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YORK REGION PUBLIC HEALTH H1N1 RESPONSE UPDATE

The Community and Health Services Committee recommends the adoption of the recommendation contained in the following report dated December 7, 2009, from the Medical Officer of Health.

1. RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that

1. Staff be directed to report back to Council in 2010 on the full costs of H1N1 immunization clinics and influenza assessment centres, and on lessons learned from the pandemic response.

2. PURPOSE

This report is prepared for Regional Council in order for it to carry out its legislative duties and responsibilities as the Board of Health under the *Health Protection and Promotion Act*. It provides an update on York Region's pandemic H1N1 influenza response as of December 3, 2009, and outlines estimated costs related to these response measures.

3. BACKGROUND

Amount of H1N1 influenza illness appears to be declining in Canada but remains higher than typical for late autumn

The World Health Organization declared a global pandemic of a new H1N1 subtype of the [influenza A virus](#) in June 2009. In Canada, cases of influenza illness occurred more frequently than typical during the summer, and increased during a second wave of H1N1 that began in the autumn. Currently, pandemic H1N1 is the main influenza strain circulating in Canada. Since it is a new strain, most people have little to no immunity to it. As a result, the pandemic H1N1 virus has infected more Canadians this autumn than the seasonal flu does in a regular flu year.

In York Region, there have been 125 hospitalizations due to influenza A since September 1, 2009, and three deaths. According to the Ontario Agency for Health Protection and Promotion Public Health Laboratories, the probability that an influenza A positive sample is pandemic H1N1 is currently 99%.

It is uncertain how long the H1N1 influenza pandemic will last. Some public health officials suggest that the peak of illness has passed. Locally, school absenteeism rates and influenza-related visits to healthcare providers have declined. However, the amount of influenza activity across the country and in York Region remains higher than normal for late autumn. The influenza virus's spread is difficult to predict, and it is still possible that a third wave of illness due to pandemic H1N1 could occur during the typical influenza season from December to April.

Following provincial direction, Public Health H1N1 response measures have included immunization clinics and influenza assessment centres

The Ontario Health Plan for an Influenza Pandemic (OHPIP) guides the provincial health system's response to an influenza pandemic. In accordance with provincial pandemic planning, York Region Public Health has been responsible for coordinating local distribution of the pandemic H1N1 influenza vaccine and for administering it to York Region residents through immunization clinics, and for operating influenza assessment centres for residents exhibiting influenza-like symptoms, in order to relieve pressure on local hospital emergency departments.

4. ANALYSIS AND OPTIONS

INFLUENZA IMMUNIZATION

Pandemic H1N1 flu vaccine is available to all York Region residents through Public Health immunization clinics and from local physicians

Following provincial direction, York Region Public Health started offering the pandemic H1N1 vaccine on October 28, 2009. Five clinic locations, in the Towns of Georgina, Markham, Newmarket, Richmond Hill, and the City of Vaughan, were selected based on Regional GIS mapping of priority populations. The vaccine was initially only available to priority groups, but has been offered to all residents since November 18, 2009.

In addition to the five public health H1N1 immunization clinics, pandemic H1N1 influenza vaccine is available from about half of York Region's physicians. Table 1 summarizes the number of H1N1 vaccine doses administered through public health clinics and distributed to healthcare providers in York Region.

Table 1
Pandemic H1N1 Vaccine Administered and Distributed by
York Region Public Health as of December 3, 2009

Site	Number of doses
Georgina: Sutton Kin Community Hall	3,049
Markham: Former Markham Hydro building	24,624
Newmarket: Ray Twinney Recreation Complex	23,849
Richmond Hill: Rouge Woods Community Centre	22,025
Vaughan: Vellore Village Community Centre	18,282
Total York Region Immunization Clinics	91,829
Hospitals	12,750
Community Physicians	191,530
Other vaccines delivery agents	6,270
Total healthcare providers	210,550
Total all sites	302,379

York Region Public Health is also helping to facilitate pandemic H1N1 immunization through workplace clinics.

Public Health pandemic H1N1 community immunization clinics are scheduled to continue until December 13, 2009

York Region Public Health's five community H1N1 immunization clinics are scheduled to run until Sunday, December 13, 2009.

A list of local physicians willing to see non-registered clients for H1N1 flu immunizations after December 13, 2009 will be publicized on the Region's web site. In addition, the Public Health Branch will make the H1N1 vaccine available on an appointment basis through existing rotating municipal clinics.

A universal seasonal influenza immunization program will begin in December

While the seasonal influenza strains that usually circulate during the flu season seem to have been pushed aside by the pandemic H1N1 flu virus this autumn, many experts believe that illness due to seasonal influenza will occur in the population once H1N1 influenza abates. Therefore, the Province of Ontario has established a three-phased influenza immunization strategy in order to provide the greatest population health benefit:

1. In October 2009, individuals 65 years of age and older were immunized with seasonal influenza vaccine, since they are most at risk of serious complications from seasonal flu infection.

2. At the end of October 2009, the pandemic H1N1 influenza vaccine program began, first for priority groups and then for the general population.
3. Finally, the provincial seasonal influenza immunization program for the general population will commence in December 2009. Seasonal influenza vaccine will be available from the places where the vast majority of York Region residents usually receive their annual flu shot, including physicians' offices, pharmacists, workplaces, and other community providers. In January 2010, the Public Health Branch will begin operating seasonal influenza vaccine clinics in the same locations as in past years.

COMMUNITY FLU ASSESSMENT CENTRES

Two York Region Community Flu Assessment Centres, which provided surge capacity to reduce impact of H1N1 on local hospital emergency departments, are now closed

As part of provincial pandemic preparedness, the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care directed local health agencies to develop community-based plans for alternate influenza assessment, treatment and referral. The York Region Co-ordinated Local Health System Pandemic Plan was developed in 2008 with local stakeholders to outline the roles of primary care, long-term care, Community Care Access Centres, hospitals and the public health unit during a pandemic. In accordance with this plan, the Public Health Branch was prepared to operate up to three centres for primary assessment of individuals with influenza-like-illnesses during a pandemic. York Region hospitals were designated to operate secondary flu assessment centres to manage more seriously ill individuals.

York Region opened its first Community Flu Assessment Centre in the City of Vaughan on November 3, 2009, and a second one in the Town of Markham on November 11, 2009. Upon review of utilization figures for these two centres, Public Health staff determined that it would not be necessary to open a third Community Flu Assessment Centre in Newmarket.

On November 22, 2009, York Region closed both of its flu assessment centres. This decision was made in conjunction with local hospitals following a decline in the number of residents seeking medical assistance for flu-like symptoms, particularly in local hospital emergency departments. In total, 472 patients were seen at the Community Flu Assessment Centre in Vaughan, and 113 patients were seen in Markham. All three Community Flu Assessment Centre facilities remain ready to be re-opened to meet the needs of the community, if required.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Incremental costs for immunization clinics and Community Flu Assessment Centres are being tracked

Based on current projections, incremental costs to operate the H1N1 influenza immunization clinics are estimated to be approximately \$3.6 million. Incremental costs to set up and operate the public health Community Flu Assessment Centres are estimated to be \$0.8 million.

The Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care will continue to fund normal operating costs for Public Health through the regular cost-shared budget. The Ministry has indicated that funding will be provided for incremental H1N1-related costs, although at this time specific details have not been provided related to the process or eligible costs.

All costs are being monitored and funding will be requested from the Province at the appropriate time. Staff will report back to Committee and Council in 2010 once the full costs of the regional H1N1 response have been determined.

The Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care has designated York Region Public Health as the lead agency for reimbursement of costs related to alternate influenza assessment, treatment and referral services

According to the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care's Funding Guidelines for Implementing Alternate Influenza Assessment, Treatment and Referral Strategies, the lead agency for local influenza assessment, treatment and referral plans is responsible for collating and submitting cost tracking templates to the Province. Requests for reimbursement may only be submitted by a lead agency, and the Ministry will only provide funding directly to a lead agency.

The Province has appointed York Region Public Health as the lead agency in the Region. Requests for reimbursement and funding for the three hospital secondary assessment centres are to be coordinated through the Public Health Branch.

6. LOCAL MUNICIPAL IMPACT

Local stakeholders, including local municipalities, health care facilities, and other agencies, continue to participate in a coordinated pandemic response with the Region as outlined in the York Region Co-ordinated Local Health System Pandemic Plan. Local municipalities were involved in the planning, implementing, and operating phases of immunization clinics and Community Flu Assessment Centres and have been requested to provide their costs so they can be included in recoveries being sought from the Province.

As part of the pandemic recovery phase, regional staff will work with local stakeholders to conduct a review of response measures. Staff will report back to Council and local municipalities on lessons learned.

7. CONCLUSION

York Region Public Health began operating pandemic H1N1 immunization clinics on October 28, 2009, and plans to keep them open until December 13, 2009. The Public Health Branch also operated Community Flu Assessment Centres from November 3, 2009 to November 22, 2009. Costing estimates are ongoing for all pandemic response measures, in anticipation of provincial funding reimbursement for eligible costs. A review of lessons learned will be conducted as part of pandemic recovery. Staff will report back to Council in 2010 on the full costs of the regional H1N1 response and on lessons learned.

For more information on this report, please contact Dr. Karim Kurji, Medical Officer of Health at Ext. 4012.

The Senior Management Group has reviewed this report.