

Preparing for a Flu Pandemic: How Will Ontario Be Affected?

This fact sheet provides information on the anticipated impact of a flu pandemic in Ontario, and what the province is doing to protect Ontarians.

How Will We Know That A Flu Pandemic Is Coming?

Since the majority of new flu strains emerge in Southeast Asia, it is very unlikely that a flu pandemic will begin in North America. The World Health Organization and public health experts around the world, including here in Canada and Ontario, are watching carefully to rapidly identify new flu strains that could cause a pandemic. However, because airline travel is much more common than in previous pandemics, experts believe that a flu pandemic could spread into all parts of the world and spread to Ontario within three months.

Important Ontario Flu Pandemic Facts

Although no one knows when a flu pandemic will occur in Ontario or how severe it will be, experts agree on the following information:

- Pandemics can occur anytime during the year.
- Once a flu pandemic arrives, each wave could last for eight weeks in a single community.
- A pandemic will likely occur in two or even more waves lasting approximately eight weeks, with the second wave of illness occurring within three to nine months after the first.
- A flu pandemic may make people sick in different parts of the province at different times and more people might get sick in one city than in another.
- According to current estimates, over the duration of the pandemic, about 35 per cent of

the population will have the flu severe enough to take at least a half day off work.

- About half of those who get sick will only need health information to care for themselves, and will not require formal medical care. The remaining people who get sick will need some form of medical care.
- More severe illness and a higher number of deaths than the usual seasonal flu is likely in all population groups.
- People with flu are infectious and able to transmit the virus for up to 24 hours before symptoms appear. Adults are infectious for three to five days after symptoms appear while children are infectious for up to seven days after symptoms appear. (**Note:** the period of infectiousness is based on how seasonal influenza is transmitted and may change in a pandemic.)

What Is the Ontario Ministry of Health Doing To Prepare For A Pandemic?

Ontario's Chief Medical Officer of Health and the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care (MOHTLC) are working with local public health units, primary care providers, hospitals, long-term care homes, and home care providers to prepare for a flu pandemic.

Developed by the MOHLTC, the *Ontario Health Plan for an Influenza Pandemic* outlines the steps that Ontario can take to prepare for a flu pandemic before it arrives, and to respond to the pandemic once it is here.

Ontario's pre-pandemic plans include:

- Developing the Ontario Health Plan for an Influenza Pandemic to support the health care system's response to a flu pandemic;
- Ensuring that health care workers are protected to the best extent possible;
- Monitoring circulating influenza strains and their effect in Ontario and in the rest of the world;
- Stockpiling antiviral drugs, equipment needed for immunization and personal protective equipment;
- Setting up distribution systems so drugs and protective equipment can be quickly distributed where they are needed;
- Strategies to optimize the availability of health human resources;
- Planning for the implementation of alternate assessment, treatment and referral centres (flu centres) to keep individuals who are ill with flu away from hospitals;
- Developing information for the public and health care providers; and
- Setting up communications systems that will provide fast and accurate updates to Ontarians on how to protect and care for themselves and their families.

The MOHLTC also co-ordinates its efforts with the Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC). The Agency developed the national flu pandemic strategy called the *Canadian Pandemic Influenza Plan*.

What Happens When A Flu Pandemic Arrives In Canada?

When a virus that can cause a flu pandemic has been found in Canada, public health officials and health care providers will follow the guidelines laid out in the *Canadian Pandemic Influenza Plan*, the *Ontario Health Plan for an Influenza Pandemic*, and their local pandemic plans to control the spread of the virus.

Ontario's Chief Medical Officer of Health is responsible for keeping Ontarians informed. This will be done through a variety of different media outlets, including:

- Influenza bulletins and fact sheets on our website;
- Free telephone advice and information via TeleHealth Ontario (1-866-797-0000), or INFOline (1-866-801-7242);
- Media briefings and press conferences; and
- Advertising campaigns.

At a national level, the Public Health Agency of Canada will operate an around-the-clock public information line, in addition to the weekly *FluWatch Bulletin* and other fact sheets available on their website : <http://www.phac-spc.gc.ca/fluwatch/index.html>.

For More Information

Visit our website at www.health.gov.on.ca/pandemic

Call INFOline 1-866-801-7242

TTY 1-800-387-5559