

Emergency Management 2012 Annual Report

Ministry of Health and Long-Term
Care

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Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care
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Emergency Management 2012 Annual Report

Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care

The [Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care](#) (MOHLTC) plays a critical role in the province's approach to emergency prevention, mitigation, preparedness, response and recovery. Under the [Emergency Management and Civil Protection Act](#) (EMCPA), the MOHLTC is assigned the following emergency lead responsibilities:

- ❖ human health, disease and epidemics; and
- ❖ health services during an emergency.

The [Emergency Management Branch](#) (EMB) coordinates many of the MOHLTC's emergency management activities. The branch resides in the Public Health Division (PHD) under the leadership of the [Chief Medical Officer of Health](#) (CMOH).

The Emergency Management Branch:

- ❖ serves the entire ministry and health sector as it responds to urgent and/or emergency situations;
- ❖ develops ministry emergency readiness plans, informs health sector planning and directs, as necessary, health sector emergency response and recovery;
- ❖ implements strategies to ensure continuity of critical ministry services during an emergency and ensures compliance with the Emergency Management and Civil Protection Act and other relevant legislation;
- ❖ promotes ongoing awareness of emergencies and emergency preparedness through training programs, exercises and public education;
- ❖ develops programs and initiatives that build emergency response capacity, and
- ❖ ensures that ministry emergency plans and procedures are coordinated with other local, provincial and national level plans.

This annual report outlines some of the MOHLTC's emergency management accomplishments in 2012.



Responds to urgent and/or emergency situations

Drug Shortage

In February 2012, Sandoz Canada reduced production of a number of drugs (including some critical drugs used for treatments and surgeries) at its Boucherville (Quebec) plant to upgrade its manufacturing standards in response to demands from American regulatory authorities.

The MOHLTC implemented a [Five-Point Action Plan](#) to address potential drug shortages. As part of the plan, the MOHLTC worked with Local Health Integration Networks (LHINs), hospitals, community health organizations, health care provider associations, pharmacists and Sandoz to gather an accurate understanding of drug availability issues and any associated effects on services. The MOHLTC also established the Ontario Drug Shortage Technical Advisory Group to provide advice to the ministry on the management of the response to the drug shortage. In addition, the MOHLTC held regular teleconferences with health sector partners to ensure the ministry and the health sector were receiving and sharing the information needed to respond to this complex scenario.

Forest Fires and Evacuations

At the official end of the forest fire season on October 31, 2012, there had been 1,611 wildfires recorded affecting a total area of 151,181 hectares. The 2012 forest fire season recorded a greater number of fires compared to 2011 but with a much smaller area burned.

The MOHLTC's Ministry Emergency Operations Centre (MEOC) monitored the situation throughout the summer to coordinate the ministry's response (e.g., evacuation). Guided by its Health Sector Plan to Respond to Forest Fires and Evacuations, the MOHLTC worked with local health sector partners to ensure the availability and readiness of health services, the protection of local health capacity and "return to home" readiness. In addition, the MOHLTC worked closely with [Emergency Management Ontario](#) and the [Public Health Agency of Canada](#) to ensure appropriate information sharing.

Novel Coronavirus

On September 22, the United Kingdom informed the World Health Organization (WHO) of the laboratory confirmation of a novel coronavirus in a Qatari resident with a travel history to Saudi Arabia. The virus matched a fatal case in June in a 60-year-old in Saudi Arabia. Due to the severity of the confirmed cases, efforts were undertaken immediately to determine the public health implications of this novel virus.

The MOHLTC worked closely with [Public Health Ontario](#) (PHO) and the [Ministry of Labour](#) (MOL) to respond to this issue. The ministry also issued an Important Health Notice (IHN) providing health workers and health sector employers with guidance on screening and occupational health and safety/infection prevention and control actions, testing and treatment. In addition, the MOHLTC issued two memos to keep health providers up to date on the evolving situation and to reinforce the guidance in the IHN.

Variant H1N1 Influenza

In September 2012, the MOHLTC was informed of a patient in a hospital in southwestern Ontario with influenza. The Public Health Ontario Laboratories (PHOL) and the National Microbiology Laboratory (NML) subsequently identified the virus as an influenza A (H1N1) variant (H1N1v). This was Ontario's first case of variant H1N1 influenza, and it was believed to be similar to a number of H1N1v cases in the USA.

The MOHLTC worked closely with its partners at Public Health Ontario, the Public Health Agency of Canada, Canadian Food Inspection Agency, Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs, Ministry of Labour, local public health units and others to respond to this event. The ministry also worked in close collaboration with public health officials from Nova Scotia. In addition, the ministry reported the situation to the World Health Organization through the International Health Regulations which require countries to report certain disease outbreaks and public health events to the WHO.

The MOHLTC also released a statement from the Chief Medical Officer of Health and a fact sheet for the public on the situation. The CMOH also participated in various media opportunities to share information with the public.

Other Responses

The MOHLTC led and/or participated in responding to a number of other events including a chlorine gas leak, formaldehyde spill, flooding in a number of communities, changes to OxyContin availability, Pertussis outbreak, train derailment, etc.



Develops ministry emergency plans

Ministry Emergency Response Plan

The MOHLTC is currently updating its [Ministry Emergency Response Plan](#) (MERP). This document outlines how the MOHLTC coordinates responses to emergencies regardless of the hazard. Objectives for the update include addressing recommendations from H1N1 evaluation reports and lessons learned from other responses, making the plan shorter and more operational, updating roles and responsibilities (i.e., alignment with the Public Health Ontario mandate), more closely aligning with the provincial Incident Management System doctrine and better describing how the MOHLTC responds to non-declared emergencies.

Ontario Health Plan for an Influenza Pandemic

In 2011/12, the MOHLTC undertook a major update to the [Ontario Health Plan for an Influenza Pandemic](#) (OHPIP) – a document which guides health system response to an influenza pandemic. The updates to the plan reflect the priority lessons learned and best practices from the 2009 influenza pandemic. The OHPIP Steering Committee and 10 working groups (made up of key representatives from across the health sector) were reconvened to ensure that a wide range of health sector needs are being addressed.

In 2012, the MOHLTC also released both the 2011/12 and 2012/13 [Seasonal Influenza Blueprint: A Plan for Action](#) documents that describe the mitigation, preparedness, response and recovery strategies of the MOHLTC, MOL and PHO to seasonal influenza. The MOHLTC is looking forward to integrating seasonal and pandemic influenza plans to develop a single robust plan – which will be known as the Ontario Influenza Response Plan - that can be used to respond to a full range of influenza outbreak scenarios.

Radiation Health Response Plan

In 2012, the MOHLTC undertook a major update to the Radiation Health Response Plan (RHRP), a plan required by the [Provincial Nuclear Emergency Response Plan](#). This health plan describes how Ontario's health system responds to a radiological/nuclear incident of a deliberate or accidental nature and the conditions under which precautionary and protective actions are ordered for the general public and health workers. The update includes a major review of roles and responsibilities, hospital response and resources, evacuation planning, occupational health and safety, monitoring and decontamination units, use of potassium iodide and communications.

Technical/expert working groups focusing on these various issues were convened from across the health system. Their input has ensured that a robust plan will be released in early 2013.

Ontario Contingency Plan for the Management of Blood Shortages

In December 2012, the MOHLTC released the [Ontario Contingency Plan for the Management of Blood Shortages Version 2](#) and the [Ontario Hospital Toolkit for Emergency Blood Management](#). The MOHLTC worked with the Ontario Contingency Planning Working Group (a subgroup of the Ontario Blood Advisory Committee) on these resources. The Ontario plan outlines the provincial response to a blood shortage. Together with a toolkit, it assists hospitals improve their emergency blood management plans to ensure a standard and equitable approach to managing low blood inventory consistent with other hospitals across the province and across Canada.



Ensures continuity of critical services during an emergency

MOHLTC Continuity of Operations Plan

The MOHLTC's Continuity of Operations Plan (COOP) provides the strategic and operational framework to facilitate the continuity of time-critical MOHLTC services and functions in the event of a large scale business disruption that impacts numerous services across the ministry. COOP plans have been reviewed and updated at the branch, division and ministry levels in 2012. In addition, the MOHLTC undertook the following actions:

- ❖ updated the list of time-critical services, compiled in a revised Access-based database;
- ❖ redesigned divisional and ministry plans to clarify escalation processes and implications and enable the documents to be used both as references and workbooks during COOP responses, and
- ❖ developed a structure for a new COOP database, in collaboration with one of the ministry's key business units, that will enable faster and more flexible information collation.

Continuity of Operations Training and Awareness

COOP training modules have been posted for online access by all COOP coordinators. Information gathered from Emergency Management Forum meetings has also been shared with COOP coordinators.

Continuity of Operations Exercising

The MOHLTC participates in an annual government-wide continuity of operations exercise. The Emergency Management Branch also leads smaller branch level exercises across the MOHLTC to test and validate plans.



Ensures compliance with legislation

An improved Ministry Emergency Operations Centre

The Ministry Emergency Operations Centre (MEOC) is the site where the MOHLTC coordinates its responses. The MEOC has been established to enable 24/7 operations when required (e.g., the MEOC has a natural gas generator to ensure continuity of operations during a power outage). Once activated, the MEOC can provide work stations with extensive telecommunications capacity for approximately 35 staff. In 2012, revisions and enhancements to the MEOC logging system/database were undertaken to customize the application based on lessons learned over the year. Additionally, an operational binder was created to support staff working in the MEOC, define and describe core workflow and planning processes, and articulate standard operating procedures. MEOC orientation sessions for staff working in the MEOC were also held throughout the year. The MOHLTC has also established an alternate MEOC site for use if the main MEOC location is inaccessible.

MOHLTC Risk Communications Response Plan

In 2012, the MOHLTC updated the *MOHLTC Crisis Emergency and Risk Communications Response Plan* which guides MOHLTC communications in the event of a crisis. The MOHLTC also updated the communications chapter in the Ontario Health Plan for an Influenza Pandemic based on a consultation with health sector representatives on communications in an influenza pandemic.

Information Management

In 2012, the MOHLTC undertook a project to ensure that during emergency preparedness and response phases, all government standards regarding information security, privacy and accessibility are met.



Promotes awareness of emergencies and preparedness

Emergency Preparedness Planner

The [Emergency Preparedness Planner](#) is a newsletter for the health sector that promotes emergency planning and effective response in Ontario's health sector. Features are written by MOHLTC staff and guest writers in the field. The newsletter is available by free subscription as well as on the MOHLTC's website in both English and French. New editions of the newsletter were released in winter 2011/12, summer 2012 and winter 2012/13.

Website

The MOHLTC maintains online health emergency management resources for health professionals and the public. The MOHLTC website was updated as events occurred throughout 2012 (e.g., resources for health care providers regarding the 2012 drug shortage). The website also has the latest Important Health Notices, Emergency Preparedness Planner newsletters and several emergency plans. A major refresh of the MOHLTC's website is underway to ensure compliance with the [French Language Services Act](#) and the [Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act](#) and to improve navigability.

Emergency Management Training

The MOHLTC provided [Incident Management System](#) (IMS - 100, 200) and [Basic Emergency Management](#) training to staff and management working in the MEOC. Staff from Emergency Management Branch also completed the IMS 910 Instructor course and Provincial Emergency Operations Centre training.

The MOHLTC held a series of webinar-based awareness sessions for health and non-health partners in preparation for a forest fire season. The topics included: preparing for a forest fire season, health services for people with opiate dependency, the Emergency Medical Assistance Team and an orientation to MEOC.

The MOHLTC led several workshops exploring the utility of complexity science for the practice of emergency management. Workshops were held for the Emergency Management Branch, the Ontario Public Health Conference, Emergency Management Ontario's senior management group and the Provincial Emergency Management Coordinating Committee.

In addition, the MOHLTC presented at numerous conferences, workshops and meetings, helping raise awareness of important emergency management and public health issues such as various plans (e.g., Ontario Health Plan for an Influenza Pandemic), programs (e.g., The Great Lakes Border Health Initiative) and events (e.g., Pan/Parapan American Games).



Builds emergency response capacity

Emergency Medical Assistance Team

The MOHLTC's [Emergency Medical Assistance Team](#) (EMAT), operated by the [Sunnybrook Centre for Pre-hospital Medicine](#), ensures the MOHLTC can support and enhance local health surge capacity in an emergency response. EMAT is a mobile medical field unit that can be deployed within 24 hours anywhere in Ontario with road access. The EMAT can temporarily establish a unit of up to 56 beds, providing a staging and triage base. It has the capability to treat up to 20 acute care patients and 36 intermediate care patients. The EMAT is modular and can deploy specific resources as needed.

In 2012, EMAT participated in two functional exercises: General Fontbonne and Huron Challenge. Both exercises included an EMAT live deployment framed by hospital table-top/functional exercises. Additional hands-on training for both EMAT and hospital staff was also conducted.

Stockpiles

The MOHLTC continues to maintain stockpiles of antiviral medications, personal protective equipment and mass immunization supplies for use in a large scale emergency.

The MOHLTC has also updated the Emergency Order Management System to improve navigability. This system allows for online requests from the field for provincial supplies and equipment during an emergency.

Daily Hazard Identification and Risk Assessment

The MOHLTC has developed and implemented a daily hazard identification and risk assessment (HIRA) process. This process scans a set of information sources to identify emerging issues/incidents and then analyzes and reports on these issues/incidents, as appropriate. The daily HIRA process supports mitigation efforts, planning activities and the enhancement of risk assessment skills of branch staff. The daily HIRA process has been developed in parallel with the annual HIRA.

Morning Rounds

The MOHLTC has implemented Morning Rounds, a daily mechanism to facilitate the sharing of knowledge and information among the MOHLTC, PHO and others, as needed. Morning Rounds are used to facilitate further discussion, consultation and follow-up regarding significant public health issues/events.

Exercise Huron Challenge

Exercise Huron Challenge, led by Emergency Management Ontario in partnership with Bruce Power, took place from October 15-19. It involved participants from local municipalities, provincial ministries, federal departments and non-governmental organizations. In addition to the MOHLTC, which coordinated the overall sector participation, the health sector participants included five hospitals, two public health units, a local health integration network, emergency medical services, CritiCall Ontario, EMAT, Public Health Ontario and Public Health Agency of Canada.

Exercise Huron Challenge saw the MOHLTC and its partners respond to a series of complex and severe weather-based events. The MOHLTC is currently conducting an evaluation of the exercise. An After Action Report and Corrective Action Plan are expected to be released in spring 2013.

Role of LHINs in Emergencies

As part of the recovery phase for the 2009 H1N1 pandemic, the MOHLTC led a review to identify opportunities to strengthen emergency response processes and plans. Three provincial reports were issued, documenting lessons learned from the 2009 H1N1 pandemic in Ontario. All three identified the need to formalize the roles and responsibilities of Local Health Integration Networks (LHINs) during an emergency. The 2010-2012 LHIN Performance Agreement also includes a new provision directing that “both parties (MOHLTC & LHINs) jointly develop guidelines and/or protocols clarifying roles and responsibilities related to emergency management”.

A LHIN working group was created in fall 2011 to develop policy recommendations on the LHINs’ role in emergency management. The focus of the LHIN role will be capacity management and ensuring facilities funded under the LHIN can continue to deliver health care services during emergencies or critically emerging situations with health system implications.

The ministry will assemble an MOHLTC-LHIN implementation working group in winter 2013 to support implementation of the LHIN role and complete key deliverables over a three-year period.



Ensures coordination with other plans

Public Health Emergency Planners Network

The MOHLTC continued participating in the Public Health Emergency Planners Network (PHEPN). This group of emergency planners from the 36 public health units uses an online site to share information and resources, and has already played an invaluable role in information sharing and promoting collaborative approaches.

An integrated partnership with Public Health Ontario

The MOHLTC's integrated partnership with [Public Health Ontario](#) continued in 2012 with significant progress on finalizing and/or updating collaboration protocols. These protocols outline new processes for Morning Rounds and joint incident assessments. Morning Rounds provide a forum for a daily review of emerging public health threats and threats to the health system. The joint incident assessments offer an opportunity for fulsome review of threats with greater potential for harm.

Federal/Provincial/Territorial Planning

The MOHLTC participates on a number of federal/provincial/territorial public health emergency management initiatives, including the maintenance of the National Antiviral Stockpile, updates to the [Canadian Plan for an Influenza Pandemic for the Health Sector](#), development of the Health Emergency Management Plan, and operational protocols for the implementation of mutual aid and surge capacity support among jurisdictions in Canada. Similarly, the MOHLTC continues to ensure a strong partnership with the regional office of the [Public Health Agency of Canada](#) which has led to a number of instances of collaboration on emergency preparedness and response throughout the year.

Planning for the Pan/Parapan American Games

The MOHLTC is participating in the coordinated planning around the 2015 Pan/Parapan American Games. This includes involvement in various committees within the provincial coordinating structure established by the Pan/Parapan American Games Secretariat, and participation in the Emergency Management Ontario-led consequence management planning process. It also includes coordinating the health sector awareness and contingency planning process to support readiness for any health impacts and extraordinary events resulting from the games, as well as efficient coordination with the Games Medical and Health Services Plan (which is being developed by the Toronto 2015 Pan/Parapan American Games Organizing Committee).

Looking ahead

In 2013, the MOHLTC is looking forward to enhancing the capacity of Ontario's health system to respond to emergencies, including:

- ❖ releasing the *Health System Emergency Response Plan*
- ❖ releasing the *Ontario Influenza Response Plan*
- ❖ releasing the *Radiation Health Response Plan*
- ❖ releasing the *Health System Evacuation Plan*
- ❖ releasing the *2013 Ministry Emergency Response Plan*
- ❖ expanding the MOHLTC COOP Exercise Program
- ❖ refreshing the CBRN Program
- ❖ refreshing the emergency management section of the MOHLTC's website