*.