



STAFF REPORT INFORMATION ONLY

Toronto Public Health Plan for an Influenza Pandemic

Date:	September 28, 2007
To:	Board of Health
From:	Medical Officer of Health
Wards:	All
Reference Number:	

SUMMARY

This report presents the Toronto Public Health Plan for an Influenza Pandemic (TPHPIP). A copy of the plan is on file in the office of the City Clerk and is also available online at <http://www.toronto.ca/health/pandemicflu>. This plan replaces the Toronto Pandemic Influenza Plan which was published in 2005. The new plan describes how Toronto Public Health (TPH) is preparing for an influenza pandemic and provides new information on how response activities such as influenza assessment, treatment and referral centres (community flu centres) and mass vaccination clinics would operate during the pandemic period. The report also identifies outstanding issues which require policy decisions or clarification from other orders of government, including the prophylactic use of antiviral medications and several legal and financial issues related to the operation of community flu centres. The next steps listed in the plan have been integrated into a workplan for TPH staff. That workplan is included in this report as Attachment 1.

Financial Impact

There are no financial impacts arising directly from this report.

DECISION HISTORY

At its meeting of November 28, 2005 the Board of Health endorsed the Pandemic Influenza Plan for the City of Toronto. The plan was endorsed by City Council at its meeting of April 25, 26 and 27, 2006. Since that time the Medical Officer of Health has provided monthly verbal updates and quarterly written reports to the Board of Health on the state of preparedness for an influenza pandemic.

ISSUE BACKGROUND

Influenza is a highly contagious respiratory illness caused by a virus which is constantly changing. An influenza pandemic occurs when there is an abrupt and major change in the protein structure of the Influenza A virus resulting in a new subtype. Since people have little or no immunity to this new strain, it can spread quickly causing outbreaks. When outbreaks occur worldwide the event is called a pandemic. The exact nature of the next pandemic virus and illness will not be known until it emerges. Influenza pandemics tend to occur in two or three waves over a period of months to a year or more. An effective vaccine would likely take four to six months to become available. Because health care services in Toronto are currently working at or near capacity, a severe pandemic could overwhelm the health system.

Toronto Public Health is the lead health agency for pandemic influenza planning, preparedness and response in the City of Toronto. Local planning is based on the most recent Canadian Pandemic Influenza Plan (CPIP) (released in December 2006) and Ontario Health Plan for an Influenza Pandemic (OHP/IP) (released in July 2007).

TPH is responsible for the local planning and delivery of disease surveillance and reporting, health risk assessment and communications, public health measures such as case and contact investigation and management, liaison with hospitals and other agencies, the distribution and administration of antiviral medication and vaccine, supporting Toronto Emergency Management Program Committee (TEMPC) operations at the Toronto Emergency Operations Centre, and ensuring psychosocial supports. In addition, the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care (MOHLTC) has directed TPH to lead the planning of influenza assessment, treatment and referral centres - to be known as community flu centres - and play a coordinating role in the broader health care sector in the city

COMMENTS

Objectives and Content of the Toronto Public Health Plan for an Influenza Pandemic

The Toronto Public Health Plan for an Influenza Pandemic (TPHPIP) replaces the Toronto Pandemic Influenza Plan which was first released by Toronto Public Health (TPH) in November 2005. The objectives of the TPHPIP are to:

- 1) Define and outline the roles and responsibilities of Toronto Public Health.
- 2) Identify preparedness activities that need to be undertaken by Toronto Public Health before the pandemic to enhance the City's state of readiness.
- 3) Outline Toronto Public Health response activities during the pandemic and the timing of such activities.
- 4) Ensure inclusion of national and provincial directions as well as other key documents, expert opinion and stakeholder input in the response plan.
- 5) Serve as a resource for local health care system partners and key community stakeholders in the development of their pandemic influenza response plans.

While TPHPIP 2007 has been prepared primarily for the use of TPH staff, future versions will deal more broadly with the entire health care sector. The plan outlines the preparedness planning that has been undertaken by Toronto Public Health and provides new information on how some of TPH's responses such as community flu centres, mass vaccination clinics, and the provision of psychosocial supports will function during a pandemic. The plan has new detail on what personal protective equipment is recommended for use during the pandemic and outlines the next steps to be taken.

The Toronto Public Health Plan for an Influenza Pandemic is organized into three sections:

- 1) **Introduction** describes the goals and objectives of the plan and outlines the roles and responsibilities of the organizations and government agencies involved in pandemic influenza preparedness.
- 2) **Preparedness** outlines the various elements of TPH preparedness planning and program and service delivery during the interpandemic and pandemic alert phases. The section describes the systems that are already in place and the planning that is underway to meet the challenges of a pandemic. It also identifies unresolved issues and the steps which remain to be taken to further strengthen the City's level of pandemic preparedness. Next steps are organized into those which will be undertaken within the next 12 months and those which will take place over a longer term.
- 3) **Response** provides specific details on how TPH will lead the City of Toronto's health response to an influenza pandemic during the pandemic phase. The section describes the systems and processes such as community flu centres, mass vaccination clinics and public health measures that may be put into place when the threat of a pandemic emerges in Toronto and during the pandemic itself.

The Preparedness and Response sections each contain ten chapters on the various aspects of preparing for and responding to an influenza pandemic. Chapter subjects are: Managing Through the Pandemic; Surveillance and Reporting; Communications; Public Health Measures; Antiviral Medications; Influenza Assessment, Treatment and Referral Centres; Mass Vaccination Clinics; Psychosocial Supports; the Health Care Sector; and Working with Other Sectors.

TPHPIP will function primarily as an online document, containing links to relevant documents and forms that have been developed as part of the national and Ontario plans as well as planning materials developed by other stakeholders. As with all pandemic influenza plans, TPHPIP is a living document. TPH will regularly update the plan and post it online to reflect new knowledge and best practices.

Outstanding Issues

The TPHPIP identifies several important issues which, from the City's perspective, require policy decisions or clarification from other orders of government. These include:

- 1) Resolution of the question of offering prophylactic antiviral medications to health workers and other essential service staff is still pending the development of a national policy. Current national and provincial policies focus on the use of antivirals for treatment.
- 2) Significant questions regarding the operation of community flu centres including liability and malpractice insurance issues, the use of personnel who are not currently licensed as health care practitioners, as well as advance funding for stockpiling of supplies and equipment, remain unresolved. The OHPIP 2007 states that the MOHLTC will continue to address legal and financial issues related to flu centres. TPH will continue to provide advice to the Ministry as it addresses these issues.

Next Steps

Each chapter in the Preparedness section in the TPHPIP identifies the next steps TPH will take in its pandemic planning and preparedness. These steps have been incorporated into a TPH workplan for 2007-08 which is contained in Attachment I of this report. The workplan shows activities that will be undertaken in the next three, six and twelve months, those that are ongoing, as well as those which will be addressed in the longer term.

CONTACT

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SIGNATURE

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ATTACHMENTS

Attachment 1: Toronto Public Health Pandemic Preparedness Workplan, 2007-08