

**Report to  
Rapport au:**

**Ottawa Board of Health  
Conseil de santé d'Ottawa  
17 April 2023 / 17 avril 2023**

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**Submitted by  
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**Ward: CITY WIDE / À L'ÉCHELLE DE LA VILLE      File Number: ACS2023-OPH-HPS-0002**

**SUBJECT:** Emergency Management at Ottawa Public Health – Annual Update

**OBJET:** Gestion des urgences de Santé publique Ottawa – Mise à jour annuelle

## **REPORT RECOMMENDATION**

**That the Board of Health for the City of Ottawa Health Unit receive this report for information.**

## **RECOMMANDATION DU RAPPORT**

**Que le Conseil de santé de la circonscription sanitaire de la Ville d'Ottawa prenne connaissance de ce rapport à titre d'information.**

## **BACKGROUND**

The [Ontario Public Health Standards](#) (2021) state, "*Emergency management is a critical role that boards of health play in ensuring that they have the capacity to respond to new*

*and emerging events and cope with a range of disruptions.*” It is one of four foundational standards that underlie and support all Ottawa Public Health (OPH) programs.

OPH’s extensive work within this standard ensures an integrated, safe, and effective response to, and recovery from emergencies, and that the organization can sustain prioritized public health core services when challenged with emergencies with public health impacts.

The City of Ottawa and OPH have adopted an all-hazards approach to emergency management. This approach evaluates hazards, assesses risks and allocates resources while maintaining response and management objectives, such as maintaining public confidence, protecting public health, and ensuring the safety of employees.

In situations where the response issue relates to public health and does not involve other City departments, OPH manages its own scalable incident management system (IMS) structure, in collaboration with community partners, and enhances its services, for example, activating a public health emergency phone line.

When there is a need for the City of Ottawa to enter an emergency response, the Office of Emergency Management takes the lead in coordinating the necessary actions from all City Departments. The City of Ottawa uses a functional approach to respond to emergency situations in which each department, including OPH, is responsible for the development of plans, processes, and procedures for its designated emergency support function, based on its mandate.

When the City enters an enhanced response, the Emergency Social Services Plan is activated based on escalation triggers, to coordinate a comprehensive approach to deliver basic services such as food, temporary shelter, and psychosocial support, essential to the wellbeing of those affected by a situation. Services and agencies contributing within the Plan include the City’s Emergency and Protective Services, Recreational, Cultural and Facility Services, Community and Social Services and OPH, as well as the Canadian Red Cross and The Salvation Army. OPH is currently actively engaged in the review of this plan, clarifying roles and responsibilities, based on recent enhanced responses, and collaborating in supporting priority populations.

In the event of an emergency with public health implications, the Medical Officer of Health would meet with the Board of Health Chair to discuss the situation and OPH’s role. The Medical Officer of Health would then advise the Board of Health of ongoing developments, as needed. The Chair may also act as spokesperson, as needed.

The purpose of this report is twofold. It serves to orient the Board of Health to OPH's emergency management role and responsibilities related to preparation, prevention/mitigation, response, and recovery, while advancing health equity in supporting the community and leveraging social capital as an emergency preparedness strategy. It also provides an update on emergency management activities since the last report, in April 2022, and emphasizes how OPH supports the Board of Health to make informed decisions on emergency management policy and direction.

## **DISCUSSION**

Since the last report in spring of 2022, OPH has been a key contributor in several responses. Document 1, attached, provides detailed definitions of the City of Ottawa's Emergency Response Escalation Levels. A complete listing of emergency responses in which OPH participated during the period covered by this report can be found in Document 2, attached.

The following provides highlights of OPH emergency management responses during this reporting period.

### **A. Extreme weather**

#### **i. Extreme cold and heat**

The City's Heat, Cold and Smog Planning Committee, chaired by Ottawa Public Health, meets regularly and updates resources for partners and residents in preparation for the heat and cold weather seasons to ensure people in our community are healthy and safe. This committee is made up of City departments and partners including: The Salvation Army Outreach Services, the Canadian Red Cross Ottawa Branch, Ottawa Community Housing, and Community Navigation of Eastern Ontario (211). OPH is responsible for communications to raise awareness of actions to prevent illness, injuries and deaths related to extreme heat or cold. These communications are disseminated to the public, to Council and to service providers who support priority populations.

#### **ii. May Severe Weather Event (Derecho)**

On May 21, 2022, an extreme weather event occurred in Ottawa; many residents were impacted, some experienced a multi-day power outage. OPH was integrated into the City EOC's Health and Human Needs Branch. As requested, OPH provided wellness calls, door-to-door wellness visits as members of the

Wellness Visit Taskforce to assess the needs of affected individuals and families, and to provide information and referrals. Also, within the response structure, OPH provided messaging on food and water safety for the general public. From an Environmental Health and infection prevention and control perspective, OPH contacted long-term care, retirement homes and other congregate settings to assess their access to power, food safety, safe water, additional needs for support and to provide education on potential health hazards.

## **B. Infectious Diseases**

### **i. The COVID-19 Pandemic**

OPH continued to contribute its expertise and resources to support vaccine operations. This collaborative work included promoting vaccination and communicating information to the public about eligibility as well as where and how to access vaccination. Epidemiological data by neighbourhood was utilized to diminish inequities in vaccination rates and increase uptake in neighbourhoods with lower vaccine uptake.

In late 2022, OPH received the findings from the Audit of the Governance of the City's Pandemic Response, which was presented and received at the City's Audit Committee on February 17, 2023. The Auditor General (AG) noted the dedication and commitment of senior leadership and staff and that the collaboration and relationships built between the City and OPH were key success factors in the response led by the Medical Officer of Health.

To enhance the effectiveness of responses, the AG recommended, and the City and OPH agreed, that the two organizations update applicable emergency management program documentation to ensure support functions, roles, responsibilities, and authorities, as well as support services, are clearly articulated especially as they relate to priority populations and those at increased risk, based on their mandates, expertise, and available resources.

### **ii. MPOX**

At the end of May 2022, OPH mobilized a comprehensive response to the emergence of MPOX (formerly referred to as monkeypox). OPH applied a health equity lens to our MPOX vaccination roll-out with a focus on gay and bisexual men who have sex with men. In collaboration with many community partners, OPH engaged Indigenous partners and shelter partners to ensure access. We adapted

to respond to barriers expressed from the community to ensure we reached eligible community members.

### **C. City's Response to the Convoy Protest**

The City entered the response level of Monitoring on January 25, 2022, in relation to truck convoys travelling across Canada heading towards Ottawa for a demonstration against COVID-19-related mandates. OPH was integrated within the Health and Human Needs section of the City's Emergency Operations Centre to mitigate any potential risks with public health impacts. The response was demobilized on March 2, 2022.

Aligning with the City Auditor General's Response to the Convoy Protest report, OPH is committed to its work with the Office of Emergency Management to leverage existing communication mechanisms in emergency responses to collectively escalate issues and engage the Duty Officer Network.

OPH continues to foster community resilience; particularly among priority populations that face barriers to accessing services and resources and therefore may be at higher risk during an emergency. Priority populations include, among others, displaced persons (e.g., Ukrainian refugees, asylum seekers, and residents impacted by evacuations), isolated seniors, persons with disabilities and those experiencing marginal housing.

During the reporting period, OPH maintained its commitment to protecting the health and safety of Ottawa residents by:

- Upholding standards under the *Health Protection and Promotion Act* and other legislation and establishing the OPH emergency management objectives and priorities.
- Supporting emergency preparation, prevention/mitigation, response, and recovery activities, building on lessons learned from previous responses to perform key activities.
- Ensuring 24/7 timely, integrated, safe, and effective response to, and recovery from emergencies with public health impacts. Through an on-call program, OPH provides timely follow-up of urgent infectious diseases, food-borne illnesses, adverse drinking water events, environmental health hazards, and other emergencies with public health impacts.

- Reviewing its emergency plans on a yearly basis, including the OPH Emergency Plan and Continuity of Operations Plan, to ensure they are apt to meet the needs of a prolonged emergency such as a pandemic or an extended severe weather event.

In August 2022, OPH received the results of the [third-party review](#) by Dr. Paul Gully of its COVID-19 response. This was an opportunity to assess what happened during the COVID response, what OPH did and why, and any related key learnings. The objectives of this review included examining:

- The goals and response of OPH to the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Whether the response was based on evidence.
- How the response was received, understood, and acted upon by stakeholders, and
- Making recommendations regarding preparedness for future events of public health significance.

Dr. Gully's recommendations continue to help guide OPH's emergency management into the coming year, as further outlined in this report, more specifically, in the areas of emergency plan review, training, evaluation, continuity of operations, health equity and inclusion, and employee wellness.

OPH also completed a review of its on-call services to assess its capacity to meet the 24/7 coverage per OPHS requirement, identifying process improvements and validating workloads.

Below is a description of some key Emergency Management activities by OPH, which are driven by the recommendations from the third-party review of the health unit's response to the pandemic, the Office of the Auditor General's finding and recommendations, and a focus on supporting priority populations.

### **Surveillance and Epidemiology:**

Surveillance functions and the science of epidemiology are cornerstones for all public health practice. Guided by surveillance and epidemiological data identifying potential risks and observing trends, OPH works to inform communities to effectively prepare for, respond to, and recover from emergencies such as the spread of infectious diseases like MPOX, or disruptions caused by severe events.

## **Communications:**

Communications at all levels, and for every member of our community is one of the most important elements of emergency management. Clear, accessible, concise, multi-lingual, culturally appropriate and timely communications contribute to preparedness actions and behaviors. This includes:

- OPH RAVE Alert Emergency Mass Notification System to raise awareness on issues of public health significance for health care and social service partners, well as OPH employees. This tool is also used to disseminate emergency notifications to employees, guide their actions related to [protective measures](#), provide situational awareness about an incident and deploy staff during an emergency.
- OPH providing expert content via the Emergency Information Officer to Public Information Media Relations (PIMR). In an activated City response,
- Tailored communications to residents through public information channels, and expert content to client services centre (311) for dissemination, providing guidance and promoting preparedness related to various hazards, such as extreme heat and cold and power outages.

The Office of the Auditor General's pandemic response audit highlighted that a joint communications approvals process with the Emergency Operations Centre, developed during the COVID response, was beneficial in that it enhanced consistency, accuracy, and integrated messaging.

## **Training:**

To meet the provincial requirement that boards of health exercise their emergency management plans, OPH participated in the EOC-Control Group (EOC-CG) annual tabletop exercise. OPH continues its recovery activities and is advancing training with those taking on supervisory and front-line IMS roles to fulfill their responsibilities during an emergency response.

As part of our ongoing commitment to communications Rave Alert Emergency Mass Notifications System training sessions and drills are conducted regularly. These learning opportunities make it possible for the health unit to rapidly scale up operations to respond to multiple emergencies and provide timely health alerts to healthcare and social service partners.

## **Partnerships:**

Provincially, Ontario Health is tasked by the Ministry of Health to oversee many publicly funded healthcare services and is therefore the lead in establishing emergency response structures (IMS) to coordinate responses across the health care system. Ontario Health East provides direction for municipal / regional healthcare sector response coordination, in partnership with local hospitals and other health system partners.

Strong relationships sustain OPH's work with its many health system, social services, and community partners, enabling the health unit to address issues with potential negative health impacts.

In collaboration with the Office of Emergency Management and Community and Social Services, OPH is engaging with priority populations and service providers to focus on equity and inclusion by integrating social determinants of health and socio-demographic data in its service delivery and emergency planning.

Stakeholder engagement was enhanced through work with interagency committees and emergency management professional networks, as a member of the City's Emergency Management Program, and health care system partners such as Hospital Emergency Preparedness Committee of Ottawa, INTERSECT, and the Ontario Public Health Emergency Managers Network.

## **Looking Ahead**

- As evaluation is an integral activity in emergency management, the recommendations provided by the independent review and audit reports will guide our work in the coming year. Monitoring and evaluating are built into all emergency responses. OPH will continue to engage in after-action reports, including corrective actions, as we gain insights from lessons learned.
- OPH will embed the theme of social capital to enhance its work on evidence informed "Social Capital in the Capital" emergency preparedness community initiatives. Resources will be dedicated to building, maintaining, and sustaining relationships with faith-based groups, and other backbone organizations and networks such as community associations to enhance their preparedness and capacity to support each other before, during, and after emergencies.



- OPH will maintain a strong focus on preparedness for extreme weather, such as multi-day power outages, which can cause disruption of services and severely impact priority populations.
- The Continuity of Operations Plan (CoOP) guides OPH's prioritization of core functions during a disruption to ensure the provision and maintenance of services and emergency support functions when public health is impacted. Within the annual (CoOP) review, teams will be consulted to conduct a more formal analysis of potential population health outcomes and adverse events as a result of potential prolonged service disruptions.
- Changes to the Emergency Management Program (EMP) documentation, in collaboration with the City's Office of Emergency Management, will be presented to the City of Ottawa's EMP Steering Committee for approval by the end of the year.
- OPH will continue to develop strategies to strengthen relationships and engagement with stakeholders and partners, including health professionals. Some examples include developing new web content in areas that are of most interest and use to them, as well as exploring more professional development opportunities for health care professionals.
- As employee wellness remains a priority, activities this year will include enhanced training, and reviewing scheduling and debriefing during and after responses.

## **RURAL IMPLICATIONS**

There are no rural implications associated with this report.

## **CONSULTATION**

No stakeholder or public consultation was required in preparing this report.

## **LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

There are no legal impediments to receiving this report for information.

## **RISK MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS**

There are no risk management implications associated with this report.

## **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

There are no direct financial implications associated with this report.

## **ACCESSIBILITY IMPACTS**

There are no accessibility impacts associated with this report.

## **ALIGNMENT WITH OTTAWA PUBLIC HEALTH STRATEGIC PRIORITIES**

This report aligns with all aspects of OPH's 2019-2022 Strategic Plan.

## **SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION**

Document 1 – Emergency Response Escalation Levels

Document 2 – Summary of OPH Emergency Responses 2022 – 2023 to date

## **DISPOSITION**

This report is provided for the information of the Ottawa Board of Health.

## Document 1

### **Emergency Response Escalation Levels** *(from the document: City of Ottawa's Municipal Emergency Plan 2022)*

**Normal Operations** consists of operations that service areas carry out according to their standard operating procedures, guidelines, legislation, policies, and procedures. When a response to Normal Operations is required, it is coordinated by Incident Commanders and service area Command Centres.

There are four levels of response escalation that require coordination through the Corporate Duty Officer / OPH Duty Officer:

- Monitoring
- Enhanced Operations
- Activated Operations
- State of Emergency

#### **Monitoring**

Monitoring involves City service areas, partners and stakeholders being made aware of a situation evolving municipally, provincially, nationally, or internationally, both privately and publicly, to understand how that situation may have an impact or consequences on Normal Operations. At this level, the Corporate Duty Officer and some or all Duty Officers may be notified and engaged.

#### **Enhanced Operations**

Enhanced Operations indicates a situation that is imminent or occurring and could threaten public safety, public health, the environment, property, critical infrastructure, and economic stability. This situation may also be politically sensitive. At this level, the Corporate Duty Officer and some or all Duty Officers are notified and engaged.

#### **Activated Operations**

Activated Operations indicates a situation that requires the engagement of the Senior Leadership Team through the mobilization of the Emergency Operations Centre Control Group (EOCCG) and the Emergency Operations Centre Operations Group (EOC Ops Group).

#### **State of Emergency**

A State of Emergency is considered when the city has entered an Activated Operations level situation and the Emergency Operations Centre Control Group recommends to the Head of Council that a State of Emergency be declared.

## Document 2

**Summary of Ottawa Public Health Emergency Responses  
2022-2023 (to date)**

<b>OPH Emergency Responses</b>				
<b>Description</b>	<b>Activation Level</b>	<b>Start Date</b>	<b>End Date</b>	<b>Days</b>
Significant Weather Event (Snowfall)	Monitoring	2022/01/16	2022/01/16	1
Health Infectious Disease COVID Immunization	Activated	2021/12/13	(2022/03/11	88
Omicron	Enhanced	2021/12/18	2022/05/03	137
Fire / Explosion on Merivale Rd.	Enhanced	2022-01-13	2022-01- 14	2
Truck Demonstration	Monitoring	2022-01-25	2021-01- 27	37
	Enhanced	2022-01-27	2022-01- 29	
	Activated	2022-01-29	2022-02- 06	
	State of Emergency	2022-01-06	2022-02- 24	
	Monitoring	2022-02-24	2022-03- 02	
Truck Demonstration / Next Generation Freedom Convoy	Monitoring	2022-03-25	2022-03- 26	2
Motorcycle Rally Rolling Thunder	Monitoring	2022/04/21	2022/04/27	9
	Enhanced	2022/04/28	2022/05/01	
Severe Weather Event (Derecho)	Enhanced	2022/05/21	2022/05/21	1
	Activated	2022/05/22	2022/05/22	11
	Enhanced	2022/06/02	2022/06/05	3
	Monitoring	2022/06/06	2022/08/08	63
Monkey Pox (MPOX)	Enhanced	2022/05/20	2022/10/31	164
Ottawa Race Weekend	Monitoring	2022/05/28	2022/05/29	1
Potential Significant Weather Event	Monitoring	2022/06/15	2022/06/16	1
Rogers Outage	Monitoring	2022/07/08	2022/07/09	1
Freedom Event in Solidarity with Dutch Farmers	Monitoring	2022/07/23	2022/07/23	1
Code Grey – HEPCO	Monitoring	2022/09/09	2022/09/10	1
Remembrance Day Ceremony	Monitoring	2022/11/10	2022/10/11	1
Measles	Monitoring	2023/01/12	Ongoing	63 +

## Summary of Extreme Heat and Cold (2022 to 2023 to date)

Extreme heat				
In late spring, OPH communicated to external stakeholders that starting summer 2022, OPH no longer communicates the Environment and Climate Change Canada heat warnings and special weather statements for hot weather. OPH recommended that those not already signed up, register for the <a href="#">EC Alert Me</a> emails and download the <a href="#">WeatherCAN app</a> to continue to receive alerts about adverse weather events in Ottawa, and that additional information can be found at <a href="#">Weather: general resources - Canada.ca</a> .				
Summary of Extreme Cold				
Frostbite Advisory (windchill -25C or colder) Warning (windchill -35C or colder)				
Advisory	Monitoring	2022/01/02	2022/01/03	2
Advisory	Monitoring	2022/01/07	2022/01/08	2
Warning	Monitoring	2022/01/10	2022/01/10	1
Advisory	Monitoring	2022/01/11	2022/01/11	1
Advisory	Monitoring	2022/01/14	2022/01/14	1
Warning	Monitoring	2022/01/14	2022/01/16	3
Advisory	Monitoring	2022/01/18	2022/01/20	3
Advisory	Monitoring	2022/01/22	2022/01/22	1
Warning	Monitoring	2022/01/23	2022/01/24	2
Warning	Monitoring	2022/01/25	2022/01/25	1
Warning	Monitoring	2022/01/26	2022/01/27	2
Warning	Monitoring	2022/01/28	2022/01/30	3
Advisory	Monitoring	2022/02/04	2022/02/06	3
Warning	Monitoring	2022/02/12	2022/02/13	2
Advisory	Monitoring	2022/02/14	2022/02/15	2
Advisory	Monitoring	2022/02/25	2022/02/26	2
Advisory	Monitoring	2022/02/27	2022/02/28	2
Advisory	Monitoring	2022/03/03	2022/03/04	2