

Pandemic Influenza

Section 11: Communications



11. Communications

Communications is a vital component of planning for pandemic influenza. Effective communications with external and internal audiences as well as a consistent and coordinated approach with federal and regional partners is essential to the provincial pandemic strategy.

A comprehensive communications plan is critical to increase the awareness of the public regarding the pandemic, to provide direction on health maintenance and available health care services, and to alleviate unnecessary anxiety. The key to a successful communications plan is a coordinated approach with the dissemination of information to all stakeholders in an efficient and timely manner throughout all pandemic phases.

Communications planning is coordinated from the international level through national, provincial and the regional levels. The Public Health Agency of Canada has an established link with the World Health Organization and communicates key information on international influenza activity, which in turn is communicated to the provinces and regions. The communications staff of the Department participate on the Federal/Provincial/Territorial Pandemic Influenza Communications Committee which coordinates information and strategies with the PHAC, and with other provinces and territories. The Department's communications staff meets regularly with communications directors from the four Regional Health Authorities to coordinate communications planning.

11.1 Objectives of an Effective Communications Plan

An effective communications plan will:

- inform the people of this province (including health care workers) about the pandemic and the provincial pandemic plan
- educate the public on measures that can be taken in advance that will reduce the risk of influenza infection and its consequences

- identify roles and responsibilities for communications during the pandemic phases
- establish communications networks for use during the pandemic
- provide timely information during the pandemic

11.2 Interpandemic and Pandemic Alert Periods

The focus of communications in this period will be on educating the key audiences on seasonal and pandemic influenza, respiratory hygiene, immunization and the need for optimizing health services during a pandemic. If during the Pandemic Alert Period clusters of human-to-human transmission were to occur in Newfoundland and Labrador, many of the crisis communications strategies outlined for the pandemic period would be implemented.

11.3 Pandemic Period

Once a pandemic is declared, the need to provide information will be intense and sustained for several months. A pandemic has unique characteristics which must be considered when planning a communications strategy including:

- global in scope
- threat to the health of the population with the possibility of high mortality
- may occur in waves over an eighteen month period
- significant disruption to communities and businesses
- unpredictable occurrences and effects
- events will likely overwhelm normal emergency planning measures

The Department will activate its pandemic communications response providing regular, timely information to all audiences about the status of the pandemic, identifying the steps being taken to

respond and advising the public about what to do during each phase.

The Department will use a number of different communications mechanisms during a pandemic, including daily internal briefings, media briefings, news releases, website updates and public service announcements.

11.4 Post-Pandemic Period

The Department will notify the public when the pandemic is considered to be officially over in Newfoundland and Labrador. The communications plan and communications activities throughout all phases of the pandemic will be evaluated and adjustments to the plan will be made as required.

Table 11.1 – Communication Roles and Responsibilities by Pandemic Phase

Communications Interpandemic Period		
Phase 1 - No new influenza subtypes have been detected in humans. A new influenza virus subtype may be present in animals, but the risk for human infection is low.		
Phase 2 - No new influenza subtype in animals posing a substantial risk of human disease		
National	Provincial	Regional
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Develop a comprehensive communications plan for all aspects of the pandemic plan• Establish networks with international, national and P/T stakeholders and define roles and responsibilities• Inform Ministers, governments and key policy decision-makers of the potential risks of a pandemic• Provide national and international information to P/Ts• Provide key messages and template materials that can be adapted to P/T needs• Promote business continuity planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Participate on F/P/T communications committees• Develop a provincial pandemic communications plan• Provide key messages and template materials that can be adapted to regional needs• Establish networks with provincial and regional stakeholders and define roles and responsibilities• Ensure RHA communications plans are compatible with the provincial strategy• Inform Ministers, RHAs and key policy decision-makers of the potential risks of a pandemic	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Participate in provincial and regional communications committees• Develop communications plan compatible with provincial communications plan• Promote personal hygiene practices and self-care• Encourage and promote pandemic planning for health facilities and community stakeholders

Table 11.1 – Continued.

<p style="text-align: center;">Communications Pandemic Alert Period</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Phase 3 - New influenza subtype identified in at least one human case. No human to human transmission or rare cases of spread through very close contact only</p>		
National	Provincial	Regional
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue activities of previous phase(s) • Inform P/Ts and other key stakeholders of increased risk and its implications • Engage and prepare media for their information support role • Coordinate F/P/T communications response • Update communications plans • Coordinate communications on the technical and scientific information 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue activities of previous phase(s) • Establish a provincial pandemic communications working group • Communicate the elevation of pandemic risk to provincial and regional partners including the public • Update communications plans • Ensure that key provincial stakeholders have accurate information to provide to their audiences/media • Communicate technical and scientific information to regional health authorities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue activities of previous phase(s) • Update communications plans • Communicate the elevation of pandemic risk to local partners and provide updates to key stakeholders in the region • Inform the public
<p style="text-align: center;">Communications Pandemic Alert Period</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Phase 4- Localized small clusters of limited human-to-human transmission</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Phase 5 - Localized larger clusters of human-to-human transmission</p>		
National	Provincial	Regional
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue activities of previous phase(s) • Inform federal government departments, P/Ts and NGOs of global pandemic activity including the health response • Implement nation-wide public education and awareness campaign 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue activities of previous phase(s) • Update prepared messages in light of current information • Inform provincial departments and RHAs of global pandemic activity including the provincial response • Provide detailed updates to the public, health care workers and other key stakeholders on clusters of human-to-human transmission of influenza • Enhance public education and awareness campaign 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue activities of previous phase(s) • Provide detailed updates to the public, health care workers and other key stakeholders on clusters of human-to-human transmission of influenza • Enhance public education and awareness campaign

Table 11.1 – Continued.

Communications Pandemic Period		
Phase 6 - Increased and sustained transmission in general population		
National	Provincial	Regional
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Continue activities of previous phase(s)• Implement pandemic phase of national communications plan• Coordinate response with provinces, territories and federal populations• Update key stakeholders• Inform the public• Assess ongoing effectiveness of communications activities• Fully implement high profile nation-wide public education and awareness campaign• Keep stakeholders up to date with the latest information, and emphasize their roles and responsibilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Continue activities of previous phase(s)• Implement pandemic phase of provincial plan• Establish provincial spokesperson(s) for health• Share information with federal, provincial and regional stakeholders• Fully implement high profile province-wide public education and awareness campaign, aligned with national campaign• Ensure consistency in messaging with other jurisdictions• Inform public of self-care practices, antiviral treatment and vaccination availability• Assess ongoing effectiveness of communications activities• Keep stakeholders up to date with the latest information, and emphasize their roles and responsibilities• Ensure the media have up-to-date information	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Continue activities of previous phase(s)• Implement pandemic phase of regional and local plans• Establish regional spokesperson(s) for health• Share information with provincial, regional and local stakeholders• Support education and awareness campaigns for health professionals and the public• Inform public of self-care practices, antiviral treatment and vaccination access• Ensure consistency in messaging with province and local bodies• Keep stakeholders/partners up-to-date with the latest information, and aware of their roles/responsibilities• Assess ongoing effectiveness of communications activities

Table 11.1 – Continued.

Communications Post-Pandemic Period Recovery		
National	Provincial	Regional
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Review activities; compile and analyze data and report• Evaluate response• Debrief with relevant partners• Revise pandemic plans based on review, evaluation and analysis• Return to Phase 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Review activities; compile and analyze data and report• Evaluate response• Debrief with relevant partners• Revise pandemic plans based on review, evaluation and analysis• Return to Phase 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Review activities; compile and analyze data and report• Evaluate response• Debrief with relevant partners• Revise pandemic plans based on review, evaluation and analysis• Return to Phase 1