

Chapter 1: Introduction

Planning is a key component of emergency management, regardless as to the nature, size, or duration of the emergency. The possibility of an influenza pandemic, a natural event that occurs three to four times per century, is recognized as a significant threat that warrants dedicated and ongoing planning to minimize its impact on society. Peel Public Health has been involved in pandemic planning since 2001. This document is part of a comprehensive emergency management strategy for the Region of Peel, and is a collaborative effort between health and municipal stakeholders that is sponsored by the Region of Peel Medical Officer of Health.

While the plan is as complete as possible at the time of publication, pandemic planning is an ongoing process. The plan is a living document that will be reviewed and revised regularly. In some instances, the plan presents options for consideration, as final decisions cannot be made until a pandemic virus emerges and its characteristics are known. Local planning is still in progress and “Next Steps” are identified throughout the document. Furthermore, some content in this document may require revision as new scientific knowledge becomes available and national and provincial pandemic planning provides new or revised direction and guidance.

Peel Health anticipates that the *Pandemic Influenza Plan for the Health Sector in Peel* will guide a timely, coordinated, efficient, and effective response to a pandemic influenza outbreak in the Region of Peel. The plan’s value, however, goes beyond that of a pandemic. Many aspects of the plan will assist the health sector in responding to other communicable disease emergencies or to chemical, radiological, or nuclear incidents. The strong working relationships that have been forged during the planning process will be invaluable in responding to any emergency or disaster.

Pandemic Planning in Peel

In January 2001, a report to Regional Council identified the necessity of pandemic influenza planning and recommended the development of a pandemic response plan for Peel Public Health. As a result of this report, Peel Health published the Region’s first *Peel Public Health Pandemic Influenza Plan* in March 2002.

In January 2006, a subsequent report to Regional Council reiterated the necessity for pandemic influenza planning, and recommended that Peel Health publish an updated pandemic plan. This report was followed by the development of a pandemic planning committee, which led to a number of physician and stakeholder meetings across the Region, and produced a revised *Peel Public Health Pandemic Plan* in June 2006.

Recognizing the need for greater stakeholder engagement, and an integrated approach to pandemic planning across the broader health sector, Peel Health initiated a new pandemic project in July 2006.

Under the sponsorship of Dr Megan Ward, Acting Medical Officer of Health, the project planning group was tasked to engage the broader health sector and lead the development of the content for the public health component of the pandemic plan through task-specific work groups.

The planning process for developing a response to the threat of pandemic influenza is highly complex. It involves input from health and non-health sector stakeholders at all levels, including municipal, provincial, and federal governments. The planning process has focused on both the overarching plan for the health sector and the operational details for Peel Public Health.

Plan Structure

This plan is divided into four main sections:

Section One provides an overview of pandemic influenza, the assumptions driving the planning process, an ethical framework, and a background of the health and social infrastructure in the Region of Peel;

Section Two provides an overview of the concept of operations for both the health and non-health sectors in the Region of Peel for a pandemic response. This section identifies the roles and responsibilities of the various stakeholders in the Region of Peel and the broader health sector. This section also identifies the command and control structure of the emergency response, and outlines the legislated authority of the Peel Medical Officer of Health;

Section Three identifies the basic pandemic response components, specifically surveillance, public health measures (including infection control practices), vaccines, antiviral drugs, health services, communications, and natural death surge management; and

Section Four provides additional information for health sector planning and preparedness, including a basic introduction to continuity of operations planning, equipment and supplies, workforce and human resources, and occupational health and safety. The section also addresses training and exercises.

Pandemic Response Goal

Consistent with the pandemic goals adopted by the federal and provincial government, the goal of the pandemic response in the Region of Peel is to:

- (1) Minimize illness and death; and
- (2) Reduce societal disruption in the Region of Peel as a result of an influenza pandemic.

Ethical Framework for Pandemic Planning

An influenza pandemic will result in the need to make many difficult decisions, many of which will have a significant and lasting impact on the residents of the Region of Peel. To assist in the decision-making process, the *Ontario Health Pandemic Influenza Plan*, (OHPIP) contains an ethical framework¹, the purpose of which is to assist officials and leaders to make honest and transparent decisions, and to prioritize the delivery of possibly scarce services and resources, such as vaccine and antiviral drugs.

OHPIP points out that stakeholders (e.g. general public, patients, health care workers, and other organizations) are more likely to accept difficult decisions if the decision-making process is:

- Open and transparent;
- Reasonable;
- Inclusive;
- Responsive; and
- Accountable.

The framework also describes a series of core ethical values that need to be taken into account in the pandemic response. More than one value may be relevant in any given situation, and some values will be in tension with others. These core values, which are discussed in more detail in the OHPIP, include: individual liberty, protection of the public from harm, proportionality, privacy, equity, duty to provide care, reciprocity, trust, solidarity, stewardship, family-centred care, and respect for emerging autonomy.

Plan Purpose

The *Pandemic Influenza Plan for the Health Sector in Peel* is a hazard-specific emergency management plan designed specifically to guide, on a strategic level, the pandemic planning and response activities of the Peel Health Department and the broader health sector. The purpose of this plan is to identify the need for planning and to identify the roles, responsibilities and key activities of the health sector and their links to the municipal sector in planning and responding to a pandemic emergency.

This plan is not a stand-in document. It supports the Peel Health Department Emergency Plan, which supports the Peel Region Emergency Plan, and also supports the planning process and development of health sector pandemic plans. This plan also works in harmony with federal and provincial pandemic plans, and the pandemic plans of surrounding jurisdictions.

¹ Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care. (2006). *Ontario Health Plan for an Influenza Pandemic 2006*, Section 2.5. Retrieved November 29, 2006, from http://www.health.gov.on.ca/english/providers/program/emu/pan_flu/pan_flu_plan.html

This plan will be maintained by the Peel Health Emergency Management Program on behalf of Peel Public Health.

Use of the Pandemic Influenza Plan for the Health Sector in Peel

This health sector plan has been designed for open use and access by all health sector stakeholders and the general public. Plan annexes, which support the strategic elements of this plan, may be withheld for operational security reasons.