



RENFREW COUNTY AND DISTRICT PANDEMIC INFLUENZA PLAN

Executive Summary

Preamble:

The Renfrew County & District Pandemic Influenza Plan is intended to be aligned with existing Provincial and Federal guidelines, regulations and directions. The plan is specific to pandemic influenza and is not applicable to the management of routine respiratory illnesses. The plan has been developed in accordance with the Canadian Pandemic Influenza Plan (2006), the Ontario Health Pandemic Influenza Plan (September 2006) and other key documents and stakeholder input.

Chapter 1 Planning Approach

The overall goals of the Renfrew County & District Pandemic Influenza Plan are to minimize serious illness and death and to reduce societal disruption resulting from an influenza pandemic. This is the first version of a Renfrew County & District Pandemic Influenza plan.

Renfrew County & District Health Unit (RCDHU) initiated pandemic influenza planning in June 2004. In order to effectively plan for an emergency response, RCDHU sought input from key stakeholders in the health, education, emergency planning, social service, volunteer, and community sectors.

An ethical framework for local decision-making and references to relevant legislative authority are also presented.

Chapter 2 Pandemic Influenza

Influenza is a common virus that is present in our community primarily on a seasonal basis. A pandemic is a worldwide epidemic, which constitutes a global health emergency. Influenza pandemics have the capacity to cause serious mortality and morbidity as the population has little or no immunity to the circulating strains of influenza. Historically, influenza pandemics have occurred approximately every 35 – 40 years. Although there is no way to predict when the next influenza pandemic will occur, many health experts believe that it is overdue and planning should take place to deal with such an emergency.

Chapter 2 provides an overview of information about influenza, pandemics and the current concern re Avian Influenza in other parts of the world. The World Health Organization pandemic phases are reviewed, as well as the scope and impact of illness that is expected to occur in Renfrew County & District.

Chapter 3 Roles and Responsibilities

All governments and all sectors have a role to play in preparing for, responding to and recovery from an influenza pandemic. It is critical that roles and responsibilities are clear and that there is good communication and coordination of efforts.

Planning and preparedness efforts are continuing at all levels of government. Current roles and responsibilities for the World Health Organization, Public Health Agency of Canada, Ministry of Health and Long-term Care and Renfrew County & District Health Unit are presented in this chapter.

The World Health Organization, Public Health Agency of Canada and the Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-term Care have all released influenza pandemic documents to guide the local planning process and to address prevention, preparedness and operational activities for an effective response and recovery. The overall goal of these plans is to minimize serious illness, death and societal disruption in the event of an influenza pandemic.

Chapter 4 Surveillance

Surveillance activities will vary depending on the stage of the pandemic. At all stages however, surveillance activities will provide the information required to make informed decisions regarding the management of the pandemic. In the interpandemic phase, surveillance activities will focus on monitoring activity in other parts of the world. The World Health Organization is hoping that very aggressive surveillance will identify the first instances of human-to-human transmission. Early identification of human-to-human transmission will facilitate the rapid implementation of control measures to prevent or delay subsequent transmission, such as the use of antiviral medications, and public health measures such as isolation and quarantine. Although the first instances of human-to-human transmission are likely to occur in other countries, surveillance mechanisms in Renfrew County & District must also be able to identify this type of transmission in the unlikely event that this should occur locally.

In a pandemic alert phase, surveillance activities will focus on monitoring international sources of information in order to determine how the virus is behaving in other parts of the world, i.e. what age groups is it affecting; how is it being transmitted; what measures are effective with respect to prevention and treatment; how sick are people becoming etc. As well, surveillance efforts will concentrate on watching for the first signs of the introduction of pandemic influenza into Renfrew County & District to determine if control measures can prevent further transmission.

Once pandemic influenza has become established in our jurisdiction, surveillance activities will focus on determining the impact of the pandemic on the population. Indicators that will be measured include emergency department visits, hospital admissions, admissions to intensive care units, ventilator usage and influenza-related deaths. When assessment centre sites are established in Renfrew County & District, the number of visits to these sites will also be monitored. As well, should antiviral drugs and/or vaccinations be available, surveillance activities will monitor the use of these medications and any adverse effects related to their use.

Chapter 5 Vaccine and Antiviral Medications

The World Health Organization, the Public Health Agency of Canada, and the Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care all agree that a monovalent influenza vaccine will be a powerful tool for reducing disease, death and societal disruption during an influenza pandemic. Antiviral medications will also play an important role in preventing and treating influenza illness during a pandemic. During a pandemic, Renfrew County & District Health Unit will serve as the primary coordinator for the distribution and administration of vaccine and distribution of antiviral medications.

As it is likely that the supply of both antiviral medications and vaccine will be limited during a pandemic, the distribution of both will be controlled by the Ontario government. Establishing priority groups to guide the use of these limited resources during a pandemic is therefore necessary. The priority groups may change depending on pandemic epidemiology.

Ontario has removed the list of priority groups from the 2006 OHP/IP and will develop a provincial policy on the use of antivirals for prophylaxis based on the national policy (currently under development) and in accordance with the ethical framework for decision-making.

Ontario's goal is to obtain enough vaccine for the entire population but, during the early stages of a pandemic, vaccine will be in short supply. In this situation, the province will follow the national recommendations for priority groups for influenza immunization, adapting them as required to meet provincial needs.

These recommendations will be used by Renfrew County & District Health Unit to direct the distribution of stockpiled antiviral medications and distribution and administration of vaccine once it becomes available.

Chapter 6 Communications

Communication is an extremely important aspect of outbreak and crisis management. Clear, concise and timely messages from a credible source using multiple delivery methods is critical before, during and after an influenza pandemic. Renfrew County & District Health Unit will be the lead organization for public and professional communication within Renfrew County & District. Communications from RCDHU will be supported by provincial, national and international sources and information from local hospitals, long-term care homes and municipal leaders. Communications will be directed to the general public and to health care providers. Effective communication between those leading the community pandemic response is crucial.

Chapter 7 Health Services

The delivery capacity of health care services in Renfrew County & District will be challenged throughout an influenza pandemic. Health care capacity issues are already significant and will be further stressed with health care provider absenteeism and the increased volume of patients seeking health care for influenza.

Chapter 7 addresses the issues that will be faced by the health care system during an influenza pandemic emergency response. It is common knowledge that there is very little surge capacity available in the system. Human resource shortages will be a major issue during a pandemic emergency response.

Many of the health service issues require provincial planning direction e.g. hospital admission and discharge criteria, licensure issues for health care workers and triage guidelines. Consistency in the delivery of health care services across Renfrew County & District and the province of Ontario is essential. Renfrew County & District Health Unit will continue to work with key stakeholders to support local planning of Health Services.

Chapter 8 Public Health Measures

Public Health Measures are non-medical interventions that may be used to reduce the spread of the influenza virus. Public health measures include public education, case and contact management, community-based disease control strategies (i.e., social distancing, school closures and restriction/cancellation of large public gatherings), and travel restrictions and border measures. The type of public health measures used will depend on the epidemiology of the virus (e.g., pathogenicity, modes of transmission, incubation period, attack rate in different age groups, period of communicability, and susceptibility to antivirals). Important decisions will be made about community-based disease control strategies aimed at minimizing the transmission of influenza in the community. The Medical Officer of Health in consultation with other levels of government will be responsible for decisions regarding the implementation of community-based disease control strategies in order to best protect the public.

Public health measures to curtail community transmission should be consistently applied within and across jurisdictions. The severity of the pandemic strain and the stage of the pandemic, as it unfolds globally, would be considered when making this determination.

Chapter 9 Infection Control

This chapter outlines the basic principles of infection control related to influenza. General information on influenza is presented, including modes of transmission, communicability, incubation period and symptoms. Infection control practices are outlined for the general public. In addition, infection control references for health care and community settings are provided. Adherence to infection control practices is essential to minimize the transmission of influenza. Frequent and careful hand washing is emphasized as a key infection control strategy and may be the only significant preventive measure available, particularly early in a pandemic. If the pandemic virus behaves differently (e.g., different routes of transmission, longer incubation period or period of communicability) infection control practices will be adjusted accordingly.

Chapter 10 Pandemic Self Care

Renfrew County & District residents will need to have access to basic information for caring for individuals with influenza. This information may support caring for a family member or providing self care. The information provided in chapter 10 outlines how people will know if they have influenza and basic advice on care.