

## Chapter 13: Communications

Effective, clear, and timely communication is a critical component of emergency management. Open communication with the community and key stakeholders is essential to secure support and co-operation, build confidence, and dispel rumours and misinformation.

This chapter defines communication objectives, target audiences, key messages, and specific strategies (written, spoken and visual) during each phase of the pandemic influenza. It also includes evaluation activities to measure the effectiveness of the communication strategies.

### Communication Objectives

The overall goal of the pandemic communication strategy is to communicate accurate and timely information to multiple target audiences regarding personal and professional actions for each pandemic phase, and to share information among stakeholders involved in the pandemic response. Communication objectives by pandemic phase are shown in Table 13.1.

**Table 13. 1: Communication Objectives by Pandemic Phase**

<b>Pandemic Phase</b>	<b>Objectives</b>
<b>All phases</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To communicate in a clear and timely manner with all target audiences and key stakeholders;</li> <li>• To educate all target audiences about routine infection prevention control practices to decrease the spread of infectious diseases;</li> <li>• To communicate with the media accurately, consistently, and in a timely manner; and</li> <li>• To respond to rumours and inaccuracies promptly.</li> </ul>
<b>Inter-Pandemic Period (Phases 1 &amp; 2)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• As above; and</li> <li>• To promote annual flu vaccination.</li> </ul>
<b>Pandemic Alert Period (Phases 3, 4 &amp; 5)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• As above;</li> <li>• To inform all target audiences about pandemic influenza planning across the Peel Health Care Sector;</li> <li>• To increase understanding among target audiences of the potential impact of pandemic influenza and the need for personal and organizational preparedness; and</li> <li>• To increase stakeholder awareness of the need to develop pandemic plans, including business continuity.</li> </ul>
<b>Pandemic Period (Phase 6)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To inform all target audiences about the level and nature of pandemic activity in the Region of Peel;</li> <li>• To communicate to all stakeholders the need to activate their pandemic plans;</li> <li>• To inform the public about personal protection, self and family care and when and where to seek medical attention;</li> <li>• To communicate the availability (or not) of vaccine and antiviral drugs and times/locations of clinic sites; and</li> <li>• To inform the public about changes to services provided by the Peel health care sector and the Region of Peel.</li> </ul>
<b>Post-pandemic period</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To thank everyone for their support and co-operation during pandemic; and</li> <li>• To evaluate communications measures used in the pandemic and modify the pandemic plan as needed.</li> </ul>

## **Communication Roles and Responsibilities**

### ***Region of Peel***

At the time of a pandemic, if a local or provincial emergency is declared, the Region of Peel will take charge of all aspects of the emergency. This provides the Region of Peel, through the Regional Emergency Control Group (RECG), overall responsibility for pandemic communications. To ensure consistency and accuracy of messages, communication to all target audiences will be controlled and monitored. Region of Peel spokespersons will be designated, and will include the Regional Chair and the Medical Officer of Health (MOH).

Communication Services Division (Corporate Services Department) will lead the Regional communication response including media relations, website updates, design, and production. The People, Information and Technology Department will lead communication to Region of Peel staff. Access Peel is responsible for the Customer Contact Centre response.

### ***Peel Public Health***

When communicable disease outbreaks occur in non-pandemic situations, Peel Public Health is responsible for communications to the general public, health professionals and other stakeholders, Regional Council, and the media. In these situations, the MOH, or designate, is the usual spokesperson. The communications support for Peel Public Health is provided by the Region of Peel, through the Communication Services Division, and this support can be enhanced as necessary by Corporate Services Department.

It is anticipated that Peel Public Health will continue to have overall responsibility for public, media, and key stakeholder communication during the pandemic alert period (Phases 3, 4, and 5).

In Phase 6, as outlined above, the Region of Peel assumes responsibility of all aspects of the emergency if a local or provincial emergency is declared. The MOH and Commissioner of Health are members of the Regional Emergency Control Group, which directs the emergency response. In line with their legislated responsibility for communicable disease control, the MOH and Peel Public Health will continue to play a major role in pandemic communication as follows:

- The MOH will be a key spokesperson for the Region of Peel during all phases of an influenza pandemic (along with the Regional Chair and others as designated);
- Peel Public Health will prepare the health messages and content for corporate and public communications; and
- Peel Public Health will continue to serve as the main conduit of pandemic information to the health care sector.

### ***Hospitals, Long Term Care Homes, CCACs, and other Health Care Organizations***

Health care organizations are responsible for communication to their own staff, patients/clients, families, volunteers, and visitors at all pandemic phases. During phase 6, when the Region of Peel is in charge of communication to the general public and the media, individual health care organizations should have as their focus, matters affecting their own facility. All media messages will be coordinated with the RECG to ensure consistency.

During a pandemic, health sector communications will be facilitated if all organizations are using the Incident Management System (IMS) (see Chapter 6). With this system each organization would have a Public Information Officer and a Liaison Officer, who form networks to problem-solve and share information.

### **Key Operating Assumptions for Pandemic Communication**

The following key operating assumptions for effective pandemic communication apply to all organizations in the Region of Peel with communication responsibilities:

- Each organization should be prepared to conduct pandemic communications in accordance with the roles and responsibilities outlined above;
- Communications need to be synchronized and consistent with communications from other levels of government. Some messages may differ depending on local pandemic activity and its timing;
- Coordination of messages with neighbouring regions and health units;
- All public communications should be written in plain language and all pictures and graphics should be clear and easily understood, regardless of familiarity with the English language and literacy level;
- Key written materials (such as personal protection, where to go for care, or vaccine information) should be translated into the languages of need (i.e. top five most common languages, plus French) for use in the Region of Peel. These include: Punjabi, Hindi, Urdu, Chinese, Vietnamese, and French. If translations are not feasible, these materials should include the following translated statement: *“This information is very important. Please have it translated.”*; and
- Those responsible for pandemic communications should understand and apply the principles and best practices of crisis and risk communication.

### **Target Audiences**

Effective communications are targeted to specific audiences. Each health care organization should identify its own target audiences and develop messages and strategies to reach them. Target audiences may be classified as internal to the organization or external. External audiences may be classified as general (e.g. general public and media), healthcare sector and non-healthcare sector. Table 13.2 identifies the target audiences for Peel Public Health/Region of Peel pandemic communications.

**Table 13. 2: Target Audiences for Peel Public Health Communications**

<b>Internal</b>	<b>External: General</b>	<b>External: Health Sector</b>	<b>External: Non-Health Sector *</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Region of Peel staff;</li> <li>• Regional Council;</li> <li>• Executive Management Team (EMT);</li> <li>• Peel Public Health staff;</li> <li>• Human Resources; and</li> <li>• Regional volunteers.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• General public; and</li> <li>• Media.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Health care professionals: physicians, nurses, pharmacies, dentists, others;</li> <li>• Hospitals;</li> <li>• Long term care homes;</li> <li>• CCACs;</li> <li>• Paramedic services;</li> <li>• Mortuary Service;</li> <li>• Coroner’s office; and</li> <li>• Community support service agencies.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Schools, colleges and universities;</li> <li>• Child care providers;</li> <li>• GTAA;</li> <li>• Local municipalities;</li> <li>• Local fire departments;</li> <li>• Peel Regional Police;</li> <li>• Essential services (e.g. utilities);</li> <li>• Social Services agencies;</li> <li>• Multi-faith/religious groups;</li> <li>• Multicultural services;</li> <li>• Animal surveillance &amp; agriculture groups;</li> <li>• Community volunteer organizations; and</li> <li>• Large and small businesses.</li> </ul>

**\* Note: All Communication to the non-health care sector will be coordinated through PREP.**

## Key Messages for Pandemic Communications

Key messages are tailored to specific audiences for each phase. Proposed key messages by pandemic phase are shown in Table 13.3.

**Table 13. 3: Key Messages by Pandemic Phase**

### **Pandemic alert period (Phases 3, 4, and 5):**

- Region of Peel has the *Pandemic Influenza Plan for the Health Sector in Peel*;
- Know the signs and symptoms of pandemic influenza;
- Use infection control practices such as hand washing, covering your cough and sneeze, staying home when you're sick, to reduce the spread of disease;
- Prepare personally for pandemic influenza;
- Organizations and businesses should prepare pandemic plans; and
- Vaccine for pandemic influenza is not available at this time and will take time to be developed once a pandemic begins.

### **Pandemic period (Phase 6):**

- Pandemic influenza is here;
- There exists a *Pandemic Influenza Plan for the Health Sector in Peel*;
- Some government services have been suspended;
- Know the signs and symptoms of pandemic influenza;
- Use infection control practices such as hand washing, covering coughs and sneezes, and staying home when sick to reduce the spread of disease;
- Call the Region of Peel or Telehealth or visit the Region of Peel website for information on how to care for the ill, infection prevention and control, self-treatment, when are where to seek medical attention;
- Activate pandemic/business continuity plans;
- Activate personal preparedness plans for pandemic influenza;
- Peel Public Health is responsible for the distribution and administration of the pandemic vaccine in Peel (when available);
- Vaccine for pandemic influenza is/is not available at this time; and
- Information on school and public places closures.

### **Post-pandemic period:**

- Thank everyone for support and co-operation;
- Call the Region of Peel or visit the website for latest updates; and
- Continue using infection control practices such as hand washing, covering your cough or sneeze, and staying home if sick.

## **Communication Strategies**

Each health care organization needs to develop communication strategies to reach its target audiences. The main communication strategies that will be used by the Region of Peel and Peel Public Health during the pandemic alert period (Phases 3, 4, 5) and the pandemic (Phase 6) are listed below and described in more detail in Table 13.4:

- Website;
- Region of Peel and Peel Public Health call centres;
- Media relations;
- Educational materials;
- Advertising campaigns;
- Community outreach and presentations;
- Regional intranet (for internal communications); and
- Updates and alerts.

Rapid communication to large numbers of stakeholders requires modern communication methods, preferably electronic (e.g. email, internet, etc). Each health care organization should have the capability to send and receive fax, electronic communications, and should monitor these communications. Physicians are encouraged to have fax machines, internet, and e-mail access at their offices. All organizations should be prepared to participate in teleconferences and major organizations should consider videoconferencing capability. Expanded use of cell phones, mobile email devices, and other emerging technologies needs further consideration.

**Table 13. 4: Region of Peel Communications Strategies by Pandemic Period**

<b>Strategy</b>	<b>Pandemic Alert Period</b>	<b>Pandemic Period</b>
<b>Website</b>	<p>The Peel Health pandemic website will provide accurate and current updates on pandemic influenza for all target audiences during all pandemic phases. This includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pandemic and avian flu updates for all target audiences;</li> <li>• Pandemic 101 FAQs;</li> <li>• Fact sheets (infection prevention and control, personal preparedness, self-care, caring for the ill, etc) and translated materials;</li> <li>• Special updates for physicians and other health care providers;</li> <li>• Links and resources (downloadable educational materials, posters, presentations);</li> <li>• Travel advisories; and</li> <li>• Contact information.</li> </ul>	<p>The Region of Peel website will be the primary source of information for the majority of target audiences and contain the following information, in addition to previous list:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Regular updates on status of pandemic, possible reduction of Regional services, whom to contact, etc;</li> <li>• Additional fact sheets and translated materials;</li> <li>• Updates on closures of schools, malls, public places (if necessary);</li> <li>• Schedule of vaccination clinics (if and when available);</li> <li>• Health professionals section; and</li> <li>• Additional links and resources (downloadable educational materials, posters, presentations).</li> </ul>
<b>Call Centre</b>	<p>In the pandemic alert period, phone calls about pandemic influenza will be handled by the Customer Contact Centre at the Region of Peel. Peel Public Health will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Share key message with Customer Contact Centre, Communicable Disease Call Centre and Environmental Health Duty Desk (second tier);</li> <li>• Ensure all pandemic updates, educational materials, media releases and communications to external groups are shared with call centres; and</li> <li>• Include the call centre's phone number on all educational materials and communications.</li> </ul>	<p>During the pandemic, the first tier Customer Contact Centre will be expanded and staff trained to handle a wider range of questions. Other enhancements:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Add phone message with the latest pandemic update for those on hold and calling after hours.</li> </ul>
<b>Media relations</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Issue media releases;</li> <li>• Work with spokespersons to ensure consistent messages;</li> <li>• Organize media conferences/briefings, when necessary;</li> <li>• Respond to media inquiries;</li> <li>• Arrange for media interviews; and</li> <li>• Respond to rumours and inaccurate information.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Same as pandemic alert period;</li> <li>• Activation of media centre; and</li> <li>• Public Service Announcements.</li> </ul>

**Table 13. 4: Region of Peel Communications Strategies by Pandemic Period (cont'd)**

Strategy	Pandemic Alert Period	Pandemic Period
<b>Educational and design materials</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Continue to develop and distribute educational materials on pandemic influenza, infection prevention and control, emergency preparedness for all target audiences - displays, fact sheets, hand-washing posters, etc;</li> <li>• Design update/alert templates for key stakeholders (physicians, health care providers, schools, EMT, Regional Council, others);</li> <li>• Collect translated fact sheets prepared by province or other municipal governments. Develop additional translated materials, if necessary.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Same as pandemic alert period;</li> <li>• Develop additional fact sheets as needed; and</li> <li>• Develop signage for vaccination clinics.</li> </ul>
<b>Advertising campaign</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consider newspaper ad campaign with infection prevention and control messages (hand-washing, cover your cough and sneeze, stay home if ill).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consider media advertising (local newspapers, transit ads) with infection prevention and control messages (hand-washing, cover your cough and sneeze, stay home if ill);</li> <li>• Use mobile signs to promote call centre and website;</li> <li>• Consider transit ads with messages about infection prevention and control; and</li> <li>• Place ads in local newspapers with vaccination clinic schedule (if and when available).</li> </ul>
<b>Community outreach and presentations</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ongoing presentations for target audiences on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Pandemic and avian influenza</li> <li>○ Infection prevention and control; and</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Consider community forums to raise awareness about pandemic influenza, infection prevention and control.</li> </ul>	
<b>Regional intranet</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pandemic 101 information and key messages, infection prevention and control, personal preparedness, etc;</li> <li>• FAQs on pandemic response, roles of Regional staff, HR-related questions; and</li> <li>• Dedicated hotline for Regional staff.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Same as for the pandemic alert period;</li> <li>• Enhance FAQs for Regional staff; and</li> <li>• E-mail and voice broadcasts for Regional staff.</li> </ul>
<b>Updates and alerts for key stakeholders</b>	<p><i>Health care sector stakeholders:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Physicians – provide Health Professionals Updates, pandemic website updates, rounds, forums; and</li> <li>• Hospitals, EMS, LTC homes, CCACs, pharmacies, dentists, other stakeholders – provide email and fax updates and alerts, teleconferences, face-to-face meetings, forums (TBC), pandemic website.</li> </ul> <p><i>Non-health stakeholders:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide timely updates via e-mails, fax, and pandemic website.</li> </ul>	<p><i>Health care sector stakeholders:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Same as for pandemic alert period;</li> <li>• Increased frequency of alerts and health information;</li> <li>• Add health care professionals section to pandemic website;</li> <li>• Add dedicated phone lines; and</li> <li>• Regular teleconferences for Health Sector Coordinating Committee.</li> </ul> <p><i>Non-health stakeholders:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Same as for pandemic alert period.</li> </ul>

## **Monitoring and Evaluation**

Evaluation is an ongoing and evolving process throughout all pandemic phases. Timely feedback allows modification or enhancement to pandemic messages. Specific monitoring and evaluation measures will include:

- Daily monitoring, and analysis, of media coverage (e.g. number of articles, editorials, their tone and content);
- Number of website visits;
- Number of calls to the Customer Contact Centre (ROP);
- Number and nature of requests for educational materials;
- Number and nature of comments and feedback from general public and other audiences;
- Attendance and nature of comments and feedback at community forums; and
- Number of presentations to target audiences and feedback/comments from attendees.

## **Next Steps**

Peel Public Health will:

- Continue to develop the educational materials that will be needed in a pandemic;
- Continue to enhance the pandemic website and to add downloadable materials for key stakeholders; and
- Finalize plans for communication to health care and other key stakeholders during a pandemic.

All health care organizations should:

- Develop communications plans, strategies and materials for their own target audiences; and
- Ensure that they have technology in place for rapid communication with their health care partners through fax, monitored email and teleconferencing.