

**Report to  
Rapport au:**

**Ottawa Board of Health  
Conseil de santé d'Ottawa  
15 April 2019 / 15 avril 2019**

**Submitted on April 4, 2019  
Soumis le 4 avril 2019**

**Submitted by  
Soumis par:**

**Dr./D<sup>re</sup> Vera Etches, Medical Officer of Health / Médecin chef en santé publique**

**Contact Person  
Personne ressource:**

**Andrew Hendriks, Director, Health Protection / Directeur, Protection de la santé  
613-580-6744 ext. 24151, Andrew.Hendriks@ottawa.ca**

**Ward: CITY WIDE / À L'ÉCHELLE DE LA VILLE      File Number: ACS2019-OPH-HPS-0001**

**SUBJECT: OTTAWA PUBLIC HEALTH EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS AND  
RESPONSE**

**OBJET: PLANIFICATION ET INTERVENTION - MESURES D'URGENCE DE  
SANTÉ PUBLIQUE OTTAWA**

#### **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 du présent rapport à titre d'information.**

#### **BACKGROUND**

In 2018, several emergency situations underscored the importance of Ottawa Public

Health's (OPH) role in emergency preparedness, response and follow-up. This information report outlines OPH's Emergency Management activities from Q1 of 2018 to Q1 of 2019.

### **Education Requirement**

This report also fulfills the Public Health Emergency Management Guideline (2018) requirement for regular emergency management learning for Board of Health staff, including a workplace orientation for new Board of Health staff members.

### **Legislative Foundations and Standards - Emergency Management**

Through alignment with the City of Ottawa Emergency Management Program, OPH fully complies with the *Emergency Management and Civil Protection Act*. Additional legislative authorities direct the OPH program, including but not limited to the *Health Protection and Promotion Act* (1990), the *Clean Water Act* (2006) and the *Occupational Health and Safety Act* (1990).

Provincial standards direct OPH's role in emergency management. Chief among them are the Ontario Public Health Standards (OPHS): Requirement for Programs, Services and Accountability and its supporting documents, the Emergency Management Standard and the Emergency Management Guideline, 2018.

The OPHS recognize emergency management as a Foundational Standard of public health, underlying and supporting all Program Standards, and state that Boards of Health “*shall effectively prepare for emergencies to ensure 24/7 timely, integrated, safe, and effective response to, and recovery from emergencies with public health impacts, in accordance with ministry policy and guidelines*”. To this end, the OPHS outline requirements and provide guidance for public health emergency management programs to ensure that boards of health can respond to emergencies and cope with disruptions to the health system.

Additional standards that shape the OPH emergency management program include those issued by the Emergency Management Accreditation Program, the Canadian Standards Association, and Accreditation Canada. Adherence to these standards helps OPH maintain an adaptive and resilient approach to emergency management that supports the broader health system.

### **Ottawa Public Health Emergency Management Program**

The OPH Emergency Management Program, coordinated by the Rapid Response and

Readiness Branch, strengthens the organization's prevention of, preparation for, response to, and recovery from emergencies with public health impacts.

### ***Prevention and Mitigation***

Preventing an emergency from occurring altogether is the primary goal of emergency management. Recent examples of OPH engagement in prevention actions include working with the Office of Emergency Management (OEM) to design and distribute information on protective measures to prevent residential flooding, and promotion of free information sessions and videos offered by community partners on preparation and handling of sandbags to protect homes from floodwaters.

Mitigating potential emergencies with public health impacts is also key to protecting the health of Ottawa residents. Through its immunization programs for vaccine preventable disease, OPH reduces the burden of illnesses like influenza on the community and contributes to prevention of outbreaks and epidemics, which may trigger an emergency response depending on the characteristics of circulating illness.

### ***Preparation***

Preparation is an integral part of emergency management. To ensure OPH is equipped to address emergencies, a number of preparedness activities are embedded in its work, including:

- Ensuring 24/7 access to: a Medical Officer of Health (MOH) or Associate MOH, a corporate Duty Officer, a Communications Officer, a Communicable Disease Manager, a Public Health Inspection Branch Manager, Public Health Inspectors (PHIs) and Public Health Nurses (PHNs) through an on-call service;
- Administering the OPH emergency communications systems;
- Ensuring that OPH's Priority Populations Emergency Response interagency plan is maintained in partnership with the OEM, Emergency Social Services and various community partners. It supports communications with those who need it most, via established outreach networks.
- Facilitating emergency preparedness training and education for OPH employees, including specific training in Incident Management System (IMS) roles, simulation and exercises, orientation for OPH Duty Officers, and health risk assessment for PHNs;
- Integrating emergency functions within other OPH programs and continuity of

operations plans to protect health and maintain core critical services; and

- Collaborating with OEM to update the Hazard Identification and Risk Assessment tool to evaluate Ottawa's vulnerability to various hazards.

OPH actively communicates health messaging at community events and through traditional and social media channels to provide information and resource links to residents and community partners on important emergency management topics. This information includes: food safety considerations during an emergency; guidance on developing personal emergency plans; and keeping residents informed of community supports should an emergency occur. To help residents reduce the risk of food borne illness during an emergency, OPH messaging focuses on general food handling and preparation tips, how to safely donate meals to families/communities in need, and food safety during a power failure.

OPH also engages partners and interagency networks through emergency planning. The Ottawa Interagency Influenza Pandemic Plan, Interagency Extreme Weather Plan and Ottawa Interagency Opioid Overdose Cluster Response Plan are examples of OPH's work with local hospitals, community clinics, disaster relief agencies, and services supporting populations experiencing marginalization, to strengthen Ottawa's overall health system.

OPH contributes as a member of numerous taskforces and committees within the City and province. Examples include the City of Ottawa 2019 Spring Freshet Task Force, the Emergency Management Program Advisory Committee, the Hospital Emergency Preparedness Committee of Ottawa, the Ottawa Interagency Influenza Pandemic Planning Committee, the Interagency Network INTERSECT, and the Ontario Public Health Emergency Managers Network.

## ***Response***

The Board of Health (BOH) is ultimately responsible for ensuring that the MOH directs OPH to take appropriate action to prevent and mitigate health risks to residents. That said, the MOH is responsible for determining when OPH needs to enter enhanced operations to support a municipal response to a specific public health threat. The MOH retains delegated authority to activate emergency plans and related programs and measures and to assess emerging situations against established escalation criteria.

When the escalation threshold is met, OPH uses the Incident Management System (IMS) to establish a response team using standardized organizational structures,

functions, processes and terminology applicable to all levels of emergency response in Ontario. IMS lends scalability when an emergency exceeds OPH's capacity to respond using normal operational resources. Communications tools, including for mass notifications, are in place to mobilize employees who are supported with procedures, training and technology.

In the event of an emergency with public health impacts, the MOH updates BOH members and works with the OPH senior leadership team to designate staff required to respond. The BOH's role during an emergency is to maintain awareness of the situation and remain abreast of OPH's actions, both when OPH responds independently and when a response is integrated within a City emergency response, to strategically inform the MOH's actions.

During an active response, OPH works with partners to ensure that populations most at risk are receiving the social and health services they may need, including referrals to the most appropriate agencies.

Recognition and enhancement of social capital - the strengths of networks and relationships among people who live in our community - is also key to any emergency response. Residents often want to help during an emergency by donating food to victims and responders, and an important part of OPH emergency management includes reducing the risk of food borne illness by responding to inquiries relating to food safety. OPH messaging on this topic focuses on general food handling and preparation tips (e.g. safe internal cooking temperatures), how to safely donate meals to families/communities in need, and food safety during a power failure.

### ***Recovery***

OPH's recovery efforts focus on collaboration with community agencies and other partners working to restore the impacted area or population to its original pre-emergency state.

Following the Severe Weather/Tornado response in 2018, OPH deployed responders to assist with connecting residents to disaster relief resources, as needs were identified.

Another example of OPH recovery efforts came after the Westboro bus collision. OPH, in collaboration with City staff including Emergency Social Services, Ottawa Police Services - Victims Crisis Unit and OC Transpo, co-developed the psychosocial support plan for the event. One product, distributed at various transit locations, and with social and earned media, was the "It's OK not to be OK" campaign to support the mental health

needs of those affected by the accident.

## **DISCUSSION**

In the past year, OPH has responded to a number of emergencies with public health impacts, both as the lead department and in support of coordinated actions by the City's Office of Emergency Management (OEM).

OPH contributed to six enhanced responses in 2018, and to 2 responses in Q1 of 2019. (see Document 1)

- 3 Fires (Meridian Place, Donald Street, Riverside Drive)
- Stittsville Infection Prevention and Control Lapse
- Natural Hazard - Severe Weather/Tornado
- Westboro Station OC Transpo Bus Collision
- Blackburn Hamlet/Innes Park Enbridge Service Outage
- Consumption and Treatment Services (formerly Supervised Injection Services)

Using the Severe Weather/Tornado as an example, the following describes how OPH's emergency management work ties in with the OEM and with the local community. OPH response activities included:

- Receiving guidance from the MOH within the Emergency Operation Centre (EOC) Control Group;
- Ensuring a conduit with the EOC at City Hall (through the OPH Duty Officer) and connection with OPH's IMS structure;
- Re-deploying employees to support residents following the storm and subsequent power outages as co-leaders of the Vulnerable Persons Taskforce, with Community and Social Services Department;
- Supporting Emergency Reception and Lodging Centres;
- Addressing potential breaches to the appropriate storage and handling of vaccines (vaccine chain);
- Advising the public about health hazards related to disposal of debris;

- Providing food safety advice and guidance on community food donations to residents affected by sustained power failures to prevent food-borne illness;
- Assisting those most in need by leveraging strong relationships with local community agencies, such as the Community Health and Resource Centres and the Salvation Army, local Food Banks, Ottawa Community Housing, as well as provincially with Emergency Medical Assistance Team (EMAT) - a mobile medical field unit that can be deployed anywhere in Ontario, through the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care's Health System Emergency Management Branch; and
- Working with key community and social services partners as a member of the *After the Storm Response Table* - a platform to provide coordinated support of longer-term recovery by ensuring resources for tornado relief are invested where they are needed most.

In 2018, OPH prepared for the City's Emergency Management Accreditation Program by reviewing and updating its emergency plans in advance of the March 2019 site visit.

On January 18, 2018, along with the OEM, OPH signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Canadian Red Cross. The MOU officially recognizes the Red Cross as an auxiliary to the public authorities in providing protection and assistance to those affected by emergencies or disasters and outlines OPH's role in supporting active responses.

OPH also completed extensive work on transitioning and updating its mass notification system, enabling more streamlined communication with staff during an emergency and the ability to disseminate health alerts.

Ensuring OPH employees are equipped with the necessary tools and knowledge to respond to emergencies with public health impacts is a primary objective of OPH's emergency preparedness and response program. The *2018-2019 OPH Emergency Preparedness Professional Development Plan* was created in 2018 to address this need. In addition to foundational emergency preparedness training, IMS training and specific training for PHIs, PHNs and scribes, the 2019 plan refines the professional training track and includes broader educational components to ensure that OPH employees have a more solid knowledge base in emergency management.

Communication is a key element of emergency response. Using a dedicated emergency mass communication system, OPH transmitted more than 100 health-

related messages during 2018 and in Q1 of 2019, ensuring key stakeholders received timely information about emerging public health issues of immediate concern.

Examples of messaging included: information on the unfolding 2018-2019 influenza season, health alerts to health care practitioners regarding communicable disease activity in Ontario, warnings about food recalls (i.e.: E.coli / romaine lettuce), extreme weather advisories and warnings, as well as contact with agencies engaged in assisting vulnerable persons impacted by tornado and bus collision tragedies.

In addition, OPH reaches clients through social media and its online presence to disseminate information in a timely and efficient way, as well as shift a large portion of predictable inquiries to web-based mechanisms, while still ensuring that residents can speak to OPH employees if needed.

### **Next steps**

Learning from previous emergencies is an integral part of any emergency management program. OPH will continue to evaluate and debrief internally and with partners to ensure that its program consistently and effectively manages emergencies with public health impacts and meets the needs of Ottawa residents.

In 2019, OPH will be launching its new OPH Emergency Preparedness webpage on [OttawaPublicHealth.ca](http://OttawaPublicHealth.ca), which will further empower residents to participate in public health actions.

OPH's Rapid Response and Readiness Branch will also work towards augmenting the organization's internal capacity to respond to emergencies by engaging staff in IMS role-specific professional development.

In the coming year, in supporting residents to "*Plan, Prepare and Be Aware*", OPH will:

- Innovate with community partners to enhance plans and initiatives aimed at assisting priority/vulnerable populations;
- Strengthen partnerships and networks to increase community resilience and preparedness and to enhance recovery efforts following an emergency;
- Increase available OPH emergency field services, such as psychological first aid and health risk assessment; and
- Continue to build inter-professional knowledge networks with other health units across Ontario.



Reviewing plans, developing emergency exercises and collaborating on business continuity will also continue to be priorities in 2019.

### **RURAL IMPLICATIONS**

There are no rural implications associated with this report.

### **CONSULTATION**

The purpose of this report is administrative in nature and therefore no public consultation is required.

### **LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

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

### **RISK MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS**

OPH conducts an annual Hazard Identification and Risk Assessment (HIRA) to identify emerging and potential risks for which the health unit needs to be prepared.

### **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

There are no financial implications associated with this report.

### **ACCESSIBILITY IMPACTS**

There are no accessibility impacts associated with this report.

### **SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION**

Document 1 – Summary of Enhance Responses – Q1 2018 to Q1 2019

### **DISPOSITION**

This report is provided for information.

## Document 1

**Summary of Enhanced Responses**  
**Q1 2018 to Q1 2019**

2018 Responses				
#	Date	Activation	Situation	OPH Involvement
1	Jan 1 - Feb 4	OPH	Interim Supervised Injection Site (SIS)	OPH's Interim SIS was deemed as an emergency response to enhance harm reduction services and prevent overdoses. On February 5, 2018 a permanent Supervised Consumption Services was approved to be operated at 179 Clarence Street.
2	21- Feb	City	2201 Riverside Drive Fire	Notification of a two-alarm electrical fire.  PHNs and PHIs were deployed to the Emergency Reception and Lodging Centre to conduct health assessments with evacuated residents.
3	April 30 – Dec 3	OPH	Infection Prevention and Control Lapse	OPH investigated an infection prevention and control lapse at a community clinic and provided education and awareness to clinic staff on appropriate infection prevention and control practices.  In collaboration with the clinic, OPH helped ensure that more than 1,000 of the clinic clients who may have been exposed to infection from the lapse received the support, guidance and information they needed to make informed decisions around testing for possible blood borne infection.

4	27-May	City	3 Meridian Place Fire	<p>Notification of a four-alarm fire.</p> <p>PHNs and PHIs deployed to the Emergency Reception and Lodging Centre to conduct health assessments with evacuated residents.</p>
5	Sept 21 – Nov 2	City	Severe Weather/Tornado	<p>Notification of six tornadoes that touched down in the Ottawa area and caused extensive damage to many buildings and power infrastructure.</p> <p>PHNs and PHIs provided support at reception and lodging centers, in the community and door-to-door, and provided information on emergency/replacement food, food safety and emergency financial support to individuals and households. OPH Communications maintained a strong social media presence, updated and maintained the website, and connected with community partners to determine areas of need.</p>
6	12-Dec	City	251 Donald Street Fire	<p>Notification of a three-alarm structural fire in a 21-floor Ottawa Community Housing facility.</p> <p>PHNs and PHIs were deployed to the Emergency Reception and Lodging Centre to conduct health assessments with evacuated residents.</p>

Q 1 - 2019 Responses				
#	Date	Activation	Situation	OPH Involvement
1	Jan 11 – 15	City	Westboro Station – Bus Collision	<p>Notification of a double-decker bus collision at Westboro Station.</p> <p>In collaboration with the Emergency Social Services (ESS) Function Leads, OPH led the development of the ESS Plan Response Strategy. OPH staff was deployed to the Westboro and Eagleson bus stations during the morning and afternoon commutes to provide information about psychosocial supports in the community. OPH Communications maintained a strong social media presence and created "It's Ok to not be OK" wallet cards to distribute to bus passengers, which linked to OPH's "What to do in a stressful event" webpage.</p>
2	Jan 18 – 20	City	Blackburn Hamlet – Water Main Break and Gas Leak	<p>Notification of a water outage to an affected area of Blackburn Hamlet, due to a broken water main valve, impacting approximately 70 homes. During repairs, a natural gas line was cut, requiring Enbridge to shut natural gas off to 500+ customers. PHIs were deployed to deliver precautionary Boil Water Advisories (pBWA) to homes that were impacted due to the water outage. PHNs were deployed to a warming centre, which was open to residents due to the low temperatures. OPH Communications staff maintained a strong social media presence, highlighting the available reception centre, cold weather/frostbite advisories and other available resources.</p>