

**Report to
Rapport au:**

**Ottawa Board of Health
Conseil de santé d'Ottawa
15 April 2024 / 15 avril 2024**

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Ward: CITY WIDE / À L'ÉCHELLE DE LA VILLE

File Number: ACS2024-OPH-EHI-0001

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

This report is intended to inform the Board of Health of Ottawa Public Health's (OPH) emergency management activities in 2023 and 2024 to date, and includes information on emergency responses, training, communications, and community engagement. The Ontario Public Health Standards (OPHS, 2021) state, "effective emergency management ensures that boards of health are ready to cope with and recover from threats to public health or disruptions to public health programs and services." It is one of four foundational standards that underlie and support all OPH programs.

OPH's 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 Emergency Management Guideline for Ontario was updated in February 2024. It "is intended to assist Boards of Health in developing, implementing, and evaluating their public health emergency management programs according to the requirements of the Standards, while aligning with national and international evidence-informed approaches to emergency management". The new guideline emphasizes the importance of health equity in emergency management planning and response, using an approach that considers how an emergency or disaster impacts the complex social, economic, health and other systems on which residents depend.

The City of Ottawa and OPH, with support from community partners, plan for emergencies using an all-hazards approach. This prioritizes planning for those hazards identified as most likely to impact Ottawa and its residents, focusing on a solid foundation of emergency preparedness that reflects the needs of Ottawa residents. It also ensures a collective understanding of priorities and objectives when an emergency response is required.

As of March 2024, both the City of Ottawa and OPH adopted a new emergency management framework: the Incident Command System (ICS), replacing the former provincial Incident Management System (IMS) framework. This is a standardized system that identifies and allocates the material and human resources needed for response, organized by their function, within a scalable structure. OPH will work with the Office of Emergency Management, as this change is fully implemented and as personnel is further certified for incident-related positions.

When there is a need for the City of Ottawa to enter an emergency response, the Office of Emergency Management coordinates the necessary actions from all departments. A functional approach is applied to respond to emergencies in which each department is

responsible for the development of plans, processes, and procedures for its designated emergency support function, based on its mandate.

When an emergency's scope is limited to public health impacts, OPH activates its own emergency response plans and mobilizes a response team, keeping the City's Office of Emergency Management informed. If an emergency managed by OPH then grows beyond the public health domain, the City's Emergency Operations Centre is activated. When the City enters an enhanced response, the Emergency Social Services Plan may be mobilized based on escalation criteria, to coordinate a comprehensive approach to deliver the following key functions: emergency reception and lodging, personal services, family assistance, reception and information, food and clothing and health services, essential to the wellbeing of those affected. Services and agencies contributing within the ESS Planning Committee Office of Emergency Management, include OPH, Recreational, Cultural and Facility Services, Community and Social Services, 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, and collaborating to enhance equity and inclusion in supporting priority populations.

DISCUSSION

Since the last report in the spring of 2023, OPH has been a key contributor in several emergency 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.

Although emergency responses over the last year were not as prolonged as in 2022, ongoing work demands persisted, (as OPH demobilized its COVID-19 resources), as did the need for consistent productivity, maintenance tasks, and ongoing projects to ensure continuous quality improvement and efficiency.

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

Extreme Heat

The Extreme Heat, Cold and Smog Plan was revised and shared with partners. The Extreme Heat, Cold, and Smog Committee now meets quarterly instead of biannually. At this time, aligning with the City's Climate Resiliency Strategy, OPH is working with the Committee to review the implementation of recommended actions to reduce heat related illness as identified in OPH's Health Impact and Vulnerability Assessment for Extreme Heat report. OPH Emergency Management continues to collaborate with the Healthy Environments Program, the City's Office of Emergency Management, and the City Water Services department to provide recommendations on location of water fountain/misting stations throughout the city, as one intervention.

OPH continues to encourage external interest holders to register for either the [EC Alert Me](#) emails or download the [WeatherCAN app](#) to receive alerts about adverse weather events in Ottawa. As well, OPH continues to amplify Environment Canada messaging to the public through social media.

Air Quality

When the smoke and debris of wildfires during the summer of 2023 caused a sharp increase in air pollution in Ottawa, OPH shared key messages from the Ministry of Health with partners such as schools, childcare, and other service providers and provided the public with information on how best to protect their health. Additionally, N95 respirators were distributed through Community Health and Wellness Hub locations.

Hepatitis A

OPH responded to notice of an individual that tested positive for hepatitis A in a local elementary school in May 2023. A response structure was established to work closely with the school board and the OPH School Health program to reduce the likelihood of transmission to close contact through contact tracing.

OPH collaborated with public health partners in Québec on contact tracing efforts. This collaboration allowed for consistent communication and messaging across the provincial border.

Measles

OPH implemented a monitoring level response structure in mid-January 2023 in response to increased measles activity across Canada. The goals of the response were to protect public health by minimizing morbidity and mortality related to measles and maintain public confidence in OPH. Key strategies included delivering routine immunizations to eligible students, providing information to health care providers on clinical assessment and testing, health education to Ottawa residents, and preparing various OPH programs for measles-related activities. OPH returned to normal operations in April.

An enhanced measles response was again initiated in mid-October, when two Outaouais residents tested positive for the virus after returning from travel abroad. A local hospital emergency room was identified as a site of potential exposure to these individuals, leading OPH to promptly notify individuals present during the exposure period to provide education and post-exposure vaccination, if warranted. Once it was determined that no known local transmission occurred, OPH demobilized its response team and returned to normal operations in early November 2023.

In response to increasing measles cases in Ontario and Québec, a monitoring level response structure was struck mid-March 2024 to enhance preparedness for contact tracing, immunization, communications, and liaison efforts. OPH remains in communication with health sector partners as they prepare for potential increases in demand for testing and other related services such as post-exposure prophylaxis.

2024 Solar Eclipse

In preparing for the solar eclipse, OPH joined various City departments within the City's Solar eclipse workgroup, led by the Office of Emergency Management, to share information and plan for preparedness and mitigation of possible impacts to City services and residents. The City of Ottawa's EOC entered Monitoring Operations on February 29, 2024.

OPH played a key role in these preparations, focusing primarily on communications about health risks and safe viewing practices. OPH also participated in Provincial calls facilitated by Healthy System Emergency Management Branch / Ministry of Health Emergency Operations Centre to enhance planning, and to share resources across several ministry partners.

On the day of the eclipse, the EOC will transition to Enhanced Operations, and OPH will contribute to a coordinated approach to managing this event.

Creating Conditions to Live Well and Thrive (Strategic Goal 2)

Many OPH Emergency Management program priorities align with OPH's strategic plan, most notably Strategic Goal 2, which has the following strategic objective and desired outcomes:

Strengthen relationships by adopting a whole of community approach to emergency management so that the people who are most impacted by local emergencies are supported through:

- A. Community engagement and community action are strengthened in collaboration with other OPH teams and partners through promoting relationships and networks for community support and data for decision-making.
- B. Increase the OPH workforce's capacity, and resilience to manage emergencies with public health impacts is increased.

a. Community Engagement and Action

OPH is committed to addressing the needs of priority populations in its emergency management efforts. The program has been actively engaged with other OPH programs such as Health Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion and Chronic Disease Prevention, and community partners such as Ottawa Community Housing and Aging in Place, as well as the Canadian Red Cross and the Council on Aging to implement the Social Capital in the Capital initiative, which focuses on building, strengthening, and sustaining relationships, social connections, and networks between community agencies and faith-based organizations, families, friends, and neighbors, preparing residents to access resources and to help each other before, during, and after emergencies.

OPH Emergency Management has also joined efforts with the Healthy Growth and Development Program to integrate emergency preparedness information to Parenting in Ottawa tailored to the communities they serve.

In early 2024, OPH collaborated with the City's Office of Emergency Management and Accessibility Office to host a virtual session on emergency preparedness for individuals with disabilities. The session aimed to provide resources and information on preparing for emergencies, making plans, creating emergency kits, and emphasizing the importance of staying connected. The event, attended by over 200 participants from diverse backgrounds, highlighted the community's keen interest in integrating emergency preparedness into their lives. The session concluded with a facilitated discussion to gather insights, address concerns, and explore opportunities for future collaboration.

OPH maintains ongoing connections with health sector and other partners in the community disseminate information to the public such as safety measures and supports available through various channels, including social media, web content, television, and radio.

b. Increasing the OPH Workforce's Capacity and Resilience

OPH is continuously working to increase the capacity of its workforce to prepare for and manage emergencies. Dr Gully's assessment of OPH's response to COVID-19, which was accepted by the [Board of Health on September 8, 2022](#), guides the work to build capacity across many programs across OPH. The team has been actioning the 18 recommendations, which focus on areas such as ensuring robust continuity of operations plans for prolonged emergencies, training for OPH employees involved in enhanced responses, and building organizational capacity in specialized areas to enhance our ability to respond to emergencies. Progress on these recommendations will be reported on through the bi-annual OPH Strategic Plan update to the Board of Health.

Aligning with our organizational commitment to Health Equity, OPH has introduced a new role for enhanced response: the Health Equity Officer. This new role will support the goal of achieving health equity in emergency responses by acting as a member of the response structure command unit to guide emergency response towards resolutions that reflect OPH's commitment to health equity in emergency management.

To strengthen internal capacity, in March 2023, a measles tabletop exercise was completed to prepare employees for a potential response. A second more complex measles tabletop exercise was led in March 2024. Through facilitated group discussion, the exercise examined how to strengthen OPH coordination and communication activities to manage an outbreak of measles in Ottawa. Participants expressed that their involvement did enhance their capacity and preparedness to be able to respond to a measles emergency.

In August 2023, OPH led the local session of the Ministry of Health's provincial Fall/Winter 2023/2024 Respiratory Surge Exercise, along with over 20 invited external partners, to exercise emergency preparedness and response plans in anticipation of the 2023/2024 respiratory season. This exercise identified several key points for emergency preparedness, including a need for greater focus on communication with priority populations, enhanced role clarity for emergency response teams and assessment of surge capacities that may be needed to respond to increased incidence of respiratory illness.

Additionally, OPH has updated its departmental Continuity of Operations Plan (CoOP) and is working with all OPH teams to develop program-specific CoOP's to enhance OPH's capacity to maintain critical services throughout a prolonged event.

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 measles and hepatitis A, or disruptions caused by extreme heat events.

According to the City of Ottawa, 2020, Climate Projections for the National Capital Region, Ottawa is experiencing warmer, wetter and more unpredictable weather. With continuing global warming (climate change), Ottawa can expect hotter summers and conditions that favor the formation of storms, tornadoes and wildfires. There will be wide-ranging repercussions for public health and safety, including from flooding, heat waves, and wildfires.

Report from the Office of the Auditor General

The Office of the Auditor General report recommended the development of a MOU or other tool between OPH and the City to ensure mechanisms are in place to enhance collaboration between the City and OPH during an emergency response.

Changes were made to the 2023 Municipal Emergency Plan where a new section on Public Health Emergencies recognizes “that while most emergencies may pose a threat to public health, some emergencies have broader population health impacts. During such a situation, OPH and the OEM shall develop Terms of Reference (ToR) to guide an effective City-wide response that leverages the framework of the MEP, while respecting the authority and technical expertise of OPH.” (MEP 2023)

This has been identified as a deliverable for 2024, in preparation for future responses.

Looking Ahead

OPH will continue to advance emergency management work as described in strategic Goal 2.

Ongoing collaboration between OPH Emergency Management, other OPH and City programs, and organizations serving priority populations demonstrates a commitment to inclusivity and to interest holder engagement, fostering a more interconnected, responsive, and resilient community. Moreover, actively engaging with priority populations is crucial to achieving long-term health equity goals, and to tailoring emergency preparedness efforts to meet diverse needs. Building upon OPH’s relationships enhances overall emergency management effectiveness, particularly in recognizing and addressing the needs of isolated older adults, people living with disabilities and those with special needs.

Continuous learning and improvement will characterize the program into the future as well. OPH will participate in the Emergency Management Ontario heat exercise in the spring and host a local extreme heat response tabletop exercise with the Extreme Heat, Cold, and Smog Committee members in Q2. Additionally, Incident Command System (ICS) training will be coordinated for OPH employees in the coming year. Every response involved hot and cold debriefs that inform OPH’s emergency preparedness and response work each year.

RURAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no rural implications associated with this report.

CONSULTATION

No interest holder 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 OPH STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

This report aligns with all aspects of OPH's 2023-2027 Strategic Plan.

SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION

DOCUMENT 1 – Emergency Response Escalation Levels

DOCUMENT 2 – Summary of OPH Emergency Responses 2023-24 to date

DISPOSITION

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

Document 1

Emergency Response Escalation Levels

(City of Ottawa's Municipal Emergency Plan 2023)

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 interest holders 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 and the Emergency Operations Centre Operations Group.

State of Emergency

A State of Emergency is considered when the city has entered into 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**

OPH Emergency Responses 2023 to March 1, 2024				
Description	Escalation Level	Start Date	End Date	Days
Measles	Monitoring	2023-1-12	2023-04-25	82
Visit President of the United States	Monitoring	2023-03-10	2023-03-21	11
	Enhanced	2023-03-21	2023-03-24	3
Severe Weather Event	Enhanced	2023-04-05	2023-04-08	3
	Monitoring	2023-04-08	2023-04-11	4
Spring Freshet	Monitoring	2023-04-18	2023-05-29	41
	Enhanced	2023-04-18	2023-04-23	5
Strike action	Monitoring	2023-04-30	2023-05-01	1
Hepatitis A	Monitoring	2023-05-25	2023-06-20	26
Ottawa Race Wknd	Monitoring	2023-05-27	2023-05-29	2
Air Quality (wildfire smoke)	Monitoring	2023-06-06	2023-06-09	3
Escapade Music Festival	Monitoring	2023-06-23	2023-06-26	3
Canada Day	Enhanced	2023-06-30	2023-07-02	2
Bluesfest	Monitoring	2023-07-06	2023-07-17	11
Severe Weather Barrhaven Tornado	Enhanced	2023-07-13	2023-07-14	1
	Monitoring	2023-07-14	2023-07-18	4
Severe Weather – Flooding	Monitoring	2023-08-10	2023-08-11	1
Capital Pride	Monitoring	2023-08-25	2023-08-27	2
Demonstrations Action	Monitoring	2023-09-19	2023-09-21	2
VIP Visit	Monitoring	2023-09-21	2023-09-22	1

East Meets west convoy	Monitoring	2023-09-24	2023-10-23	29
Measles	Enhanced	2023-10-11	2023-11-07	26
National Remembrance Day	Monitoring	2023-11-11	2023-11-11	1
Planned demonstrations	Monitoring	2023-11-25	2023-11-25	1
Solar Eclipse Event	Monitoring	2024-02-29	Ongoing	1

In addition to 20 cyber–Security Advisories received from Ontario Health East, Ministry Cyber Security Ontario.