

**Report to
Rapport au:**

**Ottawa Board of Health
Conseil de santé d'Ottawa
10 February 2025 / 10 février 2025**

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**Submitted by
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Ward: CITY WIDE / À L'ÉCHELLE DE LA VILLE File Number: ACS2025-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

As OPH navigates the complexities of emergency management, our commitment to safeguarding OPH employees and the residents of Ottawa remains unwavering. This report not only highlights our achievements in 2024 to January 31, 2025, inclusively, it also outlines a course for future resilience to ongoing public health emergencies.

As per the Ontario Public Health Standards (OPHS, 2021), “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 integrated, safe, and effective preparedness for, response to, and recovery from emergencies, which enhances the organization’s capacity to sustain prioritized public health time critical services when challenged with emergencies impacting public health.

The Emergency Management Guideline for Ontario was updated in February 2024 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 all phases of emergency management (prevention, mitigation, preparedness, response, and recovery) using a “whole of society” approach, which considers how an emergency or disaster impacts the complex social, economic, health, and other systems on which residents depend and how they can coordinate efforts to better support impacted populations.

The City of Ottawa and OPH, with support from community partners, plan for emergencies using an all-hazards approach, in which emergency plans are developed to address impacts which are common across all emergencies, which focuses on a solid foundation of emergency preparedness that reflects the needs of Ottawa residents and

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.

When there is a need for the City of Ottawa to enter an emergency response, the Office of Emergency Management (OEM) coordinates the necessary actions from all City departments. A functional approach is applied to respond to emergencies in which each department is responsible for the implementation of plans, processes, and procedures for its designated emergency support function, based on its mandate.

In an emergency with public health impacts, OPH activates its own emergency response plans and mobilizes a response team. If an emergency managed by OPH grows beyond the public health domain, OPH retains a lead position concerning public health issues in collaboration with the established City Emergency Coordination Centre (ECC).

DISCUSSION

Since the last report to the Board in April 2024, OPH has contributed to 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 responses during this reporting period.

Extreme Heat

During an extreme heat event in June 2024, OPH escalated to a monitoring response that focused on assisting the City of Ottawa to identify and prioritize Ottawa residents at

greatest risk of negative health impacts including residents living in priority buildings in Q5 neighborhoods (e.g., high-rise buildings without air conditioning, subsidized housing, and areas with a high concentration of older adults living alone) and on promoting nearby accessible cooling locations.

To ensure the safety and wellbeing of our community, OPH also implemented its extreme heat communication plan. This included amplifying Environment Canada messaging to the public through social media, the dissemination of information about where residents could go to cool down, and how to prevent and recognize signs and symptoms of health-related illness, via its website, making information available in multiple languages. Printable multilingual resources were also distributed through outreach to those experiencing challenges in accessing material online.

The Extreme Heat, Cold, and Smog Committee is chaired by OPH and meets quarterly to coordinate their work, share updates, and meet objectives outlined in both the City's Climate Resiliency Strategy, and the Health Impact and Vulnerability Assessment for Extreme Heat, which the Board of Health was informed of in November 2024 and is currently underway. In addition, OPH contributes to the creation of communications products for public information, and monitors for trends in adverse health impacts related to extreme heat.

Measles

OPH entered Monitoring operations in March 2024 in response to increased measles activity globally, nationally, and in Ontario and Québec. The World Health Organization reported a 20% increase in the number of global measles cases in 2023 compared to 2022. In Ottawa, there have been nine confirmed cases of measles in the last ten years, the most recent in 2019. Weekly updates by health unit are available from Public Health Ontario's enhanced epidemiological summary, Measles in Ontario. The purpose of monitoring was to enhance preparedness for measles contact tracing, vaccination clinics, and for public and partner communications. Preparedness planning also occurred with health sector partners including with local hospitals and regional/provincial partners.

2024 Solar Eclipse

In preparation for the solar eclipse on April 8th, 2024, OPH collaborated with multiple City departments within the City's Solar Eclipse Workgroup, led by the Office of Emergency Management, to prepare, share information and mitigate potential event impacts on City services and residents, including possible increased traffic volume from travelers to view the eclipse resulting on local transportation challenges, service, and supply chain providers. OPH focused primarily on communications related to health risks and safe viewing practices. The City of Ottawa entered Monitoring Operations on February 29, 2024, moving to Enhanced Operations on the day of the eclipse, without any incident to report.

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

OPH is committed to serving the needs of equity-denied groups in its emergency management efforts, which aligns with Goal 2 of the OPH strategic plan: Creating Conditions to Live Well and Thrive.

Community Engagement and Community Action

The OPH Emergency Management Program is actively engaged with programs across OPH and external partners 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 neighbours to prepare residents to help each other before, during, and after emergencies.

To assess resilience through a public health lens, OPH refers to Public Health Ontario's Resilience Framework for Public Health Emergency Preparedness (2020) which highlights the complexity of emergency management and identifies 11 essential elements corresponding with 67 indicators.

Current resilience building activities are focused on accessibility, emergency preparedness for older adults, and community led preparedness as described below.

Accessibility

The OPH Emergency Management Annual Update presented to the Board of Health in April 2024 described OPH's role in co-leading a virtual session on emergency preparedness for individuals with disabilities, in collaboration with the City's Office of Emergency Management and Accessibility Office.

Since, in collaboration with the City's Accessibility Office, OPH participated in the City's annual AccessAbility Day. OPH promoted the importance emergency preparedness and social connectedness to Ottawa residents, and alongside interest holders and community members, participated in consultations for the new City of Ottawa Municipal Accessibility Plan (COMAP), to make Ottawa more accessible to all.

Most recently, OPH participated in phase 1 of a University of Ottawa research project on enhancing disability-inclusive risk communications and will engage in phase 2 in the year to come. The findings of the study will lead to the development of a framework to guide future risk communication processes.

Emergency Preparedness for Older Adults

In December 2024, OPH hosted a forum on supporting emergency preparedness for older adults, which brought together 40 participants representing community organizations serving older adult to facilitate dialogue, support collaboration and planning, identify the specific risks faced by older adults in our community, and strengthen future emergency preparedness initiatives and materials.

Community Led Preparedness

In June of 2024, OPH, South Nepean Community Health Centre, and Nepean Rideau Osgoode Community Resource Centre provided a "Helping Each Other Before, During, and After Emergencies" workshop to residents of a high-rise building in Parkwood Hills, a priority neighborhood which houses a large proportion of equity denied groups such as older adults living alone and newcomers. OPH continues to engage partners serving Parkwood Hills to explore community emergency preparedness strategies, focused on building and leveraging social capital.

As well, in September, OPH attended a Resiliency Day event where connections were made with Indigenous-serving organizations.

OPH also promoted emergency preparedness to members of the Inuit community at a Family Fun Day hosted by Tungasuvvingat Inuit.

Increasing the OPH Workforce's Capacity and Resilience

Dr Gully's assessment of OPH's response to COVID-19, which was accepted by the Board of Health on September 8, 2022, continues to guide many OPH programs, focusing on areas such as ensuring robust continuity of operations plans for prolonged emergencies, training for OPH employees involved in enhanced responses, and building expertise in specialized areas to enhance our ability to respond to emergencies.

In 2024, OPH introduced the role of Equity Officer into its ICS structure to identify disparities and guide interventions with consideration of the needs of equity-denied groups.

As well, training was offered by OPH via tabletop exercises included responding to extreme heat, a respiratory surge, and an adverse drinking water incident, as described below.

Extreme Heat

In Q2, a tabletop exercise was conducted to assess the response capacity of the Extreme Heat, Cold and Air Quality (EHCAQ) Committee related to an extreme heat event. Strengths noted were collaboration and effective communication while challenges included increased health risks to seniors living alone or people with disabilities in high-rise buildings. Actions identified to enhance resilience and reduce the likelihood of negative health outcomes due to extreme heat included further development of emergency preparedness mapping resources and advocacy for the installation of additional cooling resources, such as misting and water fountains across the City.

Respiratory Surge Planning

OPH led two respiratory infectious disease surge exercises in August 2024, one internal to OPH, and another with over 20 community partners. These exercises were designed

to test and enhance current respiratory preparedness and response plans and strengthen both health system and community-level readiness and resilience. The exercises effectively validated the roles and responsibilities of OPH, the City and its partners. Additionally, participants were able to identify potential readiness gaps and ensure they were addressed prior to the start of the respiratory season.

Adverse Drinking Water Incident (ADWI)

Early in the year, OPH hosted an ADWI exercise. Participants included City of Ottawa Infrastructure and Water Service, and Safety Consultants and as well as OPH employees.

The exercise was designed to test and validate ICS roles within the ADWI plan, communication readiness, identify any possible gaps. Participants articulated a clear understanding of the ICS structure that would be established, critical collaborative processes and areas for improvement that were incorporated in the 2024 version of the plan.

Additionally, in 2024, OPH participated in the following externally lead training:

- Exercise Heatwave, Practiced Ontario 2024 Active Observer Program
- Cybersecurity Exercise, Emergency Operations Centre Control Group
- Chemical Biological Radioactive Nuclear and Explosive (CBRNE) Task Force exercise, to review and discuss the effectiveness of inter-agency communication and collaborative response efforts.

Surveillance and Epidemiology

Surveillance and monitoring of epidemiological trends is vital to detecting timely information for situational awareness and to guide decision-making. OPH uses available data to inform communities to promote effective preparedness for, response to, and recovery from emergencies such as the spread of infectious diseases like measles and hepatitis A, or health hazards presented by extreme heat events.

Report from the Office of the Auditor General

In the 2022 Audit of Governance of the City's Pandemic Response, the City of Ottawa's Auditor General recommended improving coordination with the OEM so that mechanisms are in place to enhance collaboration between the City and OPH during an emergency response.

The City's Municipal Emergency Plan (2024) states "When emergencies have broader population health impacts, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, OPH and the OEM shall develop a 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." OPH is currently working with the City's OEM to develop a template for these Terms of Reference, to be completed by mid-2025.

Looking Ahead

Looking ahead to 2025, OPH will continue to advance emergency preparedness with a strong focus on the goal 2 objective to "strengthen relationships by adopting a whole of society approach to emergency management to reduce the likelihood of adverse impacts disproportionately experienced by equity denied groups and other priority populations". This work will be advanced through ongoing collaboration between OPH Emergency Management, other OPH and city programs and partners to build and maintain strong relationships and collaborative networks to engage priority neighborhoods and priority populations.

Organizational readiness will continue grow through skill development activities planned for 2025, including:

- ICS Role-specific training
- RAVE Alert training for on-call teams alert training for on-call teams to communicate emergency information via text, email, voicemail, and social media
- Exercises (Duty Officers, extreme heat, prolonged power / cyber disruptions)

Extreme weather events are anticipated to increase in both frequency and severity; therefore, OPH will prioritize enhancements to extreme heat, cold, and air quality

emergency preparedness and responses. Continuity of Operations for all potential disruptions remains a priority, including preparation for prolonged power disruptions.

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 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 2024 to January 31, 2025

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 2024)

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 and partners 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 (CDO) and some or all Duty Officers (DO) 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 and may also be politically sensitive. At this level, the CDO and some or all DOs are notified and engaged.

Activated Operations

Activated Operations indicates a situation that requires the engagement of the City's senior leaders through the mobilization of the MECG and the ECC.

State of Emergency

There is no legislative criteria for an emergency declaration. Rather, when the City has entered into an Activated Operations level, the specific context of the situation (including legal, operational, financial / economic considerations) will be assessed to assist the Head of Council in determining whether a State of Emergency should be declared.

Document 2

2024 OPH Emergency Responses				
Description	Activation Level	Start Date	End Date	Days
Solar Eclipse	Monitoring	2024-02-29	2024-04-09	39
Measles	Monitoring	2024-03-12	2024-04-17	36
Ottawa Race Weekend	Monitoring	2024-05-24	2024-05-27	3
Extreme Heat				5
OPH	Enhanced	2024-06-17	2024-06-21	
City of Ottawa	Monitoring	2024-06-17		
Canada Day	Enhanced	2024-06-28	2024-07-02	5
Bluesfest	Monitoring	2024-07-04	2024-07-14	10
Active threat	Enhanced	2024-07-19	2024-07-19	1
Rain Fall Warning	Monitoring	2024-08-08	2024-08-10	2
Capital Pride	Monitoring	2024-08-23	2024-08-26	3
Demonstrations	Monitoring	2024-10-05	2024-10-08	3
Escapade Festival	Monitoring	2024-06-21	2024-06-24	3
IPAC Lase	Monitoring	2024-12-11	Till date	
Cyber Security Advisories total received				9

*When the City enters Monitoring, OPH Duty Officer is engaged within the City's interdepartmental network.