



“Operation FLU-READY”

Executive Summary

“Our strength in emergency preparedness has, and always will be in our determination to work together and improve our collective response capability.”

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

On October 23, 2006, York Region hosted Exercise “Operation FLU-READY”, an interactive tabletop workshop that focused on a hypothetical pandemic influenza emergency. Approximately 170 participants representing all nine local municipalities, four levels of government, the public and private sectors, non governmental organizations (NGO’s) and healthcare agencies from across York Region participated in the exercise.

The exercise scenario involved a pandemic influenza emergency that originated in China and spreads through global travel to North America and eventually York Region. The exercise was delivered in three modules, escalating in intensity and severity. Each module presented evolving challenges such as essential service disruption and the surge capacity of the healthcare sector. The groups worked collectively through a series of specific questions to identify priorities and gaps that required resolution.

KEY OBSERVATIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

Key observations identified by participants, evaluators and facilitators were utilized in the preparation of the executive summary and recommendations. Some of the key observations included:

- Focus was on the current response – continue to develop and refine strategy for sustained operations
- Clarification from Ministry of Health and Long Term Care (MOHLTC) required on many issues
- Clearly identify lead agency in charge of communications
- Establish corporate consensus on essential Regional services and how staff will be reallocated in a pandemic influenza emergency
- Public Health sector stronger than other sectors
- Promote consistent communications and information sharing
- Enhance interdepartmental and interagency coordination and cooperation with a wide range of groups
- Left with a better understanding of how my organization fits into the overall Regional plan
- Gained confidence in the considerable planning to date
- Continue to plan and evaluate plans
- Need to gain a better understanding of the roles, capabilities and capacities of other agencies.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendations outlined within this report reflect the cumulative comments, key observations, issues and gaps identified by the exercise participants, evaluators and observers. Based on these assessments, it is recommended that York Region:

1. Continue to develop business continuity programs to ensure the continued delivery of essential services and critical functions.
2. Update and test York Region departmental emergency plans to ensure a coordinated and effective response.
3. Develop Human Resource policies to deal with issues such as:
 - a) Refusal to work
 - b) Work from home
 - c) Extended absences
 - d) Redeployment of staff
 - e) Management of Volunteers
 - f) Compensation
 - g) Ill Dependents
4. Develop and test crisis communications plans to ensure timely, consistent and effective messaging between all stakeholders.
5. Seek Provincial clarification regarding matters such as:
 - a) Appropriate Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)
 - b) Mass casualty management (natural death surge management)
 - c) Management of assessment and alternate care centres
6. Communicate Emergency Management’s personal preparedness message to staff and the community on an on-going basis.

EXERCISE OVERVIEW AND OBJECTIVES

Overview

The Regional Municipality of York initiated a pandemic influenza planning process in 2000-2001. In keeping with the (World Health Organization) WHO, Federal and Provincial Ministry of Health and Long Term Care guidelines for pandemic planning, the Region engaged community stakeholders from the very beginning, established the necessary working groups and adopted a comprehensive planning and preparedness strategy. The drafting of the Region’s Health Services Pandemic Influenza Response Plan is an important segment of the process. Engaging internal, external, public and private stakeholders in the planning and preparedness initiative is also a critical element in the Region’s overall strategy. This effort involved numerous presentations and workshops and most importantly, corporate support and leadership.

Exercise “Operation FLU-READY” provided the opportunity for York Region and its community emergency response partners to assess collective planning and preparedness efforts, validating what has been achieved to date and identifying areas yet to be addressed.

Exercise “Operation FLU-READY” focused on a pandemic influenza incident affecting Canada, Ontario and ultimately York Region. Participants included Regional and Local Municipal representatives, York Regional Police, Fire, EMS, Public Health, the healthcare sector, school boards and Non Governmental Organizations. The exercise provided an opportunity to examine the effectiveness of the Region’s pandemic influenza planning initiatives and assessed the community’s readiness to respond to an emergency that would significantly impact the delivery of essential programs and services to the residents of York.

Objectives

1. Local Decision-Making Process

- ✓ Exercise the Regional, Local Municipal and key agencies decision-making processes and identify areas needing refinement.
- ✓ Identify key actions to be taken and by whom.

2. Validate Municipal Plans

- ✓ The exercise will provide a valuable opportunity for participants to evaluate and validate their influenza response capability and planning process.

3. Town/City / Region / Provincial / Federal Agencies and Private / Public Sector Interface

- ✓ Examine the local interface between Town/City / Regional / Provincial / Federal agencies in the conduct of crisis and consequence management activities.
- ✓ Examine Local Municipal, Regional, Provincial, and Federal interactions with the private and public sector during the threat or actual occurrence of a pandemic influenza emergency.

4. Public Information and Media Relations

- ✓ Discuss the following to ensure a timely response:
- ✓ Information and instructions to the community.
- ✓ Review Regional and Local Municipal public information and crisis communications plans to ensure the timely and consistent dissemination of accurate and meaningful information.
- ✓ Discuss how media will be coordinated when Local, Municipal, Regional, and Provincial agencies are involved.

5. Medical Response / Surveillance

- ✓ Review the local health care system, including public health department's readiness to identify, monitor and respond to an incident such as pandemic influenza.

4. Training and Education

- ✓ Provide an opportunity for the participants to gain a better understanding of their roles and responsibilities and the relationships between the stakeholder plans during a pandemic influenza emergency.

5. Legislative Compliance

- ✓ The exercise satisfies *Emergency Management & Civil Protection Act* requirements for the purpose of delivering annual training and exercise initiatives.

EXERCISE PROCESS

Participants were seated in sectors according to their jurisdictional responsibilities:

Sectors included:

Sector	Community Organization
1	Regional Emergency Control Group
2	Municipal Emergency Control Groups
3	Corporate Services/Human Resources/Information Technology/Legal/ Chamber of Commerce
4	Communications/Public Relations/School Boards/ Child Care Centres
5	Health Services
6	Emergency Services (EMS, Police and Fire)
7	Hospitals/ Long Term Care Facilities/ Community Care Access Centres
8	Infrastructure
9	Provincial/Federal Agencies/ Local Health Integrated Networks
10	Mortuaries/Funeral/Directors/Coroners Office/Faith
11	Community Services & Housing and non governmental organizations

As the exercise modules were presented, the groups were required to collectively work through a series of specific questions meant to assess preparedness for a pandemic influenza emergency. These questions were supplied as a catalyst to generate group discussion to highlight response and management priorities and also identify issues that required resolution.

Each sector shared their responses with the entire group, regarding the resources required to meet the challenges of an event that would have broad implications for the safety and welfare of the York Region community.

EVALUATION PROCESS

The evaluation process included formal feedback from the evaluators, participants, exercise controllers/facilitators and observers. As the sectors/organizations worked through the exercise modules, significant issues requiring resolution were identified. The exercise was not viewed as the forum to provide all the answers to a pandemic influenza emergency but rather as a process to highlight the tasks yet to be completed.

The evaluators utilized for “Operation FLU-READY” had significant experience in the areas of emergency services, emergency management, communications and healthcare.

Evaluators did not assess individual performance but focused on examining the following broad areas:

- Problem Identification and Resolution
- Plans and Procedures
- Communications and Public Relations
- The Exercise Process

Observers

Exercise “Operation FLU-READY” provided interested observers with the opportunity to view several sectors at work. The observers were also asked to provide feedback which has been incorporated into this report.

Exercise Team

The exercise team was lead by York Region Emergency Management with representation from Regional and local municipalities, York Region Health Services, including Public Health and EMS, Community Services and Housing, Corporate Communications, York Regional Police, Fire and Emergency Services.

CONCLUSION

Exercise “Operation FLU-READY” was successful in meeting its objectives. It provided an opportunity for participating organizations to assess their pandemic preparedness, emergency response capabilities and decision making. The opportunity to interact with

diverse community stakeholders also built relationships and increased understanding of the resources and capacities of the respective organizations.

Participation in the exercise provided the opportunity for various levels of government and key agencies to examine and consider the requirements for heightened cooperation and arrangements and actions that may be required prior to and throughout an influenza pandemic.

The exercise reinforced the need for ongoing support of participating organizations and their senior decision makers. It identified the need to continue influenza pandemic planning and preparedness, in partnership with community stakeholders and organizations.

In closing, the Regional Municipality of York wishes to thank all those who participated in “Operation FLU-READY”. Our strength in emergency preparedness has, and always will be our determination to work together and improve our collective response capability.