

# City of Windsor Pandemic Influenza Response Plan

## Tools for Business Continuity Planning

# COMMUNICATIONS



June 2006

## **THE COMMUNITY'S COMMUNICATIONS**

### ***What the Windsor Essex County Health Unit and the City of Windsor are doing***

Effective internal and external communications are essential to a coordinated response to an Avian Influenza pandemic. The Windsor Essex County Health Unit, working in concert with the City of Windsor and other levels of government will need to share accurate, timely and consistent information about what is known about community activities and leadership in relation to Avian Flu. During a pandemic, media and public attention will be intense, and information demands will continue over several months. Sustaining public and workplace confidence over that time will be challenging.

The role that communication will have in all stages of a pandemic, from preparations to recovery, should not be underestimated. For this reason, the development of a Communication Plan is considered to be a priority in the Pandemic Planning process

The Medical Officer of Health has presented to City Council the Windsor Essex County Pandemic Planning Committee, on which the City of Windsor and various emergency services sit, and the Windsor-Essex County Pandemic Influenza Plan. The committee includes a Communications Subcommittee that has developed a WEC Communications Plan for Avian Flu pandemic. In that the City of Windsor is a key partner with the Windsor Essex County Health Unit in the pandemic strategy, the City of Windsor's staff Pandemic Planning Committee has developed a corporate pandemic plan that supports the community plan.

### ***Who's in charge of public health?***

Under legislation, the Medical Officer of Health bears a primary responsibility for community health directives, and so he and this community committee carry a substantial burden for community planning and communication for Avian Flu, while the City of Windsor and its Pandemic Planning Committee bears responsibility for planning general community leadership and delivery of service and emergency service in times of pandemic. The Medical Officer of Health is the regional spokesperson on matters of public health.

## ***Who's in charge during Civic Emergency?***

When the City of Windsor **Emergency Response Plan** is activated, one of the key functions is the co-ordination and release of accurate information to the news media, issuance of authoritative instructions to the public, and immediate responses to or referrals for, information concerning any aspect of the emergency.

The Medical Officer of Health, the Mayor and the Corporation of the City of Windsor would be essential to the City of Windsor Emergency Response Plan and the Emergency Operations Centre/Community Control Group in a state of **Civic Emergency as declared by the Mayor** as a result of Avian Influenza pandemic. Other community public and private organizations are developing internal business/communications at the behest of the Medical Officer of Health and are participating in the Windsor Essex County Pandemic Planning Committee. They may also be summoned to the Emergency Operations Centre by the Community Control Group in time of Civic Emergency.

**The Community Control group, including the Mayor and the Medical Officer of Health, is in charge in Civic Emergency.**

The Community Control Group (CCG) – is a group of officials who are responsible for coordinating the provision of the essential services necessary to minimize the effects of an emergency on the community.

The CCG consists of the following officials:

- Mayor of the City of Windsor, or alternate;
- Chief Administrative Officer, or alternate;
- Chief of Police, or alternate;
- Fire Chief, or alternate;
- Public Works Representative, or alternate;
- Medical Officer of Health, or alternate;
- Social Services Representative, or alternate;
- Emergency Medical Services (EMS), or alternate;
- Emergency Management Coordinator, or alternate;
- Local electrical/water utility representative, or alternate, if required;
- General Manager Client Services, or Alternate.

Additional personnel called or added to the CCG may include:

- Telecommunications Coordinator;
  - Emergency Management Ontario Representative;
  - Ontario Provincial Police Representative;
  - Liaison staff from provincial ministries;
  - Any other officials, experts or representatives from the public or private sector as deemed necessary by the CCG.

## ***Communications in Civic Emergency***

In order to fulfill these functions during an emergency, the following positions are established:

- 1) Emergency Information Officer – City Corporate Communications Lead)
  - 2) Community Spokesperson (Mayor/ CAO or designates); and
  - 3) Citizen Inquiry Supervisor - 311 Call Centre Manager).
- ▶ The Primary site for the Emergency Information Centre (EIC) is at the Municipal Emergency Operations Centre. A media briefing facility will be located at Windsor Public Library, 850 Ouellette Ave. Depending on the nature of the emergency, it may be necessary to establish a media information area adjacent to the emergency site, as decided by the Community Control Group. This area, if established, will be staffed as determined by the community spokesperson.
  - ▶ The Citizen Inquiry Section is to be located at the 311 Call Centre, if possible and practical, under the supervision of the Manager of Customer Services & Support.
  - ▶ Communications will occur through news releases and conferences and mass media as well as through the 311 City information telephone service, the City website <http://www.citywindsor.ca>, the Windsor Essex County Health Unit website <http://www.wechealthunit.org>, e-mail trees to all member organizations of the Windsor Essex County Pandemic Planning Committee and its communications subcommittee. Emergency volunteers are on call for door-to-door communications, and language and ethnocultural groups can be reached with translated information through the contact network of the Multicultural Council.

### ***What's being said?***

Key messages can be divided into two initial phases: the Preparedness Phase as addressed by the Windsor Essex Health Unit and its committees, and the Response Phase in which the Medical Officer of Health is involved with the Windsor and Essex County Emergency Operations Centre. Response messages are likely to be overlaid by emergency messages in a period of continuing or worsening emergency. In the third, Recovery Phase, all participants would assess performance.

## In the Preparedness Phase:

### Public Issues

What is pandemic flu?

When will it occur?

How will it affect me?

What can I do to prepare?

Who do I contact for more information?

### Key Messages

These focus on general information on pandemic, infection control practices and preparation:

- 1) Pandemic Flu is a worldwide outbreak of flu. Pandemic is different from regular flu because it is a new virus that has not yet been identified. Regular flu strains are generally identified before the flu season arrives.
- 2) It happened three times this century and scientists are predicting it will happen again.
- 3) It could occur at any time.
- 4) Pandemics occur in waves. The virus might be active for a few months, disappear for a few months and then return for a few months.
- 5) Based on Windsor Essex County's population of 402,629, the Windsor Essex County Health Unit estimates that up to 140,920 people (35% infection rate) could be affected by pandemic flu.
- 6) Of those, it is estimated that between 601 and 2113 would require hospitalization.
- 7) Mortality is projected at between 215 and 636 deaths.
- 8) Our health care system, local businesses and families will be affected as we respond to the demands that result from the number of people in Windsor-Essex who will become sick.
- 9) If available and effective, anti-viral medication could prevent/treat pandemic flu.
- 10) If and when available, flu vaccinations will be used to prevent pandemic flu.
- 11) If you are at risk for pneumonia – get your pneumonia shot. The most common complication of flu is bacterial pneumonia.
- 12) There are other things you can do to reduce your risk of becoming sick from flu.
- 13) You can prepare by getting your flu shot annually.
- 14) Practice good hygiene (cover your mouth and nose when sneezing or coughing).
- 15) Wash your hands frequently.
- 16) Eat healthy foods (keep your immune system as healthy as possible).
- 17) If you are sick, stay at home.
- 18) The Windsor-Essex County Health Unit, municipal governments, local hospitals, first response agencies (Police, Fire, Ambulance) and local businesses have been working together to prepare for a pandemic flu.
- 19) For more information, contact the Windsor Essex County Health Unit and visit its website at <http://www.wechealthunit.org>.

## In the Response Phase:

### Public Issues

Who is at risk?

What can I do to reduce my risk?

Who should I go to for help?

Who is eligible for anti viral/vaccine?

Will I have to pay? Will my insurance cover the cost?

Who determines eligibility?

Where do I go for more information?

### Key Messages

These focus on prevention/infection control practices and access to anti-viral/vaccine:

- 1) Anyone can get sick from pandemic flu. This is a new virus, to which no one is immune.
- 2) You can reduce your risk by practicing food hygiene.
- 3) Eat healthy foods. Keep your immune system fit.
- 4) Cover your mouth and nose when you sneeze or cough.
- 5) Throw your tissues in the garbage.
- 6) Wash your hands frequently.
- 7) Do not shake hands.
- 8) Avoid crowds if you can.
- 9) If you are sick, stay at home.
- 10) The federal and provincial governments are directing the distribution of anti-viral medication and the pandemic flu vaccine.
- 11) If you are (overall eligibility TBA – an essential worker?) you can receive anti-viral medication to prevent or treat pandemic flu.
- 12) Essential workers in healthcare, police and ambulance services will receive the vaccine as soon as it is available. By vaccinating essential service workers, we can ensure that essential services will continue to be provided to the community during pandemic flu. We need to protect them so they can help you.
- 13) There will be a limited supply of anti-viral medication and vaccine to respond to pandemic flu. Pandemic flu is worldwide and companies that can produce the vaccine in Canada can only produce what their capacity allows.
- 14) Viral infections are not treatable with antibiotics – flu is a viral infection. Do not ask your doctor for antibiotics to treat pandemic flu. Antibiotics cannot prevent viral infections and may cause harm.
- 15) If you are at high risk of developing pneumonia – please get your pneumonia shot. Pneumonia is a serious complication of flu.
- 16) For more information, call 311 or visit the Windsor Essex County Health Unit website at <http://www.wechealthunit.org>

## **In the Response Phase – State of Emergency:**

A state of Civic Emergency or Provincial Emergency may be declared given scientific or popular perception of widespread risk to people. Declaration of Civic Emergency activates the Windsor Essex County Emergency Operations Centre (EOC) and the Emergency Response Plan. The Medical Officer of Health would operate in concert with the EOC. Response Phase issues would be compounded by emergency issues, which include but are not limited to:

### **Public Issues**

- ▶ Confusion and fear if the pandemic virus spreads rapidly, leaving little or no time to prepare
- ▶ Widespread pandemic and simultaneous outbreaks mean Windsor-Essex County cannot rely on remote resources
- ▶ Significant border-crossing problems
- ▶ Shortages of healthcare, emergency and essential services personnel due to illness
- ▶ Essential services will be severely disrupted
- ▶ Shortages of equipment and supplies
- ▶ Vaccine and anti-virals may be limited or not readily available early on
- ▶ Need to cope with large numbers of ill people, from all age groups
- ▶ Working conditions, health and safety, and absenteeism in all sectors
- ▶ Intense public and media anxiety

### **Key messages**

Emergency key messages will emanate from the Emergency Community Control Group/EOC and will address exigencies of the moment. They will overlay the ongoing repetition of all appropriate Response Phase key messages.

At the discretion of the Emergency Community Control Group/EOC, Response Phase – Civic Emergency key messages can include but not be limited to:

- 1) Public directives, warnings, advice or other messages of the Emergency Community Control Group (Mayor, the Community Emergency Management Coordinator, the Medical Officer of Health, Police Chief, etc.)
- 2) Emergency messages of all levels of government
- 3) Emergency service messages of the health sector
- 4) Emergency messages of community sectors, e.g. large employers regarding suspension of employment, etc.
- 5) Emergency service messages of large providers, e.g. City of Windsor services, Transit Windsor, EnWin Utilities, Bell Canada, large private sector providers, etc.
- 6) Accurate and timely descriptions of current facts regarding pandemic and response
- 7) Demonstrations of reassurance, calm, preparation and leadership
- 8) Appropriate reiteration of personal health and prevention/infection control practices

## **YOUR ORGANIZATION'S COMMUNICATIONS**

### *What should my organization be communicating?*

Each organization should have a Business Continuity Plan for pandemic and that plan should include a Communications Plan.

**Essentially, you need to know WHY  
WHO is speaking to WHOM  
and WHAT they are saying,  
WHEN they are saying it,  
HOW and for  
HOW MUCH?**

### **Why?**

In case of pandemic, your normal business operations will be disrupted. You will be short of staff. Your supply lines will not work properly. Your suppliers will be short of staff. Your customers might or might not understand. You will have to do something else — cut back, adjust or terminate services. Pandemic will become your business.

### **Who?**

**Who's in charge?** An individual or group with authority must authorize your Communications Plan. It is central to the continuation of your business.

**Communications team?** Who's briefing the decision makers about communications? Who's briefing the spokesperson? You need a communications team. Accurate information and insightful decisions about powerful key messages will have dramatic effects on your business — as will inaccurate information and bad messages. Use qualified people. Do as much as possible ahead of time. Hire a professional if you don't have one. Publicity and advertising are professional pursuits and, if pandemic starts, you might wish you had already prepared communications materials.

**Spokesperson?** Your spokesperson must be someone is well informed about your business, has been central to planning for this moment, and has the authority to interpret the information about your business – for your employees, for your partners, for your suppliers and their lawyers, for the regulators of your particular sector, for your customers, and for the community in general.



## To Whom?

**Who needs to know?** Who are your audiences? Identify them specifically and how to reach them.

**Employees?** Whatever you intend to say to whom, you had better tell your employees first, especially the frontline employees. Their decisive actions or confusion will speak volumes to your audiences — and you'll be hearing from the employees if there's a problem. They have lives as well, and they will also need to be bolstered by human resources messages and reassured by decisive community leadership messages.

**Partners?** Presumably, you can't deliver without them. Or at least you'll need to tell them if you can, which could be difficult. You will have to share messages, audiences and means of delivering messages to coordinate your service delivery and preserve it for the future.

**Suppliers?** Supply lines might need adjusting. Contracts might need liberal interpretation. Be proactive.

**Regulators?** Are you meeting the letter of the law in your sector? Are you meeting standards?

**Customers?** The telephone will start ringing the moment there is a perceived problem. Are your service plans ready? Is your service message ready? Head off disappointment and false expectations by devising means of reaching your customers before they reach you.

**The community in general?** The community includes all your more specific audiences plus a great many other people, including your competitors. You might have a need to inform the community what you are doing and how you are doing it, so as to address members of audiences that you might have overlooked and to address your reputation in the community. How well you do affects your activity during pandemic and your prospects after the pandemic is over. Media relations and effective, high profile service delivery affect this audience most.

## What?

The topics of your messages depend on the needs of your audiences, who are the people we've already talked about.

**Develop key messages** – a very few powerful messages that permeate all your communications.

- Identify the issues associated with the changes to your service delivery.
- Identify the key messages that address those issues.

**Internal messages, human resources** - To your staff, you will have to communicate the following:

- In the pre-pandemic stage: communication commences with staff regarding the possibility of a pandemic and preparedness to manage it.
- Influenza Fact Sheets.
- Health and safety issues and policies, Infection Disease policy, Leave of Absence policy, Work at Home policy.
- Messages might include hand hygiene, cough etiquette, social distancing, disposable surgical masks, eye protection, etc.
- Community and personal welfare key messages — this is a pandemic. Should your staff be at work? Under what circumstances? Working from home? What about their families? What about Health and Safety agreements? What about liability? The Medical Officer of Health and the Community Control Group will make decisions and directives. In preparation for the Response Phase to pandemic, the Outbreak Team and the Communications Subcommittee have prepared prevention/mitigation materials for distribution. Visit the Windsor Essex County Health Unit website at <http://www.wehealthunit.org> and, in the case of Civic Emergency, the City of Windsor website at <http://www.citywindsor.ca/>. Your organization must interpret them and communicate what they mean in terms of your employees' circumstances.
- Required staffing needs to keep essential services running.
- Adjustments due to absenteeism during a pandemic emergency.
- Temporary arrangements during the emergency period.

**Internal messages, service messages, internal** - Realistically, what services do you intend to provide and how?

- What does this mean for employees? Decide ahead of time and arrange the means to communicate these messages on short notice. You will need internal messages about your essential services.
- Your partners also need to know your service messages, especially if they are helping to provide the services.

**External messages**

- Your precise service information, decided ahead of time.
- Your community obligations

## When?

There are essentially three phases.

- **During the Preparedness Phase**, the Windsor Essex County Health Unit – Community Infection Control and Prevention Committee – continues to implement its Communications Plan and activities that include continued promotion of the universal Influenza Immunization Plan (non-pandemic) and the promotion of pandemic planning to community organizations, employers, and health care organizations. Many materials exemplary communications plans, information sheets and other materials can now be found on the community's pandemic planning website at <http://www.wechealthunit.org>. You can use these to develop your own plans.
- **During the Response Phase**, as declared by the Medical Officer of Health and/or the Community Control Group, you will need to implement your Business Continuity Plan.
- **During the Post Response or Recovery Phase**, you will assess the response in preparation for the next emergency.

## How?

- **Strategies** - Your means of communication are divided into internal and external. Internal communications reflect and support external communications.
  
- **Internal strategy**– e.g. the organization will keep all employees up to date on community pandemic information and provide them with a full description of our organization’s service arrangements during this pandemic period.
  - **Internal methods** – e.g. a pandemic service procedures book to each employee, website, service meetings, memos, e-bulletins, staff intranet, service descriptions, corkboard bulletins, and telephone trees. If some staff members are working at home, how will you communicate with them?
  
- **External strategy** – e.g. at the beginning of a pandemic emergency we will provide all customers, suppliers, regulators and the community at large with an accurate description of our service during the pandemic period, and will be prepared to speak to emergency issues.
  - **External methods** – e.g. methods and tools include telephone blitzes, telephone information line, telephone greetings, website, and e-bulletins; radio TV and print advertisements; and news releases. Mail might be less than satisfactory during a pandemic. Even if you do not intend to use high profile external media relations, you must prepare for those with a spokesperson and key messages, as in pandemic the news might come to you whether you like it or not.

**Practical considerations:**

- ▶ In your organization, who has primary responsibility for communicating with the public/business partners/staff?
- ▶ Who is that person's back up in the event that this person is sick with the flu?
- ▶ Are there people in your organization who have sole access to incoming information, e.g., business information, incidence reports, complaints etc., if so, have you arranged for designates to receive this information?
- ▶ Does your organization maintain a central inventory of passwords to office equipment and electronic files? Is there a designate for the person who has responsibility for the inventory?
- ▶ If your information technology person is ill, whom can you turn if you experience computer problems?
- ▶ How does your staff communicate with each other during office hours and after-office hours? Is there an alternate form of communication they can rely on, e.g., cell phones, pagers etc?
- ▶ Who are your security contacts should there be a problem with physical access to your work location and is there a back up to your security contacts?
- ▶ If mail service is interrupted, are there critical items you need to receive or deliver that you will need alternative arrangements for?
- ▶ Does your organization send out time-sensitive letters or documents and is there a back-up system for these?
- ▶ How are courier packages generally received and sent out?
- ▶ How will you send out public service announcements and news releases?
- ▶ Do you have a process for consulting with the Health Unit if needed?
- ▶ Will employees and the public be able to access a website or telephone number to get updates on service delivery news?

**How much?**

Your accounting office will want to look at the possible scenarios. Service disruption can be expensive. On the other hand, communications will be absolutely necessary to the continuity of your business. Many options are relatively inexpensive, but advertising can be costly.

**Develop a critical path** - Put development of your Communications Plan and the plan itself on a definite timeline.

## The Post Pandemic Recovery Process

- ▶ According to the City of Windsor Emergency Response Plan, a community emergency may be terminated at any time by:
  - Mayor or Acting Mayor; or
  - City Council; or
  - Premier of Ontario.
  
- ▶ Lessons learned from past pandemics include the probability that there will be a 2<sup>nd</sup> and possibly 3<sup>rd</sup> wave to the pandemic. However, each subsequent wave may have a decreased affect on the population due to the likelihood that a vaccine may be available and that persons who were ill in the first wave should have an immunity for the virus in subsequent waves.
  
- ▶ You will want to let all your audiences know when you are fully back in business.
  
- ▶ Conduct a full **communications review**.

**WATCH FOR UPDATES ON THE WINDSOR  
ESSEX COUNTY HEALTH UNIT WEBSITE AT**

<http://www.wechealthunit.org>.