

Emergency Preparedness Planner

A Newsletter for the Health Sector

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

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The New Year is upon us!

2008 has been an exciting year for emergency management in Ontario. Here are a few highlights of the important health emergency accomplishments which we have told you about in 2008:

- *Bug Out! Get the Facts on Germs*, an infection prevention curriculum for school-aged children and families
- A successful awareness campaign during *Emergency Preparedness Week* in May 2008
- Our most comprehensive issue of the *Ontario Health Plan for an Influenza Pandemic* to date
- The start-up and implementation of the *Ontario Agency for Health Protection and Promotion*
- Two of Canada's largest exercises involving health emergencies, *Exercise Antivirus* and *Exercise Trillium Response*
- With your assistance, we expanded *The Pandemic Planner* to become the *Emergency Preparedness Planner*

This success would not have been possible without your support, and we would like to recognize all of our strong partnerships in the public health and emergency management sectors – a big thank you to all of you!

Looking ahead to 2009, the *Emergency Preparedness Planner* will continue to bring you the latest news and best practices in health emergency management. Stay tuned for more on the implementation of the Public Health Emergency Preparedness Standard, the ministry's radiation health emergency planning and the new priorities for influenza pandemic planning in Ontario.

From a personal and family emergency preparedness perspective, the New Year may be a good time to review your emergency kit and family emergency plans. Make sure any food or medications you have stored are not expired, consider any winter or cold weather changes to your kit and plans (i.e. do you have an emergency kit in your car?) and make sure everyone – including any new pets – are considered in your preparedness efforts.

I hope you have a happy holiday season and as we enter 2009 – stay healthy, stay safe and be prepared!

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

Radiation Emergencies: Training and Planning

Radiation emergencies may be a scary and unknown prospect for many of us involved in supporting the health system. While radiation cannot be seen with the naked eye, with the right tools and the right education we can protect ourselves, our colleagues and the public from its effects. There are excellent resources available to health settings to support preparedness for radiation emergencies such as a spill resulting from a transport accident, an in-hospital dosage miscalculation, an industrial accident, or the unlikely scenarios of a nuclear power generator accident or radiation dispersal device ("dirty bomb").

The Emergency Management Unit has been working closely with International Safety Research (ISR)** on the Medical Emergency Treatment for Exposure to Radiation (METER) project, to provide two education and training sessions to first responders and first receivers in Ontario. The METER project is federally funded under the CBRNE Research and Technology Initiatives (CRTI), and is presenting its training course in five regions across Canada

The METER course and tabletop exercise, held in Toronto at Sunnybrook Health Sciences Centre on December 1st and 2nd offered first responders and first receivers an orientation to the best practices of radiation emergency health response. A number of training modules – including topics like Radiological Assessment, On-scene Coordination and Decontamination, and Emergency Department Management - were delivered by scientists, doctors and other radiation/nuclear specialists. The tabletop exercise allowed participants to run through an emergency scenario, discussing such challenges as the design and set-up of a hospital receiving area for radiation exposed patients.

In addition to discussing first responder/first receiver roles and responsibilities, one of the issues addressed during the training is the importance of prioritizing the treatment of life-threatening injuries in patients, treatment which may need to occur even before decontamination, unlike a chemical/biological exposure scenario. Standard personal protective equipment and precautions are more than sufficient to protect health professionals from radiological contamination that may be present on scene or on casualties.

"One of the main things that we want first responders and receivers to take away from the course is that after a radiological event that they can go ahead doing what they do best, saving lives, confident in the knowledge that they are safe. From there they can treat life threatening injuries and then use the tools we provide to assess and treat anyone who may have had very high exposures to radiation," said Pat Kenny, head of the Radiation Safety Division at ISR.

A second METER course will be held at the Ottawa Fire Services Training Centre on January 19th-20th, 2009. For more information contact: Pat Kenny, Phone: 613-241-4884, E-mail: meter-super@i-s-r.ca

The Emergency Management Unit is also working on drafting the provincial Radiation Health Emergency Response Plan, due to be released in the winter of 2009. Stay tuned for more details! For more information on the ministry's radiation health planning initiatives email: emergencymanagement.moh@ontario.ca

**Did you know that EMU retains the services of ISR on a 24/7 basis to ensure that we have quick access to appropriate expertise in a radiation emergency?

Important Dates

Explosions Can Happen 2009

All branches of the Health Service I&IT Cluster of the OPS will participate in a tabletop exercise to test the Cluster's ability to maintain critical functions and ensure employee health and safety on January 20, 2009.

Region of Waterloo Community Pandemic Exercise

Also on January 20, 2009, the Region of Waterloo Public Health has planned a community pandemic tabletop exercise to be held at their Regional Headquarters.

You Asked...?

What are the International Health Regulations?

The International Health Regulations (IHR) came into force on June 2007 to assist the international community in preventing and responding to acute public health risks that have the potential to cross borders and threaten people worldwide. The regulations require 194 countries across the globe, including Canada, to report certain disease outbreaks and public health events to the World Health Organization (WHO). In addition, where necessary, the IHR require countries to strengthen their existing capacities for public health surveillance and response. Canada must be in full compliance by June 2010.

To oversee the implementation of the regulations and to act as a conduit of information, each country is required to designate a National IHR Focal Point. Canada's Focal Point is the Public Health Agency of Canada.

For more information, please visit: <http://www.who.int/csr/ihr/prepare/en/index.html>

Pandemic Training Website Launch

For emergency planners who are looking for pandemic training resources, we have a great new tool to tell you about. A research team led by Queen's University has launched an interactive learning web portal in response to worldwide concerns about the threat of an influenza pandemic.

Known as P5, the *Being Prepared Is Being Protected Pandemic Portal Project* is designed to support hospital managers, clinical leaders, and front-line healthcare workers learn more about how to prepare for an influenza pandemic, including information on how they can protect themselves.

The portal is targeted at acute care hospitals, with special attention paid to the unique challenges often faced by smaller facilities in rural areas. However, personnel in other healthcare settings may also find it to be a valuable resource to support their pandemic readiness.

P5 was funded by The Change Foundation, an independent charitable foundation established by the Ontario Hospital Association. The development of P5 was co-led by Dr. Dick Zoutman from Queen's University and Dr. Brian Schwartz from the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care's Emergency Management Unit.

"This is really the ultimate planning exercise," according to Dr. Zoutman, the Principal Investigator of the project. "Hospitals need to be aware of the potential impact of a pandemic on their local healthcare delivery system and on their own facility. The process of planning for a future pandemic of infectious disease means grappling with a multitude of uncertainties for a hospital."

The shape and content of P5 was informed by the results of an education needs assessment survey completed by hospitals across Ontario. This survey also assessed the state of pandemic influenza planning in acute care hospitals and highlighted the readiness shortfalls that are common to most hospital response plans.

After analyzing the results of the needs assessment, the P5 project team turned to developing the online content for the learning web portal, with input from a wide range of specialists. Participants can access education materials and resources on the following topics:

- A preparedness assessment of Ontario hospitals;
- The history of pandemics;
- Ethical considerations for hospital planners;
- Clinical care guidelines for treating patients with influenza;
- An overview of the Incident Management System;
- Occupational health and safety and infection prevention and control guidance;
- Emergency planning considerations;
- Guidance on conducting pandemic exercises;
- Equipment and supply needs, including personal protective equipment;
- An overview of the local health care system's response to a pandemic, including the development of Assessment, Treatment, and Referral Centres (Flu Centres);
- Roles and responsibilities of partners at the national, provincial, and local level; and,
- Additional resource links, including information on the Ontario Hospital Association Small Rural Northern Hospital Toolkit.

P5 is an interactive learning tool. While working through the materials, learners will have the opportunity to listen to presentations from leading pandemic preparedness experts, test their knowledge by taking interactive quizzes, and further their awareness by linking to other resources and materials. P5 can be accessed for free at www.pandemicportal.ca.

Did You Know...?

Ontario Public Health Laboratories

The management and operation of Ontario's Public Health Laboratories was transferred to the Ontario Agency for Health Protection and Promotion as of December 15, 2008, to become one of the Agency's key functions.

This move means that the Agency is now responsible for operating one of the largest public health laboratory systems in North America, and will offer Ontario an opportunity to integrate laboratories with public health and surveillance activities.

For more information, visit:

<http://www.oahpp.ca/publichealthlaboratories.php>

Local Profile: Middlesex-London Health Unit and CBRN-E Planning

Over the last decade, we have become increasingly aware of the threat of Chemical, Biological, Radiological, Nuclear and Explosive (CBRN-E) incidents. Consequently, the need to plan for such events has also increased. Planning for a CBRN-E event is a fairly new arena for public health units as they typically do not provide the initial response to a mass casualty incident. However, given the potential impact on the health system and the vital role local public health units play in the management of health hazards, it has become increasingly important that public health units are engaged as a key partner in local CBRN-E planning.

Several public health units in Ontario are using innovative ways to approach planning their role in response to a CBRN-E incident, including Middlesex-London Health Unit (MLHU), who have developed the CBRN-E Incident: Public Health Management Guidelines. These Guidelines outline CBRN-E category definitions, Material Safety Data Sheets, decontamination guidelines, radiation facts, sample submission information, incident contact lists for spill response companies and profiles of various chemical and biological agents - just to name a few!

While originally intended to be an internal resource for the staff of MLHU, the Guidelines generated overwhelming interest and numerous requests, resulting in the document distribution to an extensive list of community partners including: public health units across Ontario, Royal Canadian Mounted Police, Ontario Provincial Police, the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care, and Emergency Management Ontario.

Following the release of the Guidelines, the MLHU was invited to attend an intensive police-based CBRN-E training session for the London Police Service, facilitated by the RCMP and the Department of National Defense. MLHU provided collection and transportation biohazard samples kits to three area police services, in addition to respirators and cartridges, and other supplies and equipment.

In November 2008, MLHU held an inaugural multi-agency training day on CBRN-E with representatives from police, fire, hospitals, emergency medical services and emergency management. The goal of the day was to provide each agency with a better understanding of the response capabilities of different organizations, and to increase awareness of their respective roles and responsibilities. The training day proved to be a resounding success, with approximately 70 people in attendance, representing both city and county emergency-based services.

In addition to outward awareness and training activities, MLHU also ensures that their staff participates in on-line training courses in CBRN-E and Bio-Hazardous Materials Management, offered through the Fire Marshal's Office and the Canadian Emergency Preparedness College in Ottawa.

The work of MLHU highlighted here demonstrates a hazard-based approach to emergency management, the importance of building collaborative relationships with emergency response sector partners, and the benefit which can come from sharing best practices. Congratulations to MLHU on all their hard work!

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Useful Online Resources

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' PlanFirst Webcast series is broadcasting a webinar on pandemic influenza on January 28th at 2pm ET.

http://www.pandemicflu.gov/news/panflu_webinar.html

Check out CBRNE research and technology projects associated with CRTI and Defence and Research Development Canada:

<http://www.css.drdc-rddc.gc.ca/crti/index-eng.asp>

Keep up-to-date on the latest news and laws/regulations regarding nuclear safety at the Canadian Nuclear Safety Commission website:

<http://www.nuclearsafety.gc.ca/eng/>