



The Pandemic Planner

A Monthly Newsletter for Health Care Professionals

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

February 2008

You may have noticed the last few issues of the *Pandemic Planner* grew in size and covered a lot of ground by featuring so many different activities and initiatives that support pandemic planning and readiness at the local level. This is because of you – our readership – and the feedback, input and story ideas you have submitted. The *Pandemic Planner* is a newsletter for all health professionals, institutions, facilities, and organizations. With a monthly readership of more than 2,300 across Ontario and Canada (that we distribute to), your input and story ideas make this newsletter a success and continue to help inform pandemic planning discussions, decisions, best practices and actions in communities and regions across the province and the country.

In true *Pandemic Planner* form, this issue includes a collection of profiles that feature the latest in pandemic planning tools, activities and opportunities. It also highlights new occupational health and safety regulations for Ontario's health care facilities. We hope you enjoy this issue and that it informs your influenza pandemic planning discussions, initiatives and plans. And as always - please keep your feedback and story ideas coming!

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

What's New?

Pandemic Planning and Small, Rural and Northern Hospitals

You may recall that last month's issue of the *Pandemic Planner* informed our readers of the release of the Ontario Hospital Association's (OHA) Pandemic Planning Toolkit for Small, Rural and Northern Hospitals. While this toolkit was launched in November of last year, it continues to receive local media coverage, as well as positive support and feedback from hospitals across the province.

Why all the interest and positive feedback? Quite simply because the toolkit is specifically tailored to help small, rural and northern hospitals address their uniqueness and the challenges that may be faced because of their geographical location, inclement weather, remoteness, and low density populations.

The toolkit was developed through input from an OHA working group that included representation from small, rural and northern hospitals and the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care. This toolkit dovetails with the Ontario Health Plan for an Influenza Pandemic (OHPiP) and provides strategies, checklists and templates to help small, rural and northern hospitals develop practical pandemic plans. It is also designed to encourage and support community-based and integrated approaches to pandemic planning, readiness and response.

Some of the key chapters and best practices the toolkit includes are:

- Community pandemic planning and response - outlining what pandemic planning could look like at the community level;
- "Seven Steps" to developing a hospital pandemic plan;

- Detail about what the various levels of government are doing to meet information needs, and about the tools that are offered to assist hospitals and other organizations in pandemic planning; and
- Guidelines and tools for developing service reduction, human resources, and equipment and supplies plans, as well as a communications strategy.

While this toolkit is designed to help small, rural and northern hospitals develop their pandemic plans, because of its practicality it is also being used by acute and community care hospitals in larger urban settings, as well as long-term care homes and other health facilities and organizations across the province.

The OHA has provided every hospital in Ontario with a copy of the toolkit and has made additional hard copies available by ordering online at: www.oha.com ; or by calling: 416-205-1350.

The success of the toolkit has also supported the OHA in its decision to develop an emergency planning toolkit for hospitals. This toolkit will feature guidelines and best practices on: risk assessment, priority setting and health human resources planning. In addition, because of the OHA's participation on the incident management system (IMS) provincial steering committee, the emergency planning toolkit will also include a chapter and guidelines on developing and implementing IMS in hospitals.

The emergency planning toolkit is currently in development. Stay tuned to future issues of the *Pandemic Planner* for updates on this important OHA initiative.

Ontario Ministry of Labour – New Influenza Pandemic Compliance Strategy

The Ministry of Labour (MOL) plays an important role in occupational health and safety in all economic sectors of Ontario, including health care. This ministry is represented on the OHPIP Steering Committee and has provided ongoing support, input, and advice on the provincial influenza pandemic plan.

At the January 2008 OHPIP Steering Committee meeting, the representative from the MOL provided an update on activities pertaining to pandemic planning in the workplace and occupational health and safety. This included the development of an influenza pandemic compliance strategy that came in to effect on February 1, 2008.

This innovative approach to protecting health workers from an emerging infectious disease is based on chapter 7 of the OHPIP. The MOL consulted with the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care and the Ontario Safety Association for Community & Healthcare in developing the technical content for the strategy.

Under this strategy, healthcare employers are required to comply with the Occupational Health and Safety Act and its regulations by putting written measures and procedures in place to protect workers from possible exposure to the influenza pandemic virus. These measures and procedures should be developed in consultation with the workplace's joint health and safety committee or health and safety representative. In addition, the strategy requires the incorporation of the hierarchy of controls based on risk and by influenza pandemic period and phase.

For more information on the Ontario MOL compliance strategy, please contact your local MOL office. A list of local MOL offices in Ontario can be found at www.labour.gov.on.ca.

Other sources for guidance on the development of measures and procedures to protect workers from influenza pandemic include chapter 7 of the OHPIP available at: www.health.gov.on.ca/pandemic; the Ontario Safety Association for Community & Healthcare at: www.osach.ca; and the Workers Health & Safety Centre at www.whsc.on.ca.

Note of Clarification

The January 2008 issue of the *Pandemic Planner* stated “[t]he 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.”

While the immediate large stockpile volume needed by the ministry may have been difficult to achieve during this fiscal year, please be advised that many health and safety distributors still have considerable stock of the “Pleats Plus” 1050 and 1050S product line.

In addition to there being stock of the “Pleats Plus” 1050 and 1050S, replacement of this N95 respirator is also available (“Pleats Plus” 1054 and 1054S). For more information on the “Pleats Plus” 1054 and 1054S, please speak with your distributor or visit:

<http://www.aearo.com/pdf/New%20and%20Improved%20Pleats%20Plus%20.pdf>

You Asked....?

- The Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care is starting to plan Emergency Preparedness week (EP week). This is an annual event that is celebrated across Ontario and the country, and this year it will run from May 4 – May 10. Stay tuned to next month's issue of the *Pandemic Planner* for more information. If your organization has EP week ideas, events or resources you would like to have promoted in the *Pandemic Planner*, please email: emergencymanagement.moh@ontario.ca.
- Ontario's Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care partnered with the Canadian Red Cross Society to develop Canada's first-ever prevention of disease transmission educational program for school-aged children called, “Bug Out! Get the Facts on Germs”. This program will be launched on March 3, 2008. Visit the Canadian Red Cross Society's web site at: www.redcross.ca/bugout; or on the ministry web site at: www.health.gov.on.ca/emergency.

Local Profiles

Assessment, Treatment and Referral Centre – Thunder Bay's success

Many interagency pandemic planning committees and groups across the province have started to develop a strategy for their community-based assessment, treatment and referral centres (flu centres). Some have even developed a business plan, as well as identified and selected sites to use in the event of an influenza pandemic.

As planners, we know the importance these centres will play in managing local surge capacity, supporting the appropriate allocation of health human resources, and providing a patient-centred approach to our collective response activities. The Pandemic Planning Advisory Committee of Thunder Bay – a multi-disciplinary group – has drafted a flu centre strategy that identifies possible site locations that are flexible, practical and accessible.

The work of the committee started in November 2006 and involved the local health unit; hospitals and local health facilities including the Regional Infection Control Network; first responders; the city; labour representatives; the university and college and others. By March 2007, the committee developed its terms of reference, engaged local physicians and prepared a first draft business plan that was circulated to the broader planning community for input and feedback.

Upon the release of the 2007 OHPIP, the committee was able to align its business plan in accordance to the assessment, treatment and referral centres objectives and planning assumptions provided in chapters 11 & 11A. In addition, the committee also identified three flu centre sites based on an inclusive, practical and flexible checklist it created.

One of the sites identified for use as an assessment, treatment and referral centre is a seniors' facility that is located close to the Thunder Bay Regional Health Sciences Centre (an acute care hospital). This facility has the following features:

- Fire-rated/approved centre;
- Accessible (designed for persons with disabilities);
- Located on a public transit route, and has ample parking;
- Each room has two entrances/exits (to manage patient and staff flow – one door designated for patients, one door for staff);

- Other on-site amenities, such as full kitchen area (including refrigeration for food and medications), laundry, showers, and accessible washrooms;
- Security system to help with patient and staff access, and receipt of antivirals and vaccines;
- Plenty of storage space; and
- Rooms are designed to support technological requirements (computers and telecommunications equipment such as phones, fax and radios etc.).

This location would be the primary flu centre site. During an influenza pandemic it will operate 24/7. Because of the size of the facility, there will be a secured patient stay area (beds and monitoring equipment) for individuals presenting with influenza-like-illness (ILI) who are not ill enough to be transported to hospital, but who may need 24-hour monitoring and/or do not have family support/care available at home.

There are two other sites identified by the Pandemic Planning Advisory Committee of Thunder Bay. These sites will operate for 18 hours a day and will be operationalized as needed and depending on the illness rates during the first and second wave of an influenza pandemic. The committee has approached the city for approval on the proposed assessment centre sites and it is anticipated that this request will go before city council in the coming weeks.

As for next steps, the committee will continue to develop its flu centre business plan and expects to present the next draft iteration in spring 2008. In addition, the committee will work towards developing a human resource plan that will support the staffing requirements of the flu centres and will look towards developing a strategy for required medical supplies and equipment.

For more information, contact Kay Cranston of the Thunder Bay Health Sciences Centre at: cranstok@tbh.net ; or Darlene Binette of the Thunder Bay District Health Unit at: darlene.binette@tbdhu.com . Watch for updates on these and other planning activities in future issues of the *Pandemic Planner*.

Huron County –Bringing Pandemic Planning to the Community

The Huron County Pandemic Planning Committee, led by the Huron County Health Unit, has been working hard to increase awareness of the importance of pandemic planning within the community it serves. The committee's work not only involves the local health system, but local employers, community groups and agencies.

During informal consultations, the community expressed interest in having access to influenza pandemic planning information in order to be better prepared - both at work and at home. According to Donna Parsons, a public health nurse at the Huron County Health Unit, "The health unit received feedback that the community wanted basic information on influenza pandemic, as well as training resources to help to support planning in the workplace."

To respond to this need, the health unit undertook the development of a series of training modules that can be used by any business or community organization to train their staff on pandemic preparedness. The modules developed are as follows:

What You Should Know About Pandemic Influenza:

This module provides an overview of the basics of pandemic influenza including a description of how influenza pandemic differs from the seasonal flu; information on how an influenza pandemic may impact

Huron County; and information on how individuals can protect themselves and their family during an influenza pandemic.

Hand Hygiene – Keep Germs Away Everyday:

This module provides participants with an introduction to preventing the spread of infection in a health care setting, other workplaces, community settings, and the home by teaching hand hygiene techniques.

Emergency Planning for You & Your Family:

This module provides participants with an introduction to personal and family emergency preparedness. It includes resources to conduct a self-assessment regarding emergency readiness, as well as information on how to assemble a personal / family emergency kit.

By training their members on the basics of influenza pandemic and emergency preparedness, community organizations and employers will be able to encourage their staff to plan and respond appropriately at home and in the workplace.

Each module is available in a "train the trainer" package, which includes an electronic presentation with speaker's notes. The presentations can be adapted for use in staff meetings, formal training sessions, or lunch and learn presentations. Each module is approximately 20-30 minutes in length and includes additional resources such as posters (e.g., hand hygiene), brochures, and a formal evaluation form.

The Huron County Health Unit launched these modules on its web site in the fall of 2007. Feedback and uptake by the community has been positive. "These resources have been a great tool to share the message of the importance of influenza pandemic planning," says Parsons. "Through these tools, the health unit has been able to further promote the message of personal preparedness, hand hygiene and the basics of pandemic preparedness to a much wider audience".

To access these modules, visit the Huron County Health Unit web site at www.huroncounty.ca/emergman/em_trainertools.php . For more information on the program, contact Donna Parsons at dparsons@huroncounty.ca .

Important Dates: March - April 2008

March 3 – Launch of "Bug Out! Get the Facts on Germ". Please visit: www.redcross.ca/bugout or www.health.gov.on.ca/emergency on March 3, 2008.

March 27 – The Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care's Public Health Division is hosting a workshop to further consider strategies for early treatment and assessment of patients presenting with ILI during an influenza pandemic.

April 7 - World Health Day (WHD) 2008. The day focuses on "protecting health from climate change" and puts health at the centre of the global dialogue about climate change. Visit: <http://www.who.int/world-health-day/en/index.html> .

Useful Online Resources

Centre for Infectious Diseases Research and Policy has recognized Ontario as a leader in influenza pandemic planning, visit: <http://www.pandemicpractices.org/practices> .

The United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction and the World Health Organization (WHO) launched Hospitals Safe from Disasters campaign. More information is available in the February 9 edition of the Lancet: www.thelancet.com .