



City of Hamilton

## **Public Health & Social Services**

# **Pandemic Influenza Fact Sheet**

### **What is Pandemic Influenza?**

Pandemic means an outbreak of influenza or flu virus that quickly spreads around the world. The virus will be new, highly contagious and dangerous. Unlike current seasonal flu outbreaks, pandemics occur every few decades, the last major one in 1918-1919, which killed an estimated 40 to 50 million people worldwide. Although the occurrence is unpredictable, most infectious disease experts believe that another pandemic influenza is inevitable and imminent.

### **What is Influenza and how is it spread?**

Influenza or the flu is an acute respiratory illness caused by a virus. People who get influenza usually have a cough, fever, headache, muscle aches, stuffy nose and a sore throat. Influenza spreads easily from an infected person to others through coughing and sneezing. It is also spread by direct contact with contaminated surfaces or objects like unwashed hands, toys, eating utensils, etc.

### **What will be the results of a Pandemic Influenza?**

Past pandemics have shown that a large number of people can be severely affected. It is estimated that one third of the workforce will be absent. Emergency workers and front line health care workers will be in high demand. One of the biggest challenges will be the provisions of municipal and health care services.

### **What will be the effect of a Pandemic Influenza in Hamilton?**

As many as 367,000 people in Hamilton could become infected and 83,000 could require medical care. Over 500 people could die from the pandemic. Hospital emergency rooms and doctors offices will be severely overburdened. Emergency workers including police, fire, ambulance and nursing staff will be in high demand.

### **What is the government of Canada and the province doing to prepare for a pandemic influenza?**

To prepare for a pandemic emergency, both the government of Canada and the province of Ontario have plans. The Canadian Pandemic Influenza Plan details the national planning, monitoring, communications and response. The Ontario Health Pandemic Influenza Plan focuses on the provincial response and links with the national plan. Both plans try to reduce serious illness and deaths and societal disruption as a result of a pandemic.

## **How is the City of Hamilton preparing for a pandemic?**

Public Health & Community Services has developed an Emergency Response Plan to a pandemic influenza. This plan includes the development of a surveillance program to monitor absenteeism and influenza-like illnesses in Hamilton. The plan also gives detail information regarding communication, anti-viral medicine distribution, mass immunization strategies and plans to maintain essential services. The goal of the Pandemic Influenza Response Plan is to ensure that the communication and response by public health, city departments and the local health care community is efficient, coordinated and clear. During a pandemic, the local media will be the best source of information.

## **How could my organization prepare for a pandemic influenza?**

Businesses should develop business continuity plans to maintain critical services in the event of a pandemic. Organizations should identify core services and how to deliver those services if 10-20% of the workforce is absent.

## **What can I do to prepare for a Pandemic Influenza?**

An individual can prepare for a pandemic influenza by:

- Be informed. Know about the difference between influenza and a cold. A true case of influenza typically starts with a headache, chills and cough, which are followed rapidly by fever, loss of appetite, muscle aches and fatigue, runny nose, sneezing, watery eyes and throat irritation. Children may have nausea, vomiting and diarrhea, but these symptoms are uncommon in adults.
- Stay healthy. Keep healthy by exercising regularly and eating a healthy diet with plenty of fruits, vegetables and whole grains.
- Receive the annual influenza vaccine and if you are among the high risk group (elderly and those with chronic medical conditions) make arrangements to receive the pneumococcal vaccine.
- Develop an individual preparedness plan addressing issues such as:
  - supplies - keep a small supply of groceries, cleaning products, medication, gasoline and money on hand
  - daycare or school closures
  - illness in the family