

Emergency Preparedness Planner

A Newsletter for the Health Sector

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

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Emergency Preparedness: A chilling reminder!

This month has been frigid in Ontario, and particularly during the power outage experienced by many in Toronto on January 15-16th, we have all been reminded of the potential impact of extreme weather events on our everyday lives.

In last month's issue I suggested that our readership revisit their personal or family emergency preparedness kits and plans. We heard from many of you that those kits and plans came in handy during the cold snap in mid-January.

One success story comes from a former Public Health Division colleague and current partner from the Ontario Agency for Health Protection and Promotion, Phil Jackson. He contacted us to report on the usefulness of his own family emergency supply kit during the Toronto power outage: "I awoke in the dark and was stumbling around to locate my kids' emergency radio... but the batteries were dead. I found batteries... but they were the wrong size. I finally found a flashlight... but the batteries were also dead. By then desperation had set in... but no! I remembered my emergency supply backpack, wherein I found glow-sticks, allowing me to find candles and a working flashlight (with working batteries!) which allowed me to locate inside the wondrous backpack... a radio!" Thanks for sharing your best practice with us, Phil!

Extreme cold, winter power outages and other severe weather impacts can happen annually or even more frequently, and may involve challenges like caring for individuals with special needs, dressing appropriately when outdoors to avoid frostbite and paying close attention to food safety. In addition to a home preparedness kit, we recommend that you keep essential supplies like a blanket, first-aid kit and candles in your car.

Remember to connect with friends, family and neighbors near you to coordinate support plans. Check our website to access Extreme Weather Fact Sheets and personal preparedness resources: http://www.health.gov.on.ca/english/public/program/emu/emerg_prep/extreme_templ.html

Lastly, please continue to contact us with your health emergency management success stories, and any questions or suggestions you would like to share. Email the Emergency Management Unit at: emergencymanagement.moh@ontario.ca

All the best for a warm(er) and safe February!

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

Emergency Management at the Agency

On January 6, 2009 the Ontario Agency for Health Protection and Promotion (Agency) announced the appointment of Dr. Brian Schwartz as the Director of Emergency Management Support. Many of you will recognize Dr. Schwartz's name as the Emergency Management Unit's Scientific Advisor, among other assignments. Lucky for us, Dr. Schwartz will maintain his role here at EMU, facilitating a unique and exciting collaborative link between the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care and the Agency to support health emergency management in Ontario.

We recently sat down with Dr. Schwartz to discuss his new role, the partnership he is envisioning between the ministry and the Agency, and the projects he will be leading.

"Part of the Agency's mandate is to support the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care, public health units and health facilities in the province - at the request of the Chief Medical Officer of Health - by providing scientific and technical advice during a health emergency, or circumstances which have the potential to develop into a health emergency." The resources made available by the Agency may include outbreak-specific clinical tools, infection control and emergency management expertise and best practices, or epidemiological research.

Dr. Schwartz's first priority will be to invest the Agency itself with an incident management culture, including an in-depth knowledge of the Incident Management System, as well as developing the Agency's own business continuity plan.

"Our goal is to ensure that the incident management structure of the Agency will be consistent with, and complementary to, the structure used by the ministry's Public Health Division as well as the public health units."

In addition to overseeing emergency preparedness efforts, Dr. Schwartz will continue to be a key resource to EMU in the event of an emergency: "By maintaining my role as Medical Advisor to EMU, and doing it on behalf of the Agency, I hope to model and promote a close partnership between the organizations. This collaboration will result in a larger, coordinated and efficient health emergency response capacity in Ontario."

Another item on Dr. Schwartz' task list includes working with the Public Health Laboratories to conduct a business continuity needs analysis and develop an emergency response plan. Down the road, Dr. Schwartz will be recruiting staff to support him in taking on the many components of developing an emergency management program at the Agency. He has also agreed to keep the *Emergency Preparedness Planner* readership up to speed on his initiatives!

Our most sincere congratulations to Dr. Schwartz on his appointment, and best of luck in embarking on this exciting new path. To contact Dr. Schwartz, email: brian.schwartz@oahpp.ca or call 647-260-7181.



You Asked...?

What goals were identified by the Ontario Health Plan for an Influenza Pandemic (OHPIP) Steering Committee when they recently met to consider planning priorities for the 2009 iteration of the OHPIP?

The committee had discussions around advancing provincial guidance on a number of important fronts:

- Enhanced clinical care guidelines for primary care providers, including the development of decision support tools and self-assessment tools;
- Materials to support individuals providing care to family or friends who are ill with influenza in the home;
- Further work on system-wide issues regarding access to early assessment, treatment, and referral services;
- Testing health system readiness for crisis communications during a pandemic as per the 24-hour emergency information cycle; and,
- Augmenting guidance on public health measures for elementary/secondary schools, colleges/universities, and day nurseries.

Stay tuned for future updates in the *Emergency Preparedness Planner*.

Emergency Management and Critical Infrastructure

As many of you may remember, on August 14, 2003 a cascading electrical power failure resulted in a power outage throughout a large region of Ontario, along with many north-eastern American States.

The unprecedented power failure spanned 24,086 square kilometres and affected approximately 50 million people, creating an almost instantaneous ripple effect: landline and cellular companies experienced operational difficulties; water treatment plants and pumping stations lost power; the banking and finance industry experienced an immediate degradation of services; and, the loss of power to traffic lights, electronic highway signs, traffic monitoring stations and their equipment brought the traffic system to a standstill.

In this challenging scenario the health sector was not left unscathed. Emergency medical services saw their dispatch numbers increase significantly over the course of the blackout, hospitals experienced an influx of non-acute patients requiring support, and even those facilities equipped with generators struggled to provide many regular services due to limited quantities of fuel.

The 2003 blackout underscored the interdependency and interconnectedness between critical infrastructure (CI) sectors. It also reinforced the importance of including CI preparedness as a key component of emergency management programs – one which demands an integrated approach as well as coordination across the public and private sectors to ensure effective planning and management.

To address the need for coordinated action, Emergency Management Ontario led the development of the Ontario Critical Infrastructure Assurance Program (OCIAP). The OCIAP is a province-wide program that identifies and assesses Ontario's key facilities, systems and networks, examines their interdependencies, and provides a strategy to assure their continuance during various emergency scenarios. One of the nine CI sectors is health, and the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care is responsible for maintaining a sector working group.

The Critical Infrastructure Health Sector Working Group (HSWG) was established by the Emergency Management Unit in late 2007. The HSWG includes representatives from various health sector components such as (hospitals, medical laboratories and community health centres, to name a few) which contribute to sustaining public health, life and safety as well as economic viability in Ontario.

Did You Know...?

Canadian Program of Research on Ethics in a Pandemic

While developing preparedness and response plans, influenza pandemic planners are often faced with a wide range of challenging legal, social, and ethical issues. These include questions such as deciding how limited resources should be allocated; identifying the obligations of health care providers (HCPs) and the reciprocal obligations of the healthcare system to HCPs; and identifying how information should be communicated to the public.

Grounding these challenging preparedness and response issues in the values and belief systems of Canadians will help to inform important, and often difficult, policy decisions. A new online tool, the Canadian Program of Research on Ethics in a Pandemic (CanPREP) Collaboratory, is designed to support pandemic planners as they face these pressing ethical questions.

The CanPREP Collaboratory is led by the Joint Centre for Bioethics at the University of Toronto and funded by the Canadian Institutes of Health Research. It is an online community designed for anyone with an interest in pandemic planning from both governmental and nongovernmental sectors. Participation will provide users with access to a wide range of tools focused on building capacity around ethics in public health, opportunities to participate in online forums with a wide range of stakeholders, and a unique chance to share perspectives on ethical pandemic decision making frameworks.

To sign up or learn more about the CanPREP Collaboratory, visit www.canprep.ca

Since its establishment, the HSWG has taken a number of important steps toward CI assurance in the health sector, beginning with identifying and mapping critical infrastructure facilities and services. The HSWG is currently working to establish and improve the sector's CI resilience. Recognizing the importance of collaboration, the HSWG has also participated in a number of multi-sector interdependency exercises.

Factors such as aging critical infrastructure and unpredictable weather associated with climate change may lead to an increase in CI disruptions. As we've learned, disruption in one sector inevitably leads to disruptions in other CI sectors as well, making it an important growing area of focus for health emergency planners – we encourage you to keep critical infrastructure in mind as you update and develop your emergency management initiatives. For more information on critical infrastructure check out our "Useful Online Resources" section.

Cross-Border Collaboration: The Great Lakes Border Health Initiative

Many of us enjoy the ability to travel the world regularly, and have become accustomed to the need for passport checks and border controls. Unfortunately, the same is not true for infectious diseases, which know no boundaries! Diseases do not respect national borders, making effective international and global collaboration necessary and critical. Public health systems are increasingly creating official inter-jurisdictional mechanisms and partnerships for managing both routine and emergency situations.

With this in mind, the Great Lakes Border Health Initiative (GLBHI) was created. This initiative is a partnership between the province of Ontario and seven U.S. States: Indiana, Michigan, Minnesota, New York, Ohio and Pennsylvania and Wisconsin. The primary goal of GLBHI is to improve early warning infectious disease surveillance at our international borders. By collaborating in advance of an outbreak or event, neighbouring jurisdictions will be able to respond to an infectious disease outbreak or other public health event in the most efficient and effective manner.

Over the last five years, GLBHI has completed numerous cross border initiatives including:

- Establishing a first-of-its-kind cross border health surveillance exchange program;
- Developing Public Health Data Sharing Agreement to facilitate sharing of public health related information;
- Establishing a Communication Guideline to facilitate emergency communications between states/provinces; and,
- Compiling a Reportable Disease Directory which lists all diseases which are currently reportable in each of the participating GLBHI jurisdictions.

Fundamental to the success of GLBHI is the collaboration and participation from all levels of government – federal, state/provincial, local, and Tribes/First Nations. In Ontario, this initiative is lead by the Ministry of Health & Long-Term Care and supported by the Public Health Agency of Canada; Canadian Food Inspection Agency; Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs; Public Health Laboratories; as well as a number of public health units including Windsor-Essex County, Niagara Region, Algoma, Thunder Bay District and Lambton County.

GLBHI has provided an opportunity to strengthen relationships between local cross-border jurisdictions. In particular, Niagara Region Public Health and New York State Department of Health have joined forces to conduct several cross-border initiatives, including testing emergency response capabilities in a CBRN event. Since emergencies begin at the local level, these strong local cross-border relationships are invaluable. We plan to further explore the exciting cross-border work that is occurring in Niagara Region in an upcoming issue of the *Emergency Preparedness Planner* – stay tuned!

The work of GLBHI reminds us that partnerships and collaborations are key in strengthening the province's readiness, and vital to protecting the health of all Ontarians. For more information send an email to: emergencymanagement.moh@ontario.ca

Important Dates

CSA Emergency Preparedness and Response Standard Training

A two-day seminar on Canada's National Standard for emergency management will be held in Mississauga beginning February 9, 2009.

Useful Online Resources

Public Safety Canada is currently working on developing a national strategy for critical infrastructure. Check out their proposed strategy at: [p://www.publicsafety.gc.ca/prg/em/cip/strat-part1-eng.aspx](http://www.publicsafety.gc.ca/prg/em/cip/strat-part1-eng.aspx)

Public Health Agency of Canada maintains a website with common critical infrastructure Qs and As: <http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/influenza/faq-crit-eng.php>