



# SASKATCHEWAN HEALTH PANDEMIC INFLUENZA PREPAREDNESS PLAN: AN OVERVIEW

## September 2009

The Saskatchewan Health Pandemic Influenza Preparedness Plan provides a framework to assist the provincial government, regional health authorities, municipalities, First Nations communities and other sectors to develop their own plans in preparation for a pandemic influenza. It clarifies the roles and responsibilities of government, health regions and other agencies and addresses the issues in pandemic planning and response.

### **Emergency and Response Management**

In the event of an influenza pandemic, the Ministry of Health will collaborate with its federal, provincial and territorial partners to determine the level of response needed. Because pandemic H1N1 transmission has continued around the world, with a second wave expected this fall and winter, the Ministry of Health is actively engaged in planning and preparations.

### **Health Services Continuity**

During an influenza pandemic, the health system will need to deal with both an increased demand on the system and a high rate of absenteeism.

Regional health authorities (RHAs) are required at all times to identify critical day-to-day services from each level of the health care system and categorize them according to priority. Each service must also identify the minimum number of staff required to ensure the service continues. The goal during an emergency event is to ensure uninterrupted performance even when there may be a limited number of staff.

As a matter of course, regional health authorities are also required to have plans in place to address a sudden, short-term surge in the demand for services. Because a pandemic influenza outbreak will be longer in duration than other emergency situations, RHAs are also being asked to identify Influenza Assessment Sites to which services and resources can be re-allocated if necessary. RHAs and health care facilities must also assess their space and their programs and services to see how they could minimize the number of admissions and maximize the number of beds available for influenza patients.

### **Infection Prevention and Control**

While antivirals and vaccine are effective ways to prevent the spread of influenza, good infection prevention and control practices are the cornerstone of an effective pandemic response. All health-care settings should have measures in place to protect patients/residents, employees and visitors from disease. Another goal of Saskatchewan's Pandemic Influenza Plan is to provide Saskatchewan residents with information to help them protect themselves in the community -- for example, practical ways to avoid influenza infection (regular hand-washing) and to avoid spreading the virus (good coughing/sneezing etiquette).

### **Public Health Measures**

The principle purpose of public health measures during influenza pandemic is to decrease the number of individuals exposed to the new virus, and to

potentially slow the progress of the pandemic. Slowing the spread of disease allows for more time to implement medical measures such as the development of a vaccine.

Public health measures during a pandemic influenza will vary in extent, depending on the impact of the pandemic. These measures can include public education, site-specific infection prevention and control, quarantining of infected individuals, or restrictions on travel and public gatherings. One of the guiding principles of the Saskatchewan Pandemic Influenza Preparedness Plan is not to restrict Saskatchewan residents' autonomy any more than is absolutely necessary to ensure the public good.

### **Vaccination**

Vaccination against influenza is one of the most effective measures for reducing disease, death and societal disruption during an influenza pandemic. The Canadian Pandemic Influenza Plan (CPIP) is prepared to produce enough pandemic influenza vaccine for the entire population. However, because the new pandemic vaccine will be available in batches, the CPIP is developing national recommendations for which population sub-groups should receive priority access to the vaccine.

The Ministry of Health will direct the provincial distribution and administration of the vaccine based on these national guidelines. Regional health authorities and First Nations jurisdictions will operate mass immunization clinics to administer the vaccine.

Ultimately, Saskatchewan's plan is to immunize all who want or need the vaccine when it becomes available. The vaccine will likely be given in two doses, four weeks apart, to ensure immune-system response to the new virus.

### **Antiviral Medications**

Vaccination is the most effective intervention to prevent influenza. In the interim, antiviral medications can assist in minimizing the impact of the pandemic influenza on the population.

Depending on how the virus is spreading, the Ministry of Health will distribute a portion of its antiviral reserve to the regional health authorities on a per capita basis.

The ministry will retain the remainder and distribute as required.

During a widespread outbreak or pandemic, federal, provincial and territorial experts will analyze information about the influenza virus and develop criteria regarding use of antivirals for treatment. This criteria may change during the course of the pandemic, as new information becomes available.

### **First Nations and Inuit Health (FNIH)**

On-reserve First Nation pandemic influenza responses must be integrated seamlessly into the provincial health system. FNIH, a department of the federal government, delivers public health services to First Nations people. In transferred communities that have accepted funding and responsibility for public health services, FNIH provides the funding but First Nations communities are responsible for providing the services.

FNIH works with First Nations communities to ensure they have emergency preparedness plans that incorporate pandemic planning. RHAs must ensure that First Nation community pandemic plans integrate into the provincial health care system. FNIH, through its regional offices, assumes an intermediary role between provinces and transferred communities.

Provincial and RHA pandemic planners collaborate with First Nation communities in:

- Coordination of roles and responsibilities during public health emergencies, including pandemic influenza;
- Purchase and delivery of antivirals, vaccines and other relevant emergency supplies, and clarify how these limited supplies/products will be monitored;
- Clear protocols for on-reserve First Nations communities' access to the antivirals, vaccines and other emergency supplies in a coordinated fashion;
- Clear authority from the appropriate medical health officer; and
- Capacity at the First Nation community levels to deal with outbreaks.

For more information on H1N1 influenza, visit the Saskatchewan Ministry of Health website at [www.health.gov.sk.ca](http://www.health.gov.sk.ca) or [www.FightFlu.ca](http://www.FightFlu.ca)



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