



Community and Health Services Department
Public Health Branch

MEMORANDUM

TO: Community and Health Services Committee Members

FROM: Dr. Karim Kurji, Medical Officer of Health
Adelina Urbanski, Commissioner of Community and Health Services

DATE: May 8, 2013

RE: **Update on Strategic Changes to Infectious Diseases Control**

As outlined in Report No. 1 of the Community and Health Services Committee received by Council on January 26, 2012, the Public Health Branch is in the process of enhancing its Infectious Diseases Control Division. The strengthening of infectious diseases has also been identified as an indicator of success in the Region's 2011 to 2015 Strategic Plan. This memo provides an overview of improvements which have been made to infectious disease services to date, and summarizes challenges which remain.

Immunization-related enhancements have increased access to services and improved preparedness for infectious diseases emergencies

As part of the implementation of a comprehensive vaccine strategy, the Infectious Diseases Control Division has made a number of improvements to immunization services:

- In the 2011-12 school year, school-based immunization clinics were expanded to small schools so that students no longer need to travel offsite for immunization services.
- In 2012-13, the provincial government offered a catch-up Human Papillomavirus vaccine program to students in grades 9-12. York Region was the only large health unit to offer all three doses of the vaccine in high schools rather than in offsite clinics.
- Community immunization clinics are now offered weekly throughout the year instead of monthly during the school term.
- Arrangements have been made with Welcome Centres to offer immunization clinics in these settings. This is clearly a need since public attendance at these clinics has steadily increased.

Enhancements to the student immunization record review process have also taken place. The Infectious Diseases Control Division has begun to collect immunization records from 71 of 88 private schools in the Region. In addition, enforcement of the *Immunization of School Pupils Act* has been expanded to elementary schools beginning with grades 7 and 8, with further expansions planned each year until the Act is fully enforced across all grades.

A redesign of processes and new quality assurance mechanisms have improved program efficiencies and accountability

Based on an internal review of business processes, several areas of the Infectious Diseases Control Division have been redesigned. For example:

- The Control of Infectious Diseases program, which is responsible for case/contact management and outbreak investigations, has been restructured. Instead of a single manager and 11 investigators, the program is now managed by two managers and 14 investigators, providing greater stability and surge capacity.
- Following a successful pilot, a permanent supervisor position was created to oversee administrative staff responsible for data entry into information systems that support all immunization and case management activities in the division. This has helped ensure that surveillance and client follow-up activities occur according to provincial requirements.
- In 2012, the Sexual Health program and the Sexually Transmitted Disease Clinic program were transferred to the Healthy Living Division, allowing greater oversight of these programs under a permanent Director and a second Associate Medical Officer of Health.

As part of continuous quality improvement program, divisional policies and procedures have been updated, program indicators are regularly monitored and a process for regular chart audits has been initiated. The resulting improvements to Infectious Diseases Control programs are reflected in the provincial accountability indicator for gonorrhea follow-up. In December 2012, 97% of gonorrhea cases were followed up within 48 hours of notification, a significant increase from 4% follow-up within 48 hours reported a year earlier.

Next steps include addressing challenges related to leadership, professional competencies, and provincially-mandated changes

Individuals who are highly skilled in infectious diseases competencies are difficult to recruit and development of professional competencies take time. The Infectious Diseases Director position has been vacant since June 2011, and a suitable candidate was not found during a first search. A second search for a Director is in its final stages. Considerable energy was also focused on recruiting two managers with requisite infectious disease experience in January 2013.

At the provincial level, the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care is replacing the current immunization information system with a new system, known as Panorama, in 2013-14. Panorama will change how immunization services are delivered, and will require new processes, procedures, and staff training.

Many positive changes have taken place in the Infectious Diseases Control Division over the last two years. To maintain this upward trend it will be important to recruit well, to improve divisional competencies, and to develop a solid foundation of quality improvement and continued learning.

Adelina Urbanski
Commissioner of Community and Health Services

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