INFLUENZA PANDEMIC
PREPAREDNESS AND RESPONSE

HANDBOOK FOR EMPLOYEES

Public Service Secretariat
Government of Newfoundland and Labrador

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October 27, 2009
Preparing for an Influenza Pandemic

There is a great deal of effort under way to ensure that the public service of the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador is prepared to effectively operate and continue to provide services to the residents of the province during an influenza pandemic.

This handbook provides an overview of some of the information employees of the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador need to know in order to continue to work together in the provision of excellence in public services and programs.
Influenza Pandemic: Key Questions and Answers

What is a pandemic?
A pandemic is the world-wide spread of a specific disease to which people have little or no immunity.

What is an influenza pandemic?
An influenza pandemic occurs when a radical change takes place in an influenza virus causing a new strain against which people have little or no immunity.

How is influenza or the flu different from an influenza pandemic?
Human influenza, or the flu, is a respiratory infection caused by the influenza virus. Influenza will circulate every year and causes mild to severe illness in outbreaks. Influenza pandemics occur approximately two or three times per century when a new influenza virus is created to which humans have no immunity.

How is influenza spread?
The influenza virus spreads through droplets that have been coughed or sneezed into the air by someone who has the flu. You can get the flu by breathing in these droplets through your nose or mouth, or by the droplets landing directly on your eyes. You can also contract the virus by shaking hands with infected people or by touching contaminated surfaces then transferring the viruses to your own eyes, nose or mouth.

What are the symptoms of influenza?
Influenza symptoms typically include the rapid onset of fever, headache, chills, cough, muscle aches, fatigue, watery eyes and a sore throat. Vomiting and diarrhea may also occur, especially in children.
Responsibility for responding effectively to the challenges posed by an influenza pandemic is shared among all levels of our organization.

Depending on the nature of the pandemic and the needs of each work site at the time of a pandemic, responsibilities may vary, but the responsibilities noted on the following pages will apply.
As an employee, what are my responsibilities?

It will be important that you stay informed about influenza. There are a number of websites noted in this document that you may want to refer to.

Follow the principles of the “Clean, Cover, and Contain” awareness campaign of the Department of Health and Community Services. This will help you to protect yourself and others.

People will have different levels of concern about illness and the transmission of influenza. Respecting these differences, supporting others and maintaining the confidentiality of co-workers is important.

When colleagues become unavailable through illness or reassignment, it will be important that everyone work together to ensure services to clients are maintained.

If you have any concerns or questions do not hesitate to bring them to the attention of your manager.
What are the responsibilities of other departments?

The Department of Health and Community Services (HCS) will:
• Act as the lead department with respect to information and appropriate protocols with respect to pandemic influenza.

Fire and Emergency Services, Newfoundland and Labrador (FESNL) will:
• Coordinate government’s response to an All Hazards Event; and
• Establish Emergency Operations Centre(s) as required.

The Public Service Secretariat will:
• Review human resource policies and management practices to determine whether revisions are required to meet organizational requirements;
• Expedite human resource policy changes or exemptions;
• Consult with unions on relevant matters; and
• Coordinate the reassignment/redeployment of employees across departments and agencies, if necessary.

The Department of Transportation and Works will:
• In the role of building managers, and in consultation with departments and the advice of the Department of Health and Community Services, assess the need for enhanced cleaning services and other changes to building maintenance procedures.
What are the responsibilities of my manager?

1. Monitor and address employee concerns and questions.
2. Distribute pandemic related information to employees.
3. Promote occupational health and safety practices in the workplace.
4. Be knowledgeable about your department’s business continuity plan.
5. Ensure that a human resource contingency plan is in place for your work unit.
6. Know and understand what supports are possible within your work unit to assist employees who have to take leave to recover from influenza or take care of ill family members.
7. Protect an employee’s right to privacy.
8. Monitor the availability of supplies such as hand soap, paper towels, and hand sanitizers.
9. Advise departmental executive of trends, issues and concerns that present in the workplace.
**Influenza Pandemic - What Can I Do?**

It is important that you continue to keep yourself informed. There are various websites available which contain information. A listing of some of these is provided in this handbook.

The website of the Department of Health and Community Service ([www.health.gov.nl.ca/health](http://www.health.gov.nl.ca/health)) is the official website of the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador with respect to information about an influenza pandemic and will highlight the latest information.

Clean, Cover and Contain

- Wash your hands frequently with soap and water.
- Use a tissue or the bend in your arm to cover coughs and sneezes as opposed to the hands which frequently touch other surfaces and people.
- If you become ill with influenza-like symptoms, you should stay at home until you are symptom free, are feeling well, and able to fully participate in all normal day to day business activities.

During flu season, you may also want to think about other everyday activities that can be adjusted to help protect yourself, such as avoiding handshaking, not sharing pens and holding meetings in larger rooms so that people are not crowded together.
Hand washing is extremely important and is one of the most important things that you can do to protect yourself and others against an influenza virus.

You can download this poster through the following website:
Clean, Cover and Contain

Using Hand Sanitizers

The Public Health Agency of Canada recommends the use of hand sanitizers only as a supplement to hand washing; it is not a replacement for hand washing.

Hand sanitizer dispensers will be available in some government-operated buildings, located next to areas such as cafeterias and entrances.

In some cases, a department may also provide hand sanitizer pumps at certain work stations where client or employee traffic is greater.

Employees may also choose to purchase hand sanitizers for their own use.

Hand sanitizers should have no fragrance added and to be effective, they must have at least 60% alcohol content.

Remember though, using a hand sanitizer is not a replacement for frequent and thorough hand washing with soap and water.
Clean, Cover and Contain

Using Hand Sanitizers

How To Use a Hand Sanitizer

1. Apply alcohol-based hand rub
2. Rub over all surfaces of hands and fingers until dry

You can download this poster through the following website: www.health.gov.nl.ca/health/hsi/How_to_Sanitize_Hands_2009.pdf
Clean, Cover and Contain

Cleaning Surface Areas

Influenza may be spread from droplets that are picked up from surface areas such as computer keyboards, door knobs, counter tops, desks, pens, tables, et cetera. Once touched, the employee may touch her/his eyes, mouth or nose – thus transferring the virus.

Some influenza viruses can live outside the body on hard surfaces, such as stainless steel and plastic, for up to forty-eight hours and on soft surfaces, such as cloth, paper, and tissues for less than 8-12 hours.

It is important to ensure that surface areas are cleaned.

During an influenza pandemic, the cleaning regime for surface areas and washrooms may be upgraded. The Department of Transportation and Works are liaising with the Department of Health and Community Services about best practices and appropriate cleaning protocols.
Clean, Cover and Contain

Cover

Practicing good hygiene etiquette is important to preventing the spread of the virus.

Cover coughs and sneezes with a tissue, or if you do not have a tissue, cough or sneeze into the bend of your arm.
Clean, Cover and Contain

Prevent the Spread

hygiene habits to protect against viruses

Cover up
Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when you cough or sneeze.

Toss the tissue
Throw away used tissues immediately.

20 second scrub
Wash your hands, especially after using tissues.

Hands off
Don’t touch your eyes, nose or mouth. Germs on your hands can transfer into your body.

Sneeze into your sleeve
Cough or sneeze into your elbow, not your hands.

Keep your distance
When you are ill or not feeling well, avoid close contact with others. Stay at least 1 metre away to prevent infecting people around you.

Reprinted with permission from the Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety.
Clean, Cover and Contain

Contain

If you become ill with influenza-like symptoms you should stay at home until you are symptom free, are feeling well, and able to participate in all normal day to day business activities.

If you cannot carry out your day to day work activities because of illness, you will be able to access any sick, annual, paid leave, or time in lieu of overtime, that is available to you in accordance with collective agreements or human resource policies.

If you have no leave available to you, you should discuss what options may be available to you with your manager. In some cases unpaid leave may be approved, the ability to borrow from next year’s leave may be considered, and as well, you may want to explore the use of flexible work arrangements with your manager.

Requirements for medical documentation will be required as per human resource policies. This situation will be monitored during the influenza season and you will be informed if any change to this requirement occurs.
Supports

If you become ill with influenza and have no sick leave available, you can access any annual, paid or time in lieu of overtime that has been accumulated. You may also want to consider unpaid leave or want to discuss the possibility of borrowing from next year’s leave bank with your manager.

In some cases, the nature of the work may permit an employee to avail of a flexible work arrangement on a temporary basis. Information on Flexible Work Arrangements can be found at:

www.exec.gov.nl.ca/exec/pss/working_with_us/flex_work.html

Requests for flexible work arrangements can be discussed with your manager.

The Employee Assistance Program of the Public Service Commission will also be available to you. For further information on the services available through this program, see:

www.psc.gov.nl.ca/psc/eap.
Providing Client Services

Many of the services and programs that government employees provide are important to the residents of our province. It is therefore important that, during a pandemic influenza, the provision of the services and programs that are offered by departments continue to the best of our ability.

Will government offices be closed if a case of pandemic influenza is confirmed in the workplace?

Government offices will not be closed if a case of pandemic influenza is confirmed in the workplace. We will continue to promote basic infection control processes, such as frequent hand washing, covering coughs and sneezes, and asking those who feel ill to stay at home.

Will services to the public be discontinued during pandemic influenza?

We will continue to provide services to our clients. The situation will be monitored on an ongoing basis during pandemic influenza and any changes to service levels will be communicated to employees and the community at large.
What should I do if a client presents with flu-like symptoms?

- During flu season we often come into contact with others who are experiencing flu-like symptoms.
- Take the standard precautionary measures to reduce your risk, such as:
  - Thoroughly and frequently wash your hands with soap and water;
  - Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth as germs can spread that way; and
  - Avoid close contact with others, especially those who are sick – keep as much distance between you and the other person as possible. Once you finish providing services to the individual, ensure that you either wash your hands with soap and water or use a hand sanitizer.
  - A pandemic influenza may not be any different than any other type of influenza where the incubation period is between two and seven days. Thus preventive measures should occur in dealing with others – family, friends, co-workers and clients – regardless of whether or not they exhibit flu-like symptoms.

If you have concerns about serving clients, what should you do?

It is important that your concerns are addressed. You should discuss specifics with your manager. There may be other ways to provide services that you may want to explore and your manager will be able to discuss specific preventive measures that can be practiced in your business dealings with clients.
Business Continuity Planning

Each department has identified essential services that should continue in the event that an influenza pandemic impacts government’s programs and services. These are identified in a departmental Business Continuity Plan.

The Business Continuity Plan essentially is a collection of procedures and information developed, compiled and maintained in readiness for use in the event of an emergency or disaster.

Business continuity planning is a continuous process and most departments are actively engaged in developing and continuing to refine their business continuity plans.
Essential Services

Essential services within a Business Continuity Plan are those services that when compromised in terms of availability or integrity, could result in injury to the health, safety, security, or economic well being of Newfoundlanders and Labradoreans or to the efficient functioning of the province.

There are three categories of essential services:

- **Critical services** must be provided immediately or the loss of life, infrastructure destruction, loss of confidence in the government or significant loss of revenue will result. These services normally require continuity or restoration in less than one day following an interruption. Examples of critical services are child abuse investigations, serious fire investigations, policing, and communications.

- **Vital services** must be provided in less than one week or loss of life, infrastructure destruction, loss of confidence in the government of the province, or significant loss of revenue or disproportionate recovery costs will result. Examples of vital services are income support, animal disease surveillance, and the support enforcement program.

- **Necessary services** must be recovered in one month or considerable loss, further destruction or disproportionate recovery costs will result. Examples of necessary services are tax administration, medical and dental claims processing, and permits for routine fire and life safety.
Human Resource Contingency Planning

A Human Resource Contingency Plan is a critical element in maintaining the essential, vital and necessary services of government departments at an appropriate level.

Essentially, it is a department-developed plan which outlines:

- The services and programs that are to be continued should an All Hazards Event (an emergency, disaster, or major disruption) occur;
- The number of employees that are essential to provide the services and programs;
- The knowledge, skills and abilities of employees who provide the services;
- A plan to replace or backfill employees in the event that those providing the services are unable to do so; and
- The plan to orient and train replacement personnel in the event that employees have to be redeployed from other departments.
What websites are of value to me?

Official communications regarding a pandemic influenza will be available on the website of the Department of Health and Community Services at: www.health.gov.nl.ca/health

Other information on a pandemic influenza are available from the following organizations:

- Public Health Agency of Canada (www.phac-aspc.gc.ca)
- World Health Organization (www.who.int)
- Public Safety Canada (www.publicsafety.gc.ca)
- Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety (www.ccohs.ca)

The Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety offers an e-Course on “How to Stay Healthy and Help Stop an Influenza Pandemic from Spreading.” You can access the e-Course free-of-charge at: www.ccohs.ca/products/courses/pandemic_aware/

Information specific to employees of government departments, such as answers to frequently asked questions will be posted on the Public Service network (PSN) at www.intranet.gov.nl.ca

Information on human resource policies will be posted to the website of the Public Service Secretariat at: www.exec.gov.nl.ca/exec/pss and www.exec.gov.nl.ca/exec/pss/working_with_us/policies.html

Information on employee assistance services available from the Public Service Commission is available at www.psc.gov.nl.ca/psc/eap