

UPDATE ON ONTARIO'S EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS

March 4, 2008

After the SARS outbreak in 2003, the Ontario government listened to reports from Dr. David Naylor, Dr. David Walker and Justice Archie Campbell. It created Operation Health Protection, an action plan to revitalize our public health system by preventing threats to our health and promoting good health.

The creation of the Ontario Agency for Health Protection and Promotion, its new leadership and its location at MaRS are the latest components to be completed.

Operation Health Protection includes:

- Creating the Ontario Agency for Health Protection and Promotion
- Moving forward with public health renewal
- Enhancing health emergency management
- Improving infection control and communicable disease capacity
- Strengthening public health human resources
- Building the infrastructure for health preparedness

Ontario Agency for Health Protection and Promotion, created to:

- Provide scientific and technical advice and support to those working across the various health care sectors to protect and improve the health of Ontarians
- Carry out and support activities such as population health assessment, public health research, surveillance, epidemiology, planning and evaluation
- Operate laboratory services and provide scientific guidance on infectious diseases, health promotion, chronic disease, injury prevention, environmental health and emergency management

Public Health Renewal, is being achieved by:

- Providing the Chief Medical Officer of Health with more independent powers to take action to prevent, reduce or eliminate health risks
- Since 2003, funding has increased by more than 90%, including both upload and increased investments in public health capacity.
- Making improvements in public health emergency response by giving local medical officers of health more power to respond to outbreaks
- Allowing the provincial government to take over distribution and redistribution of medical supplies (including antitoxins, antivirals, antibiotics) in case of health emergencies
- Increasing Ontario's share of local public health unit funding to 75 per cent from 50 per cent
- Reviewing and updating mandatory programs and services delivered by public health units

Enhancing Health Emergency Management by:

- Having established the Emergency Management Unit (EMU) to lead health emergency management for the health sector

- Having the EMU be responsible for coordinating actions of the Ministry for Health and Long-Term Care, distributing supplies and equipment, and providing guidance and direction to optimize the health system response during health emergencies
- Having the EMU involved in pandemic preparedness, including regular updating of the Ontario Health Plan for Influenza Pandemic
- Stockpiling of 55 million N95 respirators for health workers in close contact with patients during a flu epidemic
- Having established a 56-bed mobile acute care field hospital
- Stockpiling antivirals to treat approximately 25 per cent of the population in case of an influenza pandemic.

Improving Infection Control and Communicable Disease Capacity by:

- Creating the Provincial Infectious Disease Advisory Committee to develop guidelines for health professionals and organizations to best manage infectious disease outbreaks
- Hiring 10 new medical and scientific staff that has been recruited nationally and internationally to the Ontario Public Health Laboratories lead by Dr. Donald Low
- Ontario is unveiling a comprehensive hand hygiene program – *Just Clean Your Hands* – for all hospitals that gets underway this week
- Establishing 14 Regional Infection Control Networks to coordinate activities related to the prevention, surveillance and control of infectious diseases
- Funding 137 hospital infection prevention and control practitioners to prevent and control infectious diseases

Strengthening Public Health Human Resources by:

- Having developed and implemented HealthForceOntario, a health human resources strategy that is attracting, retaining and developing the best health care providers – including the top public health professionals such as new nurses with the province’s Nursing Grad Guarantee.

Building Infrastructure for Health System Preparedness by:

- Creating and implementing the integrated Public Health Information System that allows local public health units to identify and track cases of infectious disease.
- Ontario has iPHIS – an advanced infectious disease surveillance system – which gives early warning signals and helps to manage disease outbreaks.
- Piloting new surveillance methods to detect public health threats before an emerging contagious disease is fully diagnosed
- Planning to implement Panorama, a new pan-Canadian surveillance system which will enable health care providers to immediately collect, share and analyze health information that is critical for emerging and ongoing threats to public health, in 2011
- Purchasing N95 respirators based on the “Precautionary Principle”, which means Ontario has created a gold standard of protection for frontline health care staff

For more details on these six Operation Health Protection initiatives, please check.

http://www.health.gov.on.ca/english/providers/project/ohp/ohp_mn.html.

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