

**Report to
Rapport au:**

**Ottawa Board of Health
Conseil de santé d'Ottawa
19 April 2021 / 19 avril 2021**

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**Submitted by
Soumis par:**

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Ward: CITY WIDE / À L'ÉCHELLE DE LA VILLE File Number: ACS2021-OPH-HPS-0002

**SUBJECT: OTTAWA PUBLIC HEALTH EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS AND
RESPONSE – 2019-2020**

**OBJET: INTERVENTION ET PLANIFICATION DES MESURES D'URGENCE DE
SANTÉ PUBLIQUE OTTAWA – 2019-2020**

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

Under the Ontario Public Health Standards (2018), Ottawa Public Health (OPH) must provide regular Emergency Management education and orientation to members of the Board of Health. To fulfill this requirement, typically each year staff submits a report to the Board of Health outlining emergency management activities over the course of the previous year. Given that no such report was provided in 2020 due to pandemic pressures, the current report includes information on emergency preparedness and response activities in 2019 and 2020.

OPH's substantial work in emergency preparedness helps the health unit respond and adapt to maintain as many essential services as possible when challenged with emergencies of significant magnitude, as experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Emergency preparedness and response activities continued through the pandemic response. Actions include work to reinforce emergency management systems and support business continuity across the health unit. OPH's ongoing relationships with health system and municipal partners have allowed the health unit to respond to emergencies such as extreme heat events, disruptions to critical infrastructure, an infection control lapse in the community and other situations with potential negative public health impacts.

DISCUSSION

At its core, OPH's Emergency Management team supports emergency preparation, prevention/mitigation, response and recovery activities aimed at protecting the health of Ottawa residents. To this end, OPH has been a leader and key contributor in many responses during 2019 and 2020, including:

- Communicable disease outbreaks for measles, hepatitis A and the COVID-19 pandemic
- Infection prevention and control lapse in the community
- Supporting emergency community / reception centres following natural disasters such as flood, fire and extreme weather events

Document 1, attached to this report, provides a complete listing of all situational awareness and emergency responses in which OPH participated during the period covered by this report.

In addition to meeting the pressures of responding to large-scale emergencies during the reporting period, OPH maintained its commitment to protecting the health and safety of Ottawa residents in other capacities by:

- Ensuring 24/7 access to critical public health services through an on-call program for timely follow-up of urgent infectious diseases, food-borne illnesses, adverse drinking water events, environmental health hazards, and other emergencies with public health impacts
- Keeping area health care practitioners updated with timely mass communication health alerts and sharing information impacting their practice
- Continuing to promote and provide guidance on emergency preparedness through public information channels
- Ensuring that OPH employees receive the emergency management training and education needed to fulfill their responsibilities during an emergency response

When employees were deployed to support emergency responses, OPH's Continuity of Operations Plan allowed the health unit to respond and maintain essential public health services. Given the magnitude of the COVID-19 response, most public health operations have been impacted and the amount of essential services provided has been limited and difficult to restore. Below are highlights from the two most significant responses of the reporting period.

2019 Ottawa River Flood

Through its work with the Spring Freshet Taskforce, OPH continues to enhance City preparedness for flooding of the Ottawa River to ensure that residents in flood-prone neighbourhoods are protected in the event of an emergency. OPH has engaged communities each spring to inform people about flood risks for different areas, issued guidance and education on protective measures, such as sandbagging and well water testing, and promoted individual emergency preparedness through the creation of emergency kits and household flood plans. OPH's flood preparedness ensured that the health unit has been able to respond quickly to support residents when they faced flooding or risk of flood.

When the Ottawa River overflowed its banks in Spring 2019, OPH responded with Ottawa Fire Services to reach residents in flooded areas to conduct wellness checks and help facilitate their evacuation to Emergency Reception and Lodging (ERL) centres, where OPH teams worked with other service agencies to deliver health assessment and

support. As flood management progressed, OPH continued to deploy its Public Health Nurses and Public Health Inspectors to assess residents' health and safety and to provide education on well water testing, sandbagging, food security, and other topics of primary concern to the affected public.

Meanwhile, the OPH incident response team, organized using the Incident Management System (IMS), worked to anticipate pressure points in flood management and limit further damage to the City and its residents. This included preventing sewer systems from contaminating flooded areas, identifying areas at risk of new or increased flooding, and supporting priority populations in affected neighbourhoods.

Annual preparedness for potential flooding of the Ottawa River continued in 2020 and extends into 2021 through OPH's membership on the City's Spring Freshet sub-taskforce, along with City departments working on plans to mitigate, respond to and recover from large scale flooding in Ottawa - both years with a COVID-19 lens to minimize the spread of the virus.

COVID-19 Pandemic

OPH is responsible for monitoring emerging international situations to detect potential threats to public health. It was this surveillance that alerted OPH early on of the emergence of a novel coronavirus in 2019.

OPH stood up its COVID-19 Incident Management response team as of January 27, 2020 to organize the response strategy, drawing on resources from across the department. On March 10, OPH facilitated a tabletop exercises with members of the City's Emergency Management Program (EMP) Advisory Committee, the Salvation Army, the Hospital Emergency Preparedness Committee of Ottawa, and the Canadian Red Cross. The next day, on March 11, 2021, the World Health Organization declared a global pandemic. OPH also supported an exercise with the Congregate Settings Working Group in May and contributed to the development of an Emergency Operations Centre Control Group exercise on September 16, 2020.

Over the course of the pandemic response, over 150 employees held leadership roles as part of OPH's IMS command section. At the time of this report, OPH continues to provide extensive resources to the COVID-19 response with the response embedded into the health unit's strategy and core operations.

More recently, OPH is leveraging its emergency management and public health expertise and resources to support the coordination of the COVID-19 immunization

strategy as a member of the Emergency Operations Centre established to manage distribution of Ottawa's vaccine supply. This important work continues in collaboration with other involved City departments, partner agencies and community stakeholders working together to protect public health during the pandemic.

Lessons Learned and Key Activities

The lessons learned and actions taken as a result of evaluating emergency responses over the last two years, and experiences during the COVID-19 response, have transformed how OPH manages emergencies with public health impacts.

As outlined in previous Board of Health reports on the COVID-19 response in 2020 and early 2021, the pandemic's first wave provided several important and valuable key lessons:

- Strong surveillance and epidemiology are critical for early detection and identification of trends of concern
- Clear, engaging and timely communications have contributed to behavioural change and adherence to public health measures throughout the pandemic response
- Partnerships are instrumental to OPH's successes, including but not limited to, its relationship with the City of Ottawa, collaborations with various community partners, work with local hospitals, and engagement with neighbouring public health units
- Business and community group engagement is key to strong partnerships and a healthy economy, which are essential to public health. The pandemic highlights that a healthy population and a healthy economy go hand in hand and that differences in earning power and job security directly impact individual, family and community health.
- Technology investments are needed in the public health sector to better support surveillance, case management, contact tracing and outbreak investigations
- The pandemic has had a significant impact on residents' mental health and substance use. Recognizing this, OPH has increased community collaboration with partners who offer mental health and substance use services and continues to increase collaborations with internal partners on various initiatives.

Communication, at all levels, remains one of the most important elements for continued management of any emergency response, as it was throughout the pandemic. Using the IMS structure, OPH ensured the establishment of several sections and units, in addition to its regular information and communication services, to address all aspects of the emergency. These included:

- An expanded Liaison Section within the IMS to keep partners and stakeholders connected with OPH operations
- A Communications Section with enhanced media capacity to respond to inquiries specific to COVID-19 and associated topics
- COVID-19 Emergency Response Phone Line Unit, staffed by Public Health Nurses, to provide information and assessment
- An Inquiries Unit specialized in business engagement to provide interpretation of emergency orders, regulations and other directives issued provincially and municipally
- Internal Quality Assurance to preserve continuity and quality of public health information and communication
- Representation on the City of Ottawa's Human Needs Task Force to assess and respond to the needs of Ottawa's priority populations, which were disproportionately impacted by COVID-19 transmission
- Enhancement of the OPH Emergency Mass Notification System throughout 2019 and 2020, and into Q1 of 2021, extending reach to more health care practitioners and further streamlining how these communication systems function and are used for situational awareness and staff alerts

Additionally, collaborative work between OPH and its many community, business and City stakeholders has strengthened these partnerships. Several examples of collaborations on emergency preparedness and response include OPH:

- Maintaining a seat on the Emergency Operations Centre Control Group and Operations Group, with other City partners, to oversee response management
- Integrating OPH liaison and leadership with the Champlain Health Region Incident Command (CHRIC) to coordinate clinical response efforts with local and regional health practitioners and institutions

- Developing the Natural Death Surge Guide with Ottawa hospitals, funeral services, City social services and the Regional Coroner
- Partnering with By-law and Regulatory Services to ensure officers are supported by public health as they inform the public and local businesses about restrictions and provincial regulations
- Linking public health communications and community operations with local business organizations to ensure that business and economic impacts were always considered when determining public health measures
- Working closely with other City departments and services to coordinate complex, multi-discipline operations such as engagement with major league sports organizations, continuity of operation deployments and vaccine campaign
- Partnering with Eastern Ontario Health Unit, Leeds, Grenville and Lanark District Health Unit, and Renfrew County and District Health, to develop a mandatory masking policy to ensure consistency across the region and avoid duplication of efforts, with each public health unit then moving forward to adapt measures within their own local context
- Working with the City of Ottawa on countless initiatives, from redeploying City staff and infrastructure to the response, working rapidly to implement a bylaw for indoor masking, proactively building a safer approach for public transit and emergency child care centres, and working as a member of the City of Ottawa Human Needs Task Force to plan for food security, housing, transportation, volunteer services, fundraising, and psychosocial supports and human resource and information technology solutions

The IMS training provided to OPH employees, over the course of the year, prior to and following the 2019 flood, allowed the health unit to quickly scale up operations to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic as it evolved. With more employees trained to take on emergency management roles and work effectively in an incident management organizational structure, OPH gained greater flexibility to assign resources where they were needed, for example, in critical case management and contact tracing work aimed at limiting the spread of infection.

As well, preparedness work in managing the OPH stockpile of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), including face masks, N95 respirators, hand sanitizer, and other infection control resources needed to help protect employee health, allowed the health

unit to readily assess and respond to service needs, despite shortages in global PPE supply. Without a robust PPE management solution already in place, initial response efforts would have been substantially impeded as supplies ran out and negatively impacted other health services across the country. OPH is currently working to integrate within a City-wide PPE stockpile tracking and replenishment automation system.

Looking ahead

Training will remain a strong focus for the emergency management program in 2021. Initiatives are underway to increase the number of trained OPH Duty Officers, who fulfill an on-call first contact role, 24/7 and receive and share information between OPH and the City of Ottawa on emergency situations as they develop; and to support employees in taking on leadership roles in an incident response team.

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 associations 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 Ottawa Public Health's 2019-2022 Strategic Plan.

SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION

DOCUMENT 1 – Emergency Situations in 2019 - 2020

DISPOSITION

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

Document 1 - EMERGENCY SITUATIONS in 2019-2020

Year	Duration	Response Name	Situation
2019			
1	April 2 to 23 April 6 to 27	Measles-1 -2	OPH - Measles outbreak
2	May 19 to June 9	Measles 3	OPH - Measles outbreak
3	Jan 18 to 20	Enbridge Service Outage	Affecting approximately 550 customers in Blackburn Hamlet/Innes Park
4	Jan 21 to 22	Regina St power outage	240 units without electric
5	Jan 11 to 15	Westboro Bus Collision	OC Transpo collision - Westboro Station
6	December 3	Clementine Infrastructure	17-storey apartment building without power or water
7	April 23 to June 17	Spring Freshet	Spring flooding Ottawa River
8	June 26	Severe thunderstorm	Situational Awareness Operations re: watch issued from Environment Canada
9	July 1	Special Event - Canada Day	Situational Awareness as of July 1
10	July 19	Evacuation 404 Elgin	Building evacuation due to fire
11	Jan 1 to April 11	Hepatitis A _ 1 -2	OPH - Hepatitis outbreak
12	June 7 to Sept 15	Hepatitis A - 2	OPH - Hepatitis outbreak

13	June 2 to June 7	East Ottawa Tornado	Extreme weather resulting in a tornado landfall in eastern Ottawa
2020			
1	Jan 27 to Sept 21	COVID-19	Pandemic response to coronavirus
2	March 7 to 8	Power Outage	Power failure Bay Ward
3	March 9 to 13 July 13 to Nov 3	Dental Clinic IPAC Lapse	OPH - Infection control lapse
4	April 3 to May 13	Spring Freshet	Situational awareness re: Ottawa River flooding
5	June 3	Wurtemberg St Embassy	Building evacuation due to suspicious package
6	June 5	Solidarity March	Situational awareness with respect to the peaceful march in solidarity
7	July 1 to 2	Special Event - Canada Day	Situational Awareness as of July 1
8	July 7 to 10	Heat Event	City of Ottawa enhanced operations, in relation to the heat warning.
9	July 27 to 28	Heat Event	City of Ottawa enhanced operations, in relation to the heat warning
10	Nov 9	Active Threat towards City Facilities	Threat in Ottawa libraries where influenza vaccination clinics were located
11	Dec 24	Situational awareness – Winter Weather	Environment and Climate Change Canada special weather statement, forecasting

			30-50 mm of rain.
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