

Executive Summary

Influenza is an acute viral disease of the respiratory tract which occurs every year in the population. Outbreaks or epidemics occur every few years and can cause widespread illness in the population resulting in thousands of medical visits, hospitalizations, and deaths across Canada. Complications of influenza, such as pneumonia, are most likely to occur in infants, the elderly and persons with underlying health conditions. A flu shot each fall can prevent annual or "seasonal" influenza.

At regular intervals, but usually two or three times per century, a new influenza virus appears causing a worldwide epidemic or "pandemic". When this happens widespread disease, increased hospitalizations and high mortality will occur challenging the health care system and causing widespread social disruption.

Comprehensive early planning will reduce the effects of a pandemic on society. It will be too late to take any of the actions that can mitigate the impact of a pandemic if preparation is delayed until it arrives.

Effective planning requires a collaborative effort by all health organizations and partners throughout the province. This will provide the public with information on appropriate public health measures, self-care and treatment to help reduce the negative impacts of the illness. Planning across the health sector will ensure the development of common operational pandemic influenza plans for the greatest care and protection of the population. These plans should be comprehensive, strategic, sustainable, and resilient and allow for trans-jurisdictional integration and coordination.

The goal of the pandemic planning process is to minimize serious illness and mortality, and to reduce societal disruption in the population during an influenza pandemic. Planning will consider possible risks, hazards and vulnerabilities in order to reduce the negative impacts both on individuals and society as a whole. The planning process will identify the human and physical resources required to respond to a pandemic and to mitigate its effects.

To ensure consistency in planning for the pandemic, standard assumptions have been adopted in keeping with the Canadian Pandemic Influenza Plan. These assumptions will also provide a basis for the actions undertaken during the planning for and response to the pandemic.

Planning will include an assessment of the existing resources, skill sets and activities relative to those required to ensure response capability. The gaps identified must be addressed through the reassignment of the existing resources and activities, training, and addition of required new resources.

This process is a collaborative effort of the Department of Health and Community Services, the four Regional Health Authorities, and other health partners. As this planning process continues at the regional level throughout the provinces other partners will contribute and link operationally to provide a seamless, coordinated, emergency management approach to dealing with a pandemic.

Through a process of regular review, consultation, and the addition of new information, this planning document will provide guidance for effective preparedness and response to a pandemic influenza.