

NEW

November 19, 2009

Directions

The arrival of the second wave of the H1N1 flu virus has once again launched the delivery of public health to the forefront, with many ministry employees balancing work on H1N1 with their everyday responsibilities.

Getting an integrated response across 36 health units is a huge challenge and requires a huge amount of liaison work," said Allison Stuart, acting Assistant Deputy Minister, Public Health. "From the medical experts to the procurement group to the communications branch, ministry employees are working together as a team to ensure a well-coordinated pandemic response to support local implementation."

Under the Health Protection and Promotion Act, Ontario's mandate for public health is to provide for the organization and delivery of public health programs and services, to prevent the spread of disease, and to promote and protect the health of the people of Ontario.

That's a tall order and the ministry is rising to the challenge.

...continued on page 2

Behind the scenes of MOHLTC's **PANDEMIC RESPONSE**



Leonard Chu photo

Public Health employees Hafeeza Bassirullah, left, and Maja Milosevic, right, work with Moaz Alam, Health System Information Management and Investment, to assess H1N1 flu centre coverage across the province at the Ministry Emergency Operations Centre (MEOC), part of the Emergency Management Branch. MEOC is the central command centre from which the ministry's response to health system emergencies, such as H1N1, is coordinated. It brings together a cross-functional team to assist in the response activities. The centre is currently staffed by employees from branches across Public Health, other areas of the ministry, as well as the Ministry of Health Promotion.

Ontario Government Pharmaceutical and Medical Supply Service in action

Follow the pictures on these pages as the H1N1 vaccine arrives from the manufacturer, at the ministry's Ontario Government Pharmaceutical and Medical Supply Service (OGPMSS) location, to when it gets shipped out to public health units across the province and Toronto physicians. The OGPMSS staff shown are part of the Supply Chain and Facilities Branch, Corporate and Direct Services.

Vaccine arrives from the manufacturer every week and is stored in the Ontario Government Pharmaceutical and Medical Supply Service (OGPMSS) biocooler between 2° – 8°C to maintain vaccine stability.



1
Shipment
arrives



Dave Pankaj

Staff photos

The shipment of vaccine is reviewed to ensure that the ministry received the expected supply from the manufacturer and that appropriate storage conditions were maintained during transport.

...continued from cover

Reliable medical information

Public Health's medical group which consists of four physicians is charged with making sure medical advice is appropriate for the ministry's internal policies. They are a resource to the Chief Medical Officer of Health and work directly with Public Health branches. In addition to managing their day-to-day portfolios which deal with various aspects of infectious disease and environmental health, the medical group is required to respond quickly, often within the hour, to requests for information.

The division's Protection and Prevention Branch's surveillance group also plays a critical role on the team. Sorting through data they receive daily from health units across the province, the surveillance group takes fact-based information and uses it to tell a story that informs the decision-making process so as to limit complications and deaths. Is the virus hitting more younger people than old? More

women than men? What symptoms are most frequently exhibited? Based on the information provided by the surveillance group, communications can be tailored to ensure the most effective messaging is delivered to the public.

"The timing of the H1N1 pandemic has provided an interesting challenge," said Dr. David Williams, Associate Chief Medical Officer of Health, Health Protection and Prevention. "In the middle of responding to the demands of such a critical time, we are also adjusting to a significant organizational shift." The detailed organizational design for the division, including new roles and responsibilities, was announced in May of this year. "Getting up to speed during a pandemic obviously produces considerably more stress than during quieter times," said Williams. "My concern is that the staff pace themselves through the coming winter to avoid burnout. We are constantly reminding each other that this is a marathon not a sprint."

Information clearinghouse

One word sums up the day of a busy employee in Public Health's Emergency Management Branch: teleconferences. At the Ministry Emergency Operations Centre (MEOC), which co-ordinates the province's response during a health crisis, teleconferences are held throughout the day with hospitals, long-term care homes, public health units, provincial labs, federal and provincial governments, and other ministries. The employees who staff MEOC funnel the latest information about the virus to hundreds of health care providers across the province. "MEOC is the communication and coordination hub for information on H1N1," said Phil Graham, acting Director, Emergency Management Branch. "It is critical that Ontario's health care providers are supported with the most recent information available." Providing just the right information to health care workers is vital during a pandemic. It's critical that the best practice, best science, and best advice from leaders in the field are distilled in a way that provides practical guidance to the health sector.

...continued on page 3

"I have the support of many capable and talented people throughout the ministry. Working with such a strong team has been invaluable to me." Dr. Arlene King, Ontario's Chief Medical Officer of Health

A vaccine distribution plan is developed every week. Customer service staff input into the database specific quantities of vaccine to be shipped to each public health unit, as well as Toronto physicians. This ensures that an appropriate portion of the weekly vaccine supply is available across the province. The staff also answer questions from physicians and nurses about the vaccine supply and expected deliveries.



Naseema Kasujee and Esther Ching

2 Customer service



Front row (left to right): Linda Loewenthal, Angela Murray, Melissa Redman, and Rosa Alampi.

Back row (left to right): Rick Gaukel, Rohini Basur, Mellisa Hsu, Hope Kelly, Lavinia Stroh, Esther Ching, and Krishnamacha Kesavan.

...continued from page 2

Clear communications

Communications is a big part of the ministry's H1N1 response to allay the public's concerns about the virus, said Kevin Finnerty, executive director of the Communications and Information Branch (CIB).

"Our role is to keep the public and health system stakeholders well informed by consistently providing clear and timely communications that they can have confidence in," Finnerty said.

Behind the scenes, CIB staff spend long hours each day, and often at night, collaborating with many partners, both within and outside the ministry, to gather, synthesize, and interpret rapidly changing information

and explain it in a way that Ontarians will easily understand. "Whether it is a press release for the media, the Chief Medical Officer of Health's speech that she delivers at a press conference, or a flu self-assessment tool on the public website, all of the communication materials are the outcome of a large cross-functional team working closely together to deliver Ontarians the information they need to protect themselves and prevent the virus from spreading," said Finnerty.

"Our communications branch is second to none," said Stuart. "The messaging, the presentation, the website are all of the highest caliber, which is not easily done when the science is constantly changing."

Complicated logistics

Corporate and Direct Services brings logistical support to the table. Consider what has to happen once the vaccine arrives in Ontario. Shipped to a central location in large quantities, the vaccine need to be repackaged into smaller bundles and then shipped to public health units across the province in quantities appropriate to the size of the community. The vaccine also needs to be accompanied by documents containing related scientific information so health units can assist their clients in making informed decisions. This effort involves procurement and logistics

...continued on page 4

3 Repackaging



The manufacturer supplies the vaccine to OGPMSS in boxes of 500 doses. Staff then repackage the vaccine into mini packs, each with 100 doses. These smaller quantities can then be accessed by many more health care providers in the community.

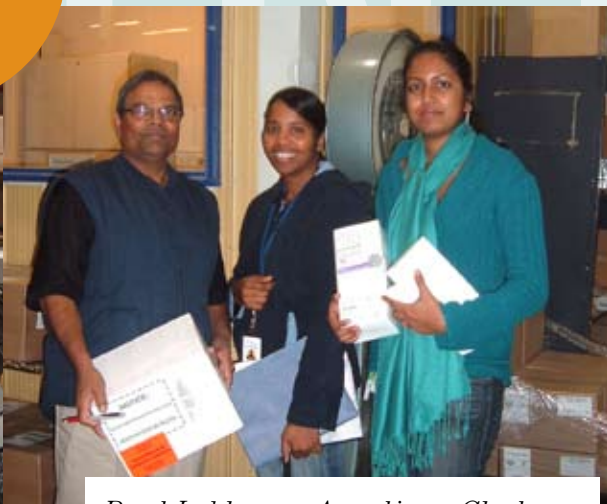
...continued from page 3

4 Warehouse

The quantity of vaccine for each shipment delivery is reviewed by staff. The vaccine is then packed in coolers to ensure that the supply remains secure and stable during transport.



Myling Meegan



Paul Lekhram, Angelique Chulan, and Thushyanthy Selvarajah



Carmino Cueto



Jo-Vic Moldelo, left, and Joe DeMarco

5 Delivery

The transport vehicles, which also maintain storage conditions of 2° – 8°C, are loaded with the vaccine shipments to be delivered to public health units across the province and, in Toronto, to doctors' offices, hospitals, community health centres, and long-term care homes.



Paul Suitters



Aubrey Arlette

staff, the provincial pharmacy, warehouse experts, transportation experts, and more, all working in tandem to ensure efficient and timely delivery of the vaccine to Ontarians.

Pulling it all together

Dr. Arlene King, introduced in June 2009 as the province's new Chief Medical Officer of Health, is on the go from morning until late at night, speaking with colleagues throughout the province as well as across Canada, assessing the situation, advising on new directions, and providing straight talk to the public. "I have the support of many capable and talented people throughout the ministry," said King. "Working with such a strong team has been invaluable to me."

One of the hallmarks of stewardship is the effective workings of cross-functional teams. "We're now in full implementation mode in our response to the H1N1 flu pandemic," said Stuart. "We're synchronizing our efforts throughout the ministry, across the provincial government, and with jurisdictions across Canada. Through our massive coordination efforts, we are helping protect the health of Ontarians." ■

6 Protection

To date, the ministry has distributed over 4 million doses of the H1N1 vaccine to the province's public health units. Visit ontario.ca/flu to find the nearest vaccination clinic, and for information on how to protect yourself against the flu and help prevent it from spreading.



Carleton Lettman and courier

